

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

HARRY O. "Crig" CRIGLER - 1867-1942 (2009 Inductee)

By Charles Conrad, WJU #1525



Harry Crigler was a prolific circus bandmaster from 1890 until 1918, spending the majority of his career with the Gentry Brothers Circus. He also had a significant post-circus career as a bandmaster and music educator. Physically, Harry may well have been the biggest of circus bandmasters – most estimates had his height at around six feet

five inches and his weight in the 250-275 pounds range.

He was born in 1867 in Connersville, IN and spent most of his youth in Lebanon, IN. His first known circus employment was as a "bass player" (likely tuba) with the Diefenbach Circus in 1886, and his first bandmaster position was in 1890 with Terrell Bros. when he replaced Jack Ryan in mid-season. He stayed in that position for a portion of the 1891 season and had a 14 piece band. In the years between those engagements, he took up the cornet again and played with Barnum, Forepaugh, Eugene Robinson's Floating Palace, Hi Henry's Minstrel Show and Maude Atkinson's French Spy Company. He is not known to have been on the road for the rest of the 1890s, but did conduct town bands in Indiana. His next circus position was as bandmaster for the Buckskin Bill Wild West Show in 1900.

He had great success as bandmaster at Otterbein, IN and took that band to the 1904 World's Fair, after which it was



Gentry Bros. Circus Band, dated Oct 12, 1907. Photo from Charles Conrad Collection.

renamed the Indiana State Band. In 1905, he became the bandmaster of one of the four Gentry Brothers Shows, and he was with Gentry until at least 1917.

Circus trombonist, composer and circus historian Charles E. Duple wrote several articles that mentioned Crigler. He said that he used the entry march *Memphis the Majestic* by Russell Alexander for the show in 1905 and W. Paris Chambers' *On Dress Parade* in 1910. A Billboard story from that year mentioned that he had a 16-piece band with a lady equine rider who sang *Don't Bite the Hand That's Feeding You* with the band as she rode around the ring.

Bandmaster Earl Freiburg wrote in an undated scrapbook: "There is not a band leader in show business today who is more popular or has more ardent friends than Harry Crigler. This I can safely say without the slightest fear of contradiction. For the past ten years Mr. Crigler has been bandmaster with Gentry Brothers well-known circus, whose headquarters are at Bloomington, IN. For several seasons past, his band with this show has been considered one of the very best in show business. Mr. Crigler is one of the few really good directors who does not resort to gymnastic gyrations in directing the tempos for his musicians. He conducts in a precise, accurate and dignified manner."

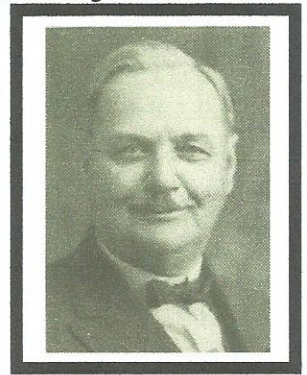
In 1919, Crigler was the bandmaster for the Miami Military Institute in Germantown, OH. In an interview he said that he had traveled to every state with touring shows. In 1920 he moved back to Indiana, this time in the area around Bloomington. He was the bandmaster for the Bloomfield Band until 1933 and became close friends with Fred Jewell, who moved back to his nearby hometown of Worthington in 1924. Crigler was a renowned cornet instructor at this time and trained several professional musicians. He also made reeds for woodwind instruments and was known nationally for providing reeds by mail.

In 1999, I interviewed Milo Moffet, who was a tuba player in the Bloomfield Band in the 1920s. He said that Crigler could "blow the roof off a building" with

his cornet sound, and also played a gold-plated trumpet. He was very serious about the music and was fastidious about his appearance. He was always well groomed. The Bloomfield Band concerts were on Saturday nights. Crigler traded with Bob Brown on the solo cornet part and conducted the band. He took a bus from Bloomington on Thursday night and stayed in a Bloomfield Hotel, where he taught lessons on Friday and Saturday, and returned to Bloomington on Sunday morning.

A 1996 interview with David Thrasher, who took cornet lessons from Crigler from 1926 until 1928, provided more information about this period in Crigler's career. Crigler served as the band director at Bloomington High School in

1928 and 1929. Thrasher also mentioned his attention to his appearance, saying he wore monogrammed French cuffs with laundered shirts and very shiny shoes. He said that Crigler called all of his students "Sonny" and used the Arban book for his lessons. No information has been found about Crigler after 1930, and he died from cancer at his home in Oxford, IN on May 12, 1942. In 1929, Karl King dedicated his march *Pageantry* to Crigler.



Gentry Bros. Circus Band, dated Oct 12, 1907. Photo from Charles Conrad Collection.



Bloomfield Community Band. May 1, 1925



Harry O. Crigler

1913 Gentry Brothers Dog and Pony Show band, Harry O. Crigler, bandmaster