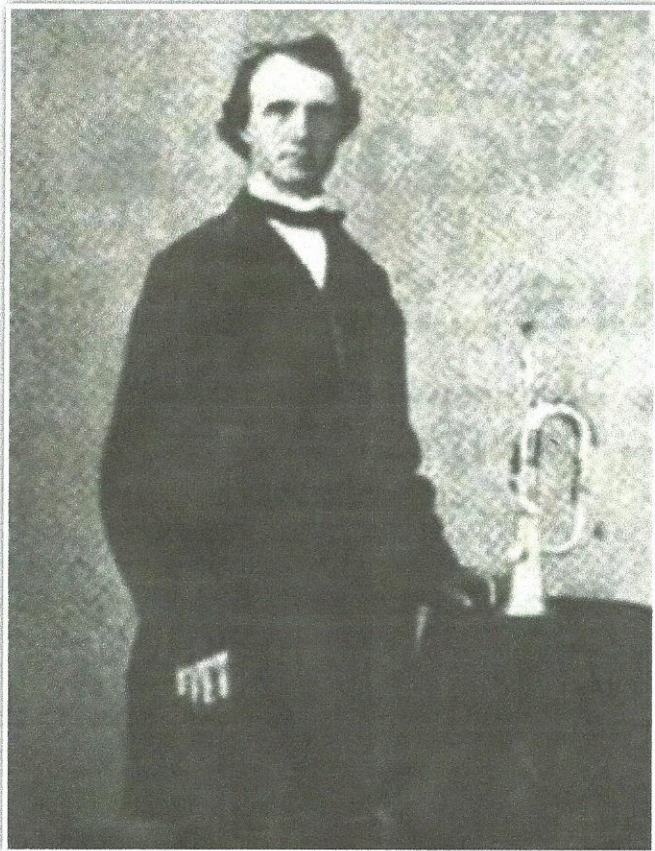


# WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

## 2018 HALL OF FAME LAUREATE

### THOMAS G. CANHAM - 1816-1871

By Charles Conrad, WJU#1525



Thomas Canham photo from The Glen D. Bridges Archive of the International Trombone Association.

Thomas G. Canham was born in 1816 on the British isle of Jersey and served as a musician in the British military in India. He was also an excellent violinist, which was not as unusual at that time as it would seem today. A good number of circus musicians as late as the 1920s doubled on strings, and there were many circuses that featured both a band and an orchestra, usually made up of many of the same players.

The first known circus bandmaster position for Canham was in 1849 with Welch, Delevan and Nathan's National Circus. The advertisement that ran in local newspapers stated: "*The Grand ARMAMAXA, or Imperial Chariot, drawn by 30 elegant Horses, and driven by the Champion Reinsman or Lion Whip, HENRY LACY, will make its appearance in town at 10½ o'clock. A.M., containing the New York Knickerbocker Brass Band, led by Mr. THOMAS*

*G. CANHAM, who will perform all the most fashionable and modern airs of the day."*

In 1850, Canham was the bandmaster for the Spalding & Rogers Circus, one of the biggest shows on the road at that time. The following year, the show was known as Spalding, Rogers & Van Orden's People's Circus, which advertised:

*"The Spirit of '76, abounding with revolutionary incidents, reviving proud reminiscences, exciting patriotic emotions, replete with startling equestrian feats, introducing prominent heroes of 'the times that tried men's souls.' THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY, GEN'LS PUTNAM AND WAYNE, LORD CORNWALLIS, Continental and British Soldiers, Indians, Yankee Girls led on by Kate Putnam, and concluding with the most thrilling tableaux ever witnessed – GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON, mounted on a **Live War Horse Weighing 1,200 lbs.** borne aloft on the shoulders of his **BRAVE CONTINENTALS** amidst the martial strains of **CANHAM'S WEST POINT MILITARY BAND . . ."***

That show closed in December with a run in New Orleans, and it appears that Canham did not go with a circus in 1852, staying in New Orleans and leading a band. In 1853 he returned to the circus life with the Mann, Moore & Co. Circus, which advertised "*CANHAM'S PHELIA D'ORLEANS BAND has been brought from New Orleans especially for this establishment, with the confident expectation that it will be pronounced by Amateurs and Musicians the best band that has ever been yet heard under a canvas, and is pronounced the most perfect OPERATIC ORCHESTRAL STRING BAND on the American continent.*"

We have thus far found no mentions of Canham in 1854, but he was back with the circus in 1855 in what appears to be a forerunner of the Wild West Shows that were popular starting in the 1880s – Seymour & Co.'s Unique and Interesting Entertainment of the Manners and Customs of the Uncivilized Indians of the Far West. They advertised:

*"Tom Canham's Celebrated Brass Band – which for harmony and execution of music has no equal among the traveling bands of the day." The biggest name*

*mentioned was the "Celebrated Chief Red Jacket," described as the "most eloquent Indian orator living, Grand Sachem of the Six Nations."*

Canham returned to the Spalding & Rogers Circus in 1856. That show had traveled the large rivers of America for two years on a large show barge that featured Karl Fuhrmann playing a large organ and chimes, the first show known to use organ. It was now split into two separate shows that featured the greatest of the keyed buglers at the helm of its two bands – Ned Kendall with the Spalding & Rogers New Railroad Circus and Thomas Canham with the Spalding & Rogers Circus.

