

# WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

## J. J. RICHARDS (1878-1956), Inductee 1981

By Cameron Dall, WJU #2135

We all know of Joseph John (J.J.) Richards and some of his compositions -- "*Emblem of Unity*" from 1941 being one of the most well-known of his marches. Richards created 120 compositions for circus and school bands. Of those, 95 were marches, including popular tunes such as *Visalia* (1909), *Con Celerita* (1911), *Speedway* (1912), *The Meteor* (1915), *In Fretta* (1925), *Shield of Liberty* (1939), *Golden Bear* (1948), and *Crusade for Freedom* (1951).

Richards was born August 27, 1878 in Cwmavon, Wales and his family moved to the U.S. when he was about 10. He began the study of cornet and trombone at an early age and joined the Yale, KS town band as a cornetist. After further experience in other town bands, he joined summer traveling shows to earn money to pay for his education at Kansas State Teachers College in Pittsburg, KS. Pittsburg was located only thirty miles from Columbus, KS, home of Merle Evans. Richards later attended the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, where in 1917 he won the school's gold medal in counterpoint and harmony. During World War I Richards taught music at the Army Band School at Camp Grant in Rockford, IL.

Richards' career as a circus musician began when he joined the Forepaugh-Sells Circus Band in 1908 as a cornetist. The following year he joined the Barnum and Bailey Circus Band as solo cornetist. In 1910 he returned to the Forepaugh-Sells Circus Band, this time as the bandmaster. Richards joined the Ringling Brothers Circus Band in 1911 and remained with them through the 1918 season, serving as the bandmaster the last seven years. Upon leaving the circus bands, Richards conducted concert bands in Florida during the winter season and in the Midwest during the summer season.

He became a member of the American Bandmasters Association in 1936 and was elected president in 1949 at their convention in Charlotte, NC, a position he held for one year.

In 1937, Richards moved to Sterling, Illinois and became conductor of the Sterling Municipal Band, and the following year his duties included conducting the Rock Falls (Illinois) Band and the Kable Brothers Band, sponsored by the Kable Brothers Printing Company in Mount Morris, IL.

In 1945, Richards became the fifth conductor of the famous Long Beach Municipal Band in Long Beach, CA succeeding

Herbert L. Clarke. He served as the conductor of this band for five years, retiring because of the civil service regulation requirement. Although officially retired, he continued to conduct the Kable Concert Band in summer concerts.

Those residing in Southern California from the 1940's until the 1980's possibly enjoyed witnessing the **All Western Band Review** that took place in Long Beach in late November. Band reviews were parades that only included bands - no floats, no horses - only bands. Band reviews are judged in certain classifications or divisions: size of band or size of school. Bands perform marches from a selected list and are played without repeats. Awards are given out at the end of the review at an awards ceremony. There were also other band reviews, such as the **Maytime Band Review** that took place in National City (near San Diego) and the **California Band Review** which took place in November in Santa Ana. In addition, over the years there were also the **Santa Monica El Primero Band Review**, the **Chino Band Review**, **Hawthorne Band Review** and **Arcadia Band Review**, just to name a few. Only a few band reviews exist today. Many circus marches were very popular with the band reviews: "*Barnum and Bailey's Favorite*" and "*Bravura*" being two of them. Richards composed the "*All-Western Band Review*" march in 1953, which is one of the last compositions he wrote.

Some Richards marches that are particularly worthy are:

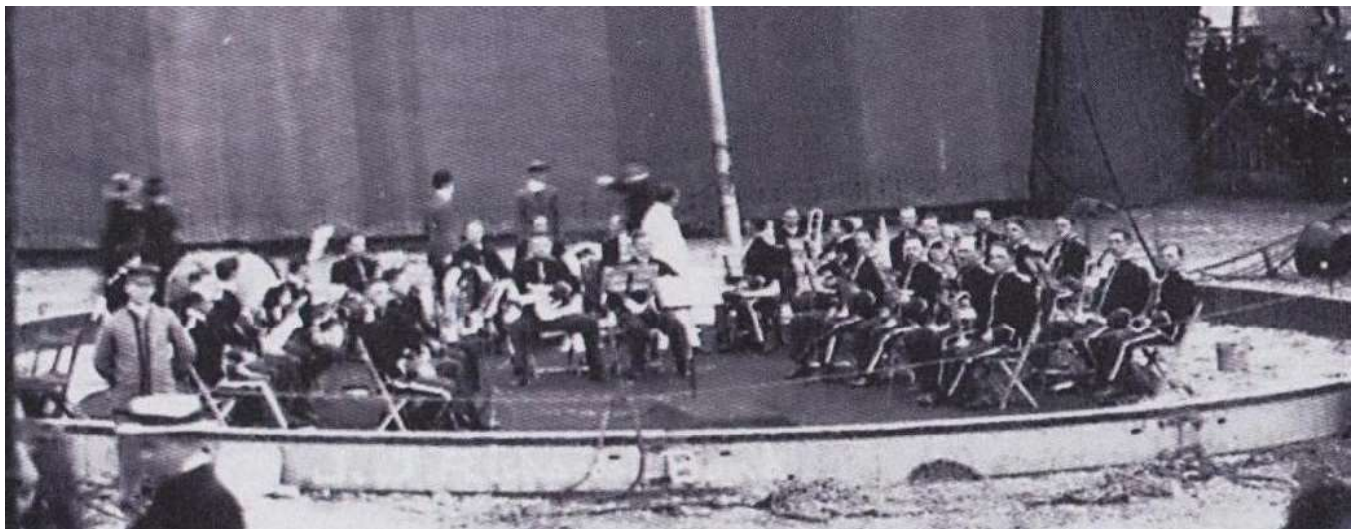
- "*Westerner March*", written in 1934 with a snippet of "*California Here I Come*" in the second strain;
- "*Hail America*" written in 1941 as a medley of patriotic songs - great for a July 4th or Memorial Day concert;
- "*Salute to Sterling*" composed in 1938 a year after Richards became director of the Sterling Municipal Band.

Information taken from his obituary in the *Long Beach Press* newspaper on March 14, 1956 mentions that he had been living at 1055 E. Broadway in Long Beach. He had resided in the city since becoming director of the Long Beach Municipal Band in 1945. His obituary states that his musical career included 15 years as bandmaster for the Ringling Bros. Circus and as a Mason of the El Bekal Temple in Long Beach. He was survived by his wife, Anna; brothers Henry of Philadelphia and William of Indianapolis; sister, Mrs. Bessi Morrow of Bakersfield, CA; and nephew, John T. Innis of Long Beach. His final resting place is at Sunnyside Mausoleum, 1095 E. Willow Street.



**1910 Forepaugh-Sells Circus Band, J.J. Richards, Bandmaster**

*Buster Bailey Collection*



**1913 Ringling Bros. Circus Band, J.J. Richards, Bandmaster**

*Charles Bennett, Jr. Collection*



**Long Beach Municipal Band circa 1946, J.J. Richards, Bandmaster**

*Inman Co. Photo, Long Beach, CA*