

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

GEORGE GANWEILER (1858-1906), Inductee 2008

By Charles Conrad, WJU #1525

[See poster on back cover]

George Ganweiler was the bandmaster for the Ringling Brothers Circus following the retirement of William Weldon (WJU Hall of Fame 2012.) He led that entourage through some of its most glorious years.

He was born George H. Gauweiler February 26, **1858** in Keokuk, IA and his family moved to Quincy, IL shortly after his birth.

George's father, Jacob, grew up as a musician in New York City and played in theater orchestras.

George's two brothers, Jacob, Jr. and John, were also musicians. The three brothers changed the spelling of their name to Ganweiler in the late 1880s. The city of Quincy benefited from its position on the Mississippi River, and had railroad connections through Chicago. Consequently, many of the day's top performers and ensembles performed there, and Ganweiler likely was able to experience Gilmore's Band, the Theodore Thomas Orchestra, pianist Anton Rubenstein, and many German choral festivals. He almost certainly attended a concert of the LaGrange Silver Cornet Band with W. Paris Chambers as featured cornet soloist.

Ganweiler's first professional experience as a musician was in **1876** with the Arnold Bros. Minstrels as a cornetist, and his first position as a conductor was with the Young Men's Business Association Band in Quincy about **1879**. The December 7, 1879 *Quincy Daily Herald* mentioned that he had returned after leading the Arnold Bros. Minstrel Band that season.

In **1880**, Ganweiler became bandmaster of the area's leading ensemble, the Gem City Band, which benefited greatly one year later when electric lights were added and evening concerts became popular. Noteworthy gigs for the Gem City Band included a July 4th balloon ascension and a performance celebrating the release of 300 German carp into the local stock pond! He married Elizabeth Crabbe of



Ringling Bandmaster
George Ganweiler in 1897

Edina, MO that same year, and they became the parents of two daughters. He was given a presentation baton at a concert in July **1882**.

Ganweiler's first circus employment came in **1883** as solo alto player with A. E. Menter's Forepaugh Circus Band. His brother and father also played clarinet with the band. During the winter following this season he put together the first Gauweiler Orchestra to play through the winter in Quincy. He stayed with the Forepaugh Circus at least through 1894, living in Quincy as a freelance professional musician in the winters.

In **1884** he organized the Germania Orchestra, which would soon become the Gauweiler Brass Band and Orchestra. The ensemble was featured at the Opera House until 1899. Still the bandmaster of the Gem City Band, that ensemble played at the Empire Theater. In **1885**, he left that ensemble to form his own band.

Numerous Quincy newspaper stories mention engagements played by the Gauweiler Band and Orchestra throughout **1886**, but none mention George by name, so it is possible that his father could have been in charge of the ensemble. An undated newspaper story claims that he increased the size of the Forepaugh Band from 12 to 16 before the 1887 season. An ad in the *New York Clipper* indicates the expectation of the musicians: "*Wanted by first-class band, all finely uniformed, and double in orchestra, and play all the best class of music, both standard and popular, a position at some resort; or with first-class traveling organization. Satisfaction guaranteed. None but thoroughly responsible parties need address me.*"

During the winter off-season from the circus he led the orchestra at the Quincy Opera House. Ganweiler led his band in a concert that received rave review in the April 4, **1887** *Quincy Daily Journal*. Included in the program were Verdi's *Nabucodonsor Overture* and Suppe's *Pique Dame Overture*, but the hit of the evening was *The Forge in the Forest* by Michaelis, which was repeated as an encore. All three of these works would become standard repertoire for center ring concerts in a few years. The August 16, 1887 issue of the same local newspaper reported that Ganweiler and four other musicians from his band would travel to Indianapolis to join the Laura Dainty "Mountain Pink" show, so it seems very likely that he took the entire summer off from the circus. No other references to this show have been found.

The March 13, 1888 Quincy Daily Whig mentions that Ganweiler and several members of his band were traveling to Philadelphia to open the season with the Forepaugh Circus. By 1888, his father and two of his brothers were playing in his band with the circus, which had grown to a 20-piece ensemble. A September bandwagon accident in Kansas City injured several of the bandsmen, including his father, who suffered a broken arm and retired from the circus to Quincy. T. A. "Frank" Warren, one of the bandsmen from Quincy and a close friend of Ganweiler, was severely injured and died a few months later. One of the show's big features was Eclipse, "The Trapeze Horse," who jumped from one moving platform to another. D. W. Reeves' *Centennial March* was the tournament's featured music. Ganweiler and his brothers began playing in the winter off-season in New Orleans at the Farini Theater, but it was destroyed in a fire that also claimed the brothers' instruments. The April 9, 1890 Quincy Daily Herald ran an article about Ganweiler and three other musicians leaving for Philadelphia to rehearse for the upcoming Forepaugh Circus season. There was a mention of the new band uniforms that cost \$100 each!