As mentioned earlier, it was not unusual at all for a circus to have both a band and an orchestra, but what was a bit surprising in this situation is that Canham was listed as the conductor of both the band and the orchestra for this show. He was also referred to as the "Magic Bugler" in newspaper ads. This was a title that was used frequently, as was "Wizard Bugler" and "Lion Bugler."

In 1857 Canham began a three-year run as the bandmaster with the Dan Rice Circus. The newspaper advertising called it "Thomas Canham's Keystone Orchestra," and listed this descriptor: *"The reputation of the Leader, Mr. CANHAM, and the character of the gentlemen who composed his Orchestra, are a sufficient guarantee that they not only are worthy of the important positions assigned to them in this great establishment, but the public will have the pleasure of listening to the finest **Brass and String Band** that ever travelled."*

Canham also served in the same capacity during the 1858 season, and he returned for the 1859 season, which was billed as Dan Rice's farewell tour. The press release stated:

*"The GREAT SHOW will make an exposition parade on the morning of the exhibition day, when the 20 HORSE BAND CARRIAGE containing Canham's Brass and String Band, will be driven by the best reinsman in America."*

The band's composition at this time was Canham as Eb keyed bugle soloist, 1 Eb cornet, 2 Bb cornets, 2 Eb altos, 2 trombones, a euphonium, and tuba and two percussionists – one on snare drum and the other playing both bass drum and cymbals. The orchestra consisted of 1st and 2nd violins, viola, flute, 2 clarinets, 2 cornets, trombone, tuba and drums.

It was not quite a real farewell tour, and Rice returned with Thomas Canham as bandmaster in 1860. There was now a Herr Swarts listed as the orchestra leader and Canham appears to have left mid-season, as he was replaced by William Thompson. There was some discussion that there

was a rift between Rice and Canham, but no details have appeared.

Canham's whereabouts are unknown in 1861, but he was advertised as bandmaster for the Thayer & Noyes Hippozoonomadon. Another name also appears in that position for at least a portion of the season – E. S. Bergans.

Since Canham returned to the Thayer & Noyes Circus in the 1862 season, it seems likely that he replaced Bergans during the 1861 summer. At some point in the late 1850s or early 1860s, Thomas Canham is given credit for teaching the keyed bugle to one of America's future great cornet soloists – David Wallis Reeves -- who was also a significant composer of band music. The keyed bugle was falling out of favor, and it is quite likely that Canham switched to the cornet during this time period. It was noted in Reeves' biography that he continued to play solos on both the cornet and the keyed bugle for several years after the latter instrument had faded as a solo performance vehicle. He returned to the show in 1863, and an Indianapolis newspaper article noted that *"Last night Mssrs. Thayer & Noyes, accompanied by Canham's Band, serenaded his Excellency Governor Morton."*

Canham's performances during 1864 have not been discovered, but it is known that Edward M. Parmerlee served as the bandmaster for Thayer & Noyes during that season. He returned to the Thayer & Noyes circus in 1865 for one last season.

In 1867, Canham became the bandmaster for the John Robinson Circus for three full seasons and the start of the 1869 season. His band was referred to as *"Thomas Canham's Operatic Silver and String Orchestra of Twenty First-class Musicians"*.

Although the timeline has not been established, it was mentioned by several authors that Canham suffered serious injuries in a bandwagon accident, and that possibly this led to his death at the age of 55 in 1871, although no cause of death has been established. During the 1869 season, Benjamin "Fritz" Friday, who would become a significant bandmaster for John Robinson a couple of years later, took over for Canham. Canham was advertised as the bandmaster at the start of the 1870 season, but he was replaced quite early and may not have performed that year at all. The most informative and reprinted, though certainly not impartial, biography of Canham was written by his friend and bandsman George Meade around 1890. Meade stated there was an "overturned band chariot one dark night while traversing the mountains of Virginia." Thomas Canham died on December 27, 1871 at his sister's house in Paterson, NJ, and was buried at Cedar Lawn Cemetery in that city.