



Cole Bros. Band in Peoria, IL on April 25, 1948. Bandleader Henry Kyes (WJU Hall of Fame 1976). Photo by Sverre O. Braathen (WJU Hall of Fame 2009). Photo courtesy Special Collections, Milner Library, Illinois State University, Normal, IL.



WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

HENRY D. KYES (1892 - 1979), Inductee 1976

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351



Henry Kyes, Circus Bandleader

Photo courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society

Henry Kyes was our sixth inductee into the Windjammers Hall of Fame. That happened in 1976 as a tribute to his trumpet and bandleader talents as demonstrated with many different shows. His business card lists a number of those.

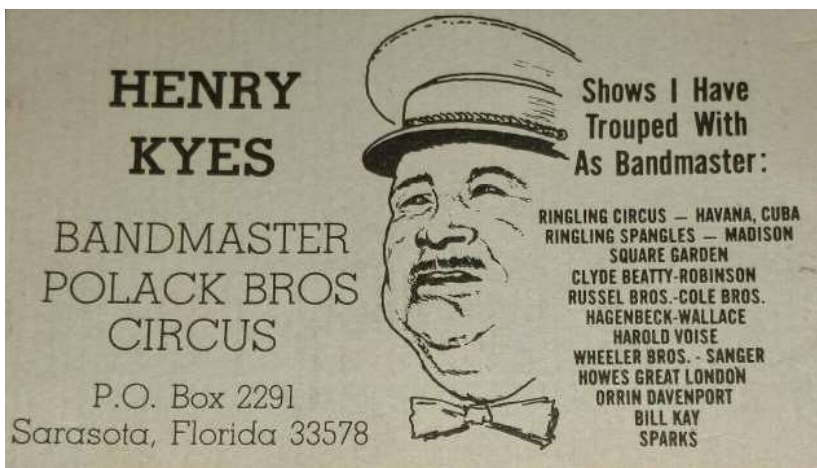
Henry was born October 7, 1892, to Fletcher D. and Metta A. Kyes in Tazewell County, IL. He was the fifth of seven children. As a small boy, he fell in love with the circus. He tried to emulate the "death-defying" tight rope walker of a circus he saw in his hometown. While he was thrilling his playmates, he fell and broke his arm in three places. His mother fainted, but his father bought young Henry an ice cream soda and then a baritone horn that he obtained for 25 cents at an auction sale. Years later, Henry reported "I played in the school orchestra and finally joined the village band.

Father said I could join a road show as soon as I could play the 'Chicago March,' which went to high C in spots. I got so I could hit the high notes without difficulty. My father, a lawyer, and my grandfather, a county judge, predicted I wouldn't amount to much fooling around with a horn and wanted me to study law. But the call of the road got me, and I joined a carnival band. I got \$8 a week and cakes, but that was big money for me, as I had been picking beets for 40 cents a day." Henry was just 14 at the time.

At age 16, Henry joined the Great Parker Shows for their 1909 season and then was left stranded in Salem, OR with just 15 cents – and plenty of prunes from a nearby orchard – to his name. Later, he played with Lord George's Sangers Shows as bandleader. Kyes commented. "The show was so bad that the customers used to shoot at the train as the show left town. I used a large piece of metal for protection when I sat near a train window."

In his musical journey, Kyes played with John W. Vogel's Big City Minstrels, Al. G. Field's Minstrels, and the B.F. Keith Circuit of Theaters in New York City. He was also first trumpet of the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra, the Tampa Symphony, and the Damrosch Orchestra, with Victor Herbert, and in the Ziegfeld Follies. He went to the Ringling Bros. Circus as assistant conductor to Merle Evans, playing trumpet there for twenty-two years. He directed the band for the Ringling's Madison Square Garden show, **SPANGLES**. He also did some of the Cuban engagements of the Ringling-Barnum Circus.

