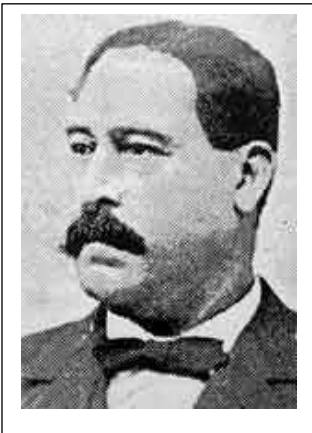


WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

JOSEPH A. EMIDY (1835-1905), 2005 Inductee

By Charles Conrad, WJU #1525



Joseph Antonio Emidy (often misspelled as "Emedy") is credited with writing music for A. E. Menter, James Robinson (bandmaster for the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth in the 1880s), Howe's Great London Circus, William Merrick, Carl Clair, and George Ganweiler. Some scholars, including Sverre Braathen, believe that he may have been the first significant composer of music for specific circus acts.

Joseph Emidy was born in Truro of Cornwall County in England April 19, 1835 and was raised as a musician. He married Elisa Anna Bunn, who would gain some fame as an equestrienne in the circus, in 1859. They were involved in circus performances throughout England, notably with the Sanger Brothers Show, and they came to the United States in 1871 with the Howe's Great London Circus and Sanger's English Menagerie. His title was Leader of the British Cornet Band. He would spend three years as bandmaster of this organization. He maintained throughout his life that he wrote his first arrangement for band at the tender age of 12! There was a fatal accident involving the Howe's Bandwagon near Millerton, NY on October 30, 1871 as the season was about to end.

The following information was taken from the November 1, 1871 *New York Times*:

"The accident occurred on what is known as 'William's Hill,' a steep decline. Just before daylight the band wagon or chariot, attached to Howe's European Circus, left Bain's Corners, for Millerton, drawn by eight horses, which were driven by an experienced driver, but who did not know the road. The morning being dark, he came upon the hill before he was aware of the fact. He attempted to gather up the reins and to put on the brake, but he was not quick enough. His eight-in-hand got the start of him, and dashed down the hill at frightful speed, when suddenly one of the wheel horses fell. He, with the chariot, was dragged to the side of the road with his now

frantic mates, where the chariot upset and tumbled down a precipice. On top were five musicians, the rest having gone to Millerton by rail. The chariot made two complete somersaults, the first throwing the musicians off, and in turning the second fell on two of them, killing them instantly. The other three and the driver escaped as if by a miracle. The names of the killed were J. A. Emidy and Wm. Fetzer."

The Emidy killed in the accident was a 22-year old cousin of Joseph Antonio Emidy with whom the bandmaster shared his name. As reported in the *New York Clipper* on November 11, the band played the dirge from *Saul* for the funeral procession, marching with muffled drums and instruments draped in black crepe.

In 1872 the show toured throughout the Northeast and through the Midwest in 1873, wintering in Connersville, IN. The large bandwagon was known as "The Car of Euterpe," and a contemporary Howe's flyer engraving (pictured in *Old Time Circus Cuts* by C. P. Fox) shows a band of about 12 pieces riding on the wagon. His band also performed in New York for other events, as a story in the September 30, 1874 *New York Tribune* mentions "Mr. JA Emidy and his Celebrated Grand Orchestra, from Her Majesty's Theatre, London, England are playing for a variety show at the New York Colosseum."

Emidy took out an ad in the December 12, 1874 *New York Clipper* stating he was "late of the Howe's London Circus" in which he offered his services as a composer, arranger and bandmaster. He was hired by the Montgomery Queen Circus and relocated from New York to San Francisco. He is mentioned as the entourage's bandmaster in an article in the September 23rd *Syracuse Daily Courier*.

That spring Emidy was involved in another bandwagon incident in which the team ran at full speed for a mile, with bandsmen jumping off right and left. Emidy was quoted in the *New York Clipper* June 5th: "the bloody horses wanted to kill the band." The band at this point was called "Emidy's Transcontinental Band." He performed with that entourage at least until 1877, when advertising described "the golden band chariot Great Pacific containing Emidy's British Cornet Band." Emidy then became the bandmaster with D. W. Stone's Grand Circus. An advertising flyer claimed that there were "37 Eminent

Instrumentalists uniformed as the Imperial Guard of Napoleon III."

