

2005 WINDJAMMER HALL OF FAME

William N. Merrick (1856-1938)

William N. Merrick was born on April Fools Day, 1856 in Zanesville, OH. In 1874, he married and joined the A. D. Atwood Band, playing the E-flat cornet. Alonzo Atwood, who had resided in Zanesville since 1837, was a local music teacher who organized the bands for the two circuses that wintered in town, Raymond & Co. and Van Amburg's Menagerie. Merrick played with the Van Amburg show in 1875, leaving to go with Billy McAlister and the Washburn Last Sensation troupe, then returning to Van Amburg to play under bandmaster Prof. Kopp.

From 1876 through 1882, Merrick played under Louis Heck with the Sells Brothers Shows. Heck retired in 1883, and Merrick was promoted to bandmaster. The 1884 Sells Brothers Circus listed "Professor W. N. Merrick and his Silver Cornet Band of 29 pieces." The show was called the Sells Brothers Enormous Railroad Shows in 1885, when Merrick presided over a 16-piece band and then the Sells Brothers Great Railroad Show in 1886. The instrumentation of that year's band included an E-flat clarinet, a B-flat clarinet, an E-flat comet, a B-flat comet, 2 alto horns, a trombone, a euphonium, tuba and two drummers.

In 1892, the Sells Brothers Circus became the only American Circus to take its entire band to Australia, sailing on the steamship *Mariposa* at the conclusion of the 1891 season. Merrick's son, Al N. Merrick, joined the band as librarian, tuba player, and leader of the second parade band. The entourage returned to California in June to start the domestic portion of the season. Two other important musicians were among the show personnel, as composer G. E. Holmes played third trombone and P. G. Lowery led the "Colored Band" at the side show.

In 1893, Merrick served as Music Director for Beach & Bowers Minstrels in the off season from Sells Brothers. He held a similar position for the Streets of Cairo touring theatrical company in the winter following the 1895 season. The following year, Merrick moved to the Great Wallace Circus, playing E-flat cornet and directing the 19-piece big top band that included his son. The band rode in the Chariot *Euterpe* in the parade, pulled by a team of 10 coal blue and 10 snow white horses.



W. N. MERRICK,
Musical Director Forepaugh and Sells Brothers' Circus.

William N. Merrick - continued

In 1898, Merrick was bandmaster for the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Combined Circus, conducting a 25-piece ensemble. In Beloit, KS, the band played the *Star Spangled Banner* to a loud ovation following the reading of a telegram that announced the end of the Spanish-American War, Merrick stayed with this show for the next five years

In 1905, Merrick left Forepaugh and became bandmaster for the William P. Hall Shows, and possibly McCaddon's Circus. Merrick then moved to the Hagenbeck Wallace Circus, where he would spend the remainder of his circus career. Merrick had a feisty reputation, with more than one mention of altercations with both circus employees and "towners."

Merrick played comet in the Hagenbeck-Wallace band under Park Prentiss in 1912, also serving as the mail agent for the circus. He returned to the position of bandmaster for the 1913 season, and then retired to his home on Merrick Drive in Zanesville. He owned a farm as well as a cement business and seems to have been quite successful. He continued to play the comet and lead a town band well into his old age. In 1936, he wrote a song for the presidential campaign entitled *Vote for Landon*. He was a charter member of the Zanesville Musicians Union, and belonged to the Elks and Eagles as well as being a Mason.

William Merrick died December 20, 1938 at the age of 83 in Zanesville and is buried there.