

GEORGE GANWEILER (1858 - 1906)



Below is one of the earliest Ringling Bros. Circus bands...on horses!!! According to the Circus Historical Society site, "...the circus band, comprising forty musicians, will be found mounted upon matched white horses, full caparisoned in the richest of habiliments. The members of the band are uniformed in the full dress of United States artillerymen. Their accoutrements are all correct, even to the waving red plumes on their helmets. And, best of all, this band is not merely for display but it is a musical organization of the very highest order of merit. "

Photos courtesy of Circus Historical Society (circushistory.org)

Ganweiler's Famous Artillery Band Playing on Horseback - An 1897 Ringling Circus Parade Feature



[George Ganweiler, Ringling bandmaster; WJU Hall of Fame 2008]

2008 WINDJAMMER HALL OF FAME: George Ganweiler (1858-1906)

George Ganweiler was the bandmaster for the Ringling Brothers Circus following the retirement of William Weldon and led that entourage through some of its most glorious years. He was born George Gauweiler in 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, and his first position as a conductor was with the Young Men's Business Association Band in Quincy about 1879. In 1880, he 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 balloon ascension on July 4th and a performance celebrating the release of 300 German carp into the local stock pond. He married Elizabeth Crabbe of Edina, MO that same year, and they became the parents of two daughters. 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.

He switched to cornet and 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. His first season as a circus bandmaster was probably 1886, as a newspaper account mentions that he increased the size of his Forepaugh Circus Band from 12 to 16 in 1887. 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."

By 1889, his father and both 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. 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 feature music. Ganweiler and his brothers began playing in the winter off-season in New Orleans at the Faranta Theater.

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 that included two additional cornets, piccolo, two clarinets, alto horn, trombone, baritone, tuba, and two drummers. Band #2, riding later in the parade in a second bandwagon, carried E-flat clarinet, B-flat clarinet, two cornets, two alto horns, 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 this year.

The 1893 Adam Forepaugh Shows Band was again a 28-piece ensemble, consisting of piccolo, eight clarinets (including Jake Ganweiler), five cornets, four horns, four trombones, euphonium, three tubas, and two 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. The spectacle was "Scenes from the Battles of 1776." 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. It's 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.

The year 1894 was seemingly uneventful, but in 1895, Ganweiler's brother Jake died in New Orleans during a yellow fever epidemic while he and George were playing in the theaters. It is not known if he completed the 1895 season or

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started the 1896 season with the Forepaugh Show. On 6 July 1896, 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 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, 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."

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. Two years after the landmark season with Liberati and his band, the center ring concert 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.

The 1901 Ringling Brothers Band was a 26-piece ensemble, with an instrumentation of piccolo, seven clarinets, six cornets, four horns, three trombones, two euphoniums, two tubas, and two 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 Mr. Rhoda Royal, were made charter members of the "Ancient and Exalted Order of the Elephant (AEOE)." Before his death at the age of 39 in 1902, composer and Ringling circus band trombonist Dexter W. Platt dedicated *The Coliseum March* to Ganweiler.

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. 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 were all featured with testimonials about the Conn Perfected Conn-queror cornets.

In 1904 the spectacle was "Jerusalem and the Crusades," and the center ring repertoire remained with a heavy emphasis on opera selections and overtures. A sampling of selections included: *Overture Raymond-Thomas*, *Gems from Babes in Toyland-Victor Herbert*, *Overture to "The Italian in Algiers"-Rossini*, *Sultan of Sulu-Ade and Wathall*, *Airs from "The Chimes of Normandy"-Planquette*, *Overture "Franz Schubert"-Suppe*, *Grand Scene from "Attila"-Verdi*, *Melody from "Daughter of the Regiment"-Donizetti*, *Overture Hungarian-Keler-Bela*, and *Mosaic from "Ernani"-Verdi*.

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 10 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 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."

Al Sweet said of Ganweiler, "He was as fine a gentleman as ever directed a circus band."