There are only two known extant works in sheet music of Emidy compositions - the first is *Bronson's Galop*, inscribed with no date to D. W. Stone. An engraving of Emidy and two bandmen are featured on the cover, which identifies Emidy as "Conductor of the Superb Brass & Reed Band Attached to D. W. Stone's Grand Circus - Rendered at Every Entertainment." A second sheet music example of Emidy's compositions, the *Hotel Wilson Waltz*, dates from 1882, and is dedicated to Dr. Levi Wilson. It features an engraving of the hotel on the cover.

There is some written evidence that Emidy was the bandmaster for the Frank Kelch Circus in the 1870s and possibly the 1880s, but no confirmation has yet been located. The March 24, 1877 *New York Mercury* misspells his name as "Emide" and describes him as the bandmaster for the Howe's Great London Circus directing his accomplished British Cornet Band. There is no other confirmation that he actually returned to Howe's.

Sometime in the early 1880s, Emidy and his wife retired from circus life and stayed at their home in Woonsocket, RI, where they had taken up residency about 1878. Emidy became a naturalized U.S. citizen on October 25, 1901.

WOONSOCKET [F] DIRECTORY. 81

The Prettiest Line of **Slippers** In the City is at **Murray & Co.'s,** 94 & 96 MAIN ST.

Emidy Joseph (*Emidy Bros.*), 43 Olo, h. 89 West
" Joseph A. Prof. leader Woonsocket Cornet Band and music teacher, h. 62 Third avenue

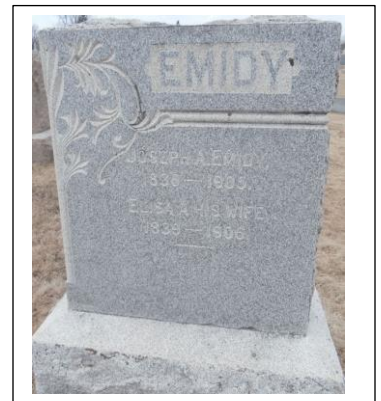
Emidy became the conductor of the Woonsocket Cornet Band, an ensemble of around 25 musicians that was very popular and well respected in the city. Emidy was also featured as a cornet soloist on numerous occasions, and he stayed as conductor of the ensemble until his death on December 26, 1905.

A story in the February 7, 1900 *Woonsocket Evening Reporter* confirms his continuing activity as a writer of circus music: "Prof. J. A. Emidy, leader of the Woonsocket Cornet Band, has made a contract with William Merrick, leader of Sells Bros.' and Forepaugh's big show band, to arrange all music for that organization the coming season. Mr. Merrick will have 27 men under his baton. Prof. Emidy has arranged the music for the Barnum - Bailey show for years, and they are playing his compositions in Europe at the present time and scoring a great success. Prof. Emidy is one of the best band music arrangers in the country." Circus bandmaster Charles Schlarbaum acquired several of these arrangements from Merrick's descendants.

Several other local activities undertaken by Emidy are describes in an obituary from an unidentified local paper from December 27, 1905: "*Prof. Joseph A. Emidy, a highly respected resident of Woonsocket, and dean of musicians in that section of New England, died last evening at 9 o'clock at his home 160 Third Avenue, Woonsocket. He had been gradually failing in health for some weeks past, but Saturday he suffered a paralytic shock, which rendered him unconscious, in which state he remained until his death. He was always a musician and played the violin as well as the cornet with the Woonsocket Opera House orchestra for many years. For years he was the leader of the Woonsocket Cornet Band. He was also a teacher of prominence. He was a composer, meeting with much success in this line. His arrangements for military bands are noted all over the country. He did much journeying in California and British Columbia by team, as modern railroad had not yet found their way in those sections. Prof. Emidy was an honest, upright man of kind and genial disposition, and he made many friends wherever he went. Besides a wife, he leaves a brother, James Emidy, and several nephews and nieces. The funeral will be held Friday. Edward W. Clifford, a well-known musician, will have charge of the combined musical organizations of the city, the members of which will attend the funeral.*"

The December 29, 1905 *Woonsocket Evening Reporter* gave an account of the funeral, mentioning that the Woonsocket Cornet Band played the *Dead March from Saul*, the same dirge that Emidy had led with his circus band at the funeral procession for his nephew some 34 years earlier after the bandwagon accident. The ensemble played a hymn by Pleyel as the casket was carried from the church.