The 1891 Forepaugh's Grand Military Orchestra was a 28-piece big top band with a 7-piece orchestra led by Charles Gerlach. The band split into two units for the parade - a standard procedure for larger bands. Ganweiler led band #1 and played solo cornet for a band that also included 2 other cornets, piccolo, 2 clarinets, alto, trombone, baritone, tuba, and 2 drummers. Band #2, riding later in the parade in a second bandwagon, carried Eb clarinet, clarinet, 2 cornets, 2 altos, trombone, tuba, and two drummers.

The band for the 1892 season was smaller at 22 pieces, and the spectacle was "The Fall of Nineveh." Ganweiler's brother John died at the age of 25 from tuberculosis. In the winter Ganweiler conducted the band for the Paris Gaiety Company.

The 1893 Adam Forepaugh Shows Band was again a 28-piece ensemble, consisting of piccolo, 8 clarinets (including Jake Ganweiler), 5 cornets, 4 horns, 4 trombones, euphonium, 3 tubas, and 2 drummers. There was still a 7-piece orchestra, with some players doubling from the big top band, and a 10-piece Italian side show band. There was also a Quaker City Flute and Drum Corps with four flutes and four drummers that was made up of personnel different from either of the bands. The spectacle was "Scenes from the Battles of 1776." Some of the featured vignettes were Washington Crossing the Delaware, the Surrender of Lord Cornwallis and the British Army at Yorktown, Paul Revere's Ride, the Battles of Bunker Hill and Concord, and concluding with the Inauguration of George Washington as the first President.

In May in Decatur, IL, the band played a joint concert with a local Turner's Band in a Turner's Festival. In August, the band played a special concert in Sioux City, IA, and the local newspaper gave a glowing review: "*The band consisted of*

30 musicians, and plays music of about the same grade as is rendered by the Fourth Regiment Band. The fact that it is a circus band is naturally suggestive of the blare of brass and din of coarse instruments that generally go to make up the music of the circus band. But the Forepaugh Band is an exception. It is a fine musical organization, and the music lovers of Sioux City, who are accustomed to fine band music, applauded it with unstinted enthusiasm. Its thirty pieces gave it a much greater volume than that of the Fourth Regiment Band, while its execution is exquisite."

The concert included **Chicago Tribune March, Centennial March, Spanish Waltzes, Beautiful Galatea, Zampa, and Semiramide Overtures**, and several popular numbers, including *After the Ball*. The contract for the season specified that the musicians must provide silver plated brass instruments and must dress becomingly at all times. Sidemen, the players who were not soloists or orchestra players, earned \$11 weekly with all room and board except when the show was in Philadelphia, its home base and by now Ganweiler's city of residence.

Another innovation of the 1893 season was noted in a story in the August 31, 1893 Hutchinson (KS) News: "*At 11 o'clock the parade came off, and Main street, from Avenue A to Twelfth avenue, was literally lined with spectators. In front marched Forepaugh's famous band of thirty pieces, under the leadership of Professor George Gauweiler, and the new departure of going on foot was enjoyed by all. as it gave an opportunity to hear all play together instead of in many wagons and at various places in the parade.*" Two observations about this story – the reporter used the spelling of Gauweiler later than it was usually seen and my guess is that he did not poll the bandsmen when he claimed that it was "enjoyed by all" to march a long parade rather than riding in the bandwagon.

No documentation has been located about the 1895 Forepaugh band, but the 1896 Forepaugh & Sells Bros. route book lists Theo. B. Long as the Music Director charged with a 29-piece band with Miss Maude Hayward as featured cornet soloist. The route book mentions that she played one solo in the center ring concert for each show, and that she created such a sensation that she was obliged to perform an encore. Interestingly, this band featured a quartet of saxophones – soprano, alto, tenor and baritone, the first time this was known in a circus band.

Also of interest in the route book was an admonition to the audience not to judge the quality of the music from the parade performance: "*...not judging the quality of a circus band by their parade performance. This is gross injustice, for bumping over a cobble stoned road is not conducive for symphony.*"

On July 6, 1896, George Ganweiler succeeded the retiring William Weldon as bandmaster of the Ringling Brothers Circus. He made numerous personnel changes over

the next two months, and seems to have made quite an impression, as was reported by a Keokuk, IA (coincidentally the town of his birth 38 years earlier) newspaper that *"it is worthy to note that all of the 'cue' music was high class, being selections from grand and comic operas and the greatest successes of modern writers. . . Not least among the attractions is the excellent band, conducted by George Ganweiler."*

In a 2002 article entitled "Side Lights on the Circus Business, part 25" published in *Bandwagon*, the Journal of the Circus Historical Society, David W. Watt writes (quoting a 1915 newspaper account): *"George Ganweiler was a high class leader, was a fine dresser; and while he was not what might be called a grand stand leader, he was a high class director that never made any false moves. He took such pride in having his band dressed well. Every man had to wear a stand up collar and his clothes had to be pressed about so often, whether it was his street clothes, or his band uniform. Any time when their general appearance on the street or in the band did not suit Mr. Ganweiler, [he] would call their attention to it and say to them, "Young man, it is just as necessary for you to look well around the show as it is for you to play well." You would often hear it said around the show that George Ganweiler wore out more clothes brushing them than he did wearing them. But the high class manner in which he kept his band all during the season was noticeable in many cities where the show played. After George had charge of the band for a season, the high-class men would always be given a raise for the next year."*