A statement from a niece referred to Emidy as "Affectionately known as 'Old Joe Emidy' in Woonsocket musical circles" and noted his helpful attitude and gentle nature. After his death, a fellow musician said of him: "There is hardly a musician in the city who is not indebted to Old Joe Emidy, not only for his valuable instruction, but for many acts of kindness." Emidy was buried in Woonsocket's Union Cemetery.



An interesting aspect of Emidy's life and career that should be mentioned is his heritage. Although he was the grandson of a West African slave, photos (in black and white from that time, of course) show him to have more of a southern European, perhaps Italianate, appearance. No mention of this heritage appears in the Woonsocket writings, but the African ancestry is mentioned in a significant circus band historical article.

POSTSCRIPT: JOSEPH EMIDY'S GRANDFATHER

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351

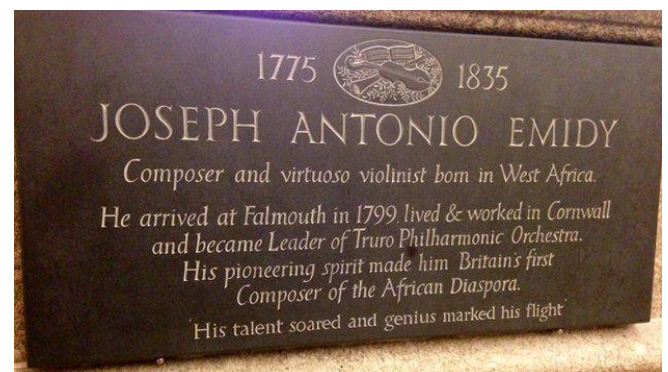
Joseph Antonio Emidy's ancestry is one of the more noteworthy and interesting stories of English and American musical life in the 18th and 19th century.

Emidy was named after his grandfather, Joseph Antonio Emidy (1775 - 1835). The senior Emidy – Joseph, to avoid confusion -- was kidnapped as a young boy from the Guinea coast of West Africa and enslaved by the Portuguese and then the English. Portugal was one of the earliest European slave trading countries but was relatively humane as a slaving nation. The boy was probably someone's personal attendant rather than a plantation laborer. Joseph ultimately came to live in Lisbon with his owner, and while there his talent for music became apparent. He learned to play the violin and in 1795, the talented twenty-year old joined the Lisbon Opera Orchestra in the second violin section while still in servitude. Not long after, a British frigate captain stranded in Lisbon because of needed ship repairs, attended the Opera and was impressed by the young man's energy and apparent talent. Long desiring a good violin player to furnish music for the sailors' dancing and entertainment in the evenings, the captain decided to kidnap the young man as he exited the theater that night. And that happened.

No longer a Portuguese slave, Joseph was now with the British Navy in the lowest rank of sailors. The muster book of September 1, 1795 listed him as number 316 of the ship's crew and he was described as a "Lisbon volunteer." Because he was clearly not at all happy with his plight, Joseph was never allowed ashore during the next four years because it was believed he would escape at the first opportunity. When the

captain was eventually transferred to another ship, Joseph was discharged from his duties.

On February 28, 1799, Joseph disembarked at Falmouth, England and was now a free man. He quickly earned a reputation as a proficient musician, fine violinist, composer, music teacher and conductor. In 1802 he married Jane Hutchins, the white daughter of a local tradesman. Over time, they had eight children. Having moved to Truro in 1815, he advanced to being music director of the Truro Philharmonic Orchestra.



Plaque honoring Joseph's accomplishments

Joseph died on April 23, 1835, four days after the birth of his namesake grandson born to Joseph's son Thomas Hutchins Emidy (1805 – 1871) and Margery Carnarton Young Emidy. In his grandfather's honor, the boy was raised as a musician.



The only known drawing of Joseph (1775-1835), A Musical Club in Truro, by an unknown artist.