Bandmaster George Ganweiler and his 1897 Ringling Bros. Mounted Circus Band
Image courtesy Circus Historical Society

A big feature of the **1897** Ringling Brothers Circus was its mounted band, about which the route book noted: *"Prof. Ganweiler, formerly band director in the Second United States Cavalry, which has the only mounted band in this country except the one now with Ringling Brothers Shows, is a director of lifetime experience and accredited with being one of the best arrangers and leaders in the country, as well as a cornet virtuoso ranking with the very best. He has also perfected his mounted band."*

Actually, the mounted band was half of the full big top band, and the other half rode in the lead parade bandwagon. The

center ring concert, two years after the landmark season with Liberati and his band, was still an important feature. The full repertoire was listed by numbers in the program, and the number was listed on a placard for the audience.



Bandmaster George Ganweiler and his 1899 Ringling Bros. Circus Band
Image from Ludwig H Fahrewald Collection

The **1901** Ringling Brothers Band was a 26-piece ensemble, with an instrumentation of piccolo, 7 clarinets, 6 cornets, 4 horns, 3 trombones, 2 euphoniums, 2 tubas, and 2 drummers. The ensemble played a memorial service in Los Angeles in memory of assassinated President William McKinley. During a stint in Canada, Ganweiler added *God Save the King* and *All's Well in John Bull Land* to the band's center ring repertoire of classical and operatic selections. He was obviously a favorite of the Ringling Brothers, as he, along with Henry Ringling and Equestrian Director Rhoda Royal, were made charter members of the "Ancient and Exalted Order of the Elephant (AEOE)." Ganweiler's brother and clarinetist Jake died in 1899, probably after contracting yellow fever.

By **1903** the Ringling Brothers Band had grown to 39 pieces. The ensemble included what may have been the greatest of circus euphonium sections, manned by Charles Sanglear and the 28-year-old Fred Jewell (WJU Hall of Fame 1975). Both were considered outstanding virtuosos and each tried to outdo the other. Ganweiler became a mentor to Jewell, both as a musician and as a bandleader. His young protégé would soon become one of the great writers of circus music and a top bandmaster.

Ganweiler's prestige had grown to the point that he was featured on the cover of C. G. Conn's *Musical Truth*, and the cornet section was featured with testimonials about the Conn Perfected Conn-queror cornets.

In 1903 and 1904 the spectacle was "Jerusalem and the Crusades," and the center ring repertoire remained with a heavy emphasis on opera selections and overtures. The

program description of the spectacle stated: "Ringling Brothers' spectacular production of the salient dramatic and thrilling episodes of the momentous and romantic story of Jerusalem and the Crusades, vividly portraying in characteristic and radiant costumes, athletic and picturesque pastimes of the chivalric types in the days when knighthood was in flower. The prodigal extravagance and voluptuous revelries of the oriental court were shown with historic accuracy in festal gaieties and dancing divertissements."

The 1905 Ringling Brothers Circus featured one of the most famous spectacles of the day, "The Field of the Cloth of Gold," the story of the 1520 meeting of Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France in Ardens.

Ganweiler was to be the bandmaster for the 1906 season of the Ringling Brothers Circus, but he died suddenly and unexpectedly in Sioux City, SD on March 1, 1906 at the age of 48. Writing in a 1927 issue of The Billboard, circus historian C. G. Sturtevant summarized his impact: "The decade of the 90s brought further improvement and progress in attaining a distinct class in circus music. No leader had a greater part in bringing out this result than

George Ganweiler, who took over the Adam Forepaugh Circus band. . . The outstanding characteristic of Ganweiler was his tremendous zeal and efficiency. A master musician himself, he was a terror to incompetents and shirkers, for the first left in a hurry and latter stayed only as long as they held up. No matter what ability a musician had he had to cut everything as clean and watch his cues right up to "Home, Sweet Home," as he did the first week out in order to stay on with Ganweiler. Yet men knew if they had a season under Ganweiler that was the only recommendation needed, and to good competent men he was most considerate and paid top money. The Ringlings brought Ganweiler over to their show in 1897 and the combination of Al Ringling and George Ganweiler made the last word in fine circus program presentation."

Composer D. W. Platt dedicated *The Coliseum March* to Ganweiler. Al Sweet (WJU Hall of Fame 1982) provided this summary of George Ganweiler, our Windjammers Unlimited Hall of Fame Inductee in 2008:

"He was as fine a gentleman as ever directed a circus band."



Ganweiler and his Ringling Bros. band in 1898