In 1972, *The Reading Times* (PA) journalist Ray Kohler wrote about bandmaster Henry Kyes and included a picture





Polack Bros. Circus bandleader in 1972 at the Rajah Theater in Reading, PA. Photo courtesy *The Reading Times*.

of Henry as he “lets loose a staccato trumpet volley ... from the orchestra pit of the Rajah Theater.” The article includes:

“The Rajah Theater must be one of the most unusual circus settings in the world. Its handbox stage has been known to give performers – specifically aerialists – a feeling akin to claustrophobia. And when the elephants walk the boards – well – shiver me timbers! The Rajah Theater also is the only stop on the Polack Bros. circuit where, because of the lack of time, there is no occasion for the bandsmen to get together to practice. The result, prior to the Shrine Circus’s matinee performance Friday afternoon, was a musical phenomenon known as the “talk-over” rehearsal. The man who talked ‘em through it was Henry Kyes, the burly, 79-year-old, deadpan Polack Bros. bandmaster who plays a right-handed trumpet while directing with the left hand.”

Polack Bros. only carried a conductor, a drummer, and an organist, with the rest of the band comprised of local musicians. In the “talk-through,” Henry grunted, “Get out the Von Uhl book” (Baron Julius Von Uhl, wild animal trainer.) He then gave the downbeat to *Sabre Dance* with a guttural “ba-ba-bam, ba-ba-bam.” Soon the whole group rocked with “ba-ba-bam, ba-ba-bam” Henry stopped them with “Okay, that’s enough of that. Watch for the cut off and then play B-flat chords.”

Henry continued, “Next is the chimp act ... bring ‘em on lively ... bim-ba-bim ... you know ... and that walk bit for Bo-Bo Barnett, the clown. He walks sneaky. Catch him on each step, boommmmmmm.” After an hour without the musicians sounding a single note of music, they had jived their way through the charts for the upcoming 2 ½ hour performance. Then it was show time for real. When the ringmaster blew his whistle, Kyes gave the downbeat for the fanfare, stuck his \$350 English Besson C-trumpet to his mouth and off they went.

At intermission, the journalist continued the interview in the dressing room where Kyes was smoking a shredded cigar stuck in his pipe, and in the process having some wayward ash burn a hole in his shirt.

The journalist reported: “He talked about his youthful days on showboats and minstrel frolics ... how he got the name the ‘Paul Whiteman of Spangle Land’ ... his love of food, and the organization he formed, ‘Restaurant Cranks of America.’”

Paul, the journalist concluded, was “a dry-witted bachelor who is a man of few but well-chosen words. His motto is ‘pay attention to what everybody says. Sometimes you can even learn something from an idiot.’”

When Henry Kyes was selected as a WJU Hall of Fame laureate in 1976, member Robert Mayer (WJU #26) wrote an article about his experience in 1948 of witnessing first-hand Henry Kyes’ skills as a circus bandmaster. (*Circus Fanfare*, 1976, No. 2). Robert wrote:

His skillful eye, his ever-understanding mind, has watched circus greats rise to supreme heights of grand success, and has seen them die. As a great band leader, he must know every act, feel every changing tremor of a changing thousand routines. For his is a directing hand that guides the pulse of the seemingly flawless perfection that marks a major circus’ s performance. TIMING is a secret of circus perfection, and an assurance of continuing LIFE in many of the more daring feats performed, in the ring, on the stage platforms, in the vast arena, and high up above as the circus performance moves swiftly thru its daily routines.

The music of any circus band must catch that RHYTHM, hold it with unswerving steadiness. Henry Kyes had it all the way - to be ready to change with lightning-like speed to suit conditions of the act being performed and in moments when tragedy strikes, as it sometimes does, the band must be capable to swing into the “disaster march” - “The Stars and Stripes Forever”- of which has an uncanny power to hold the audience from panic according to circus tradition.

Also, by the circus band, the people of the circus tell the time of day or night - as you would use a clock or watch - on any occasion as to what you are supposed to do, to know when your cue is due -- it can be changing props, going into your next routine, etc. After all, circus band music sounds unlike any other music you have ever heard, especially under a great billowing spread of white (or any other color) canvas. And that canvas makes the difference. It mellows the brass and gives the drums a distinctive tone not heard elsewhere. On a wet day, with an overhead wet canvas, the band, in most cases, will intentionally play down.

Knowing every act on the program and the performers to go with it, was an attribute of Henry Kyes. During a course of a single performance sometimes 200 cues were followed by the band. Sometimes only a few bars of a selection are played. Always the changes are abrupt and instantaneous. Every act must be played with the proper music -- a certain kind of music for certain acts: marches for the “Spec”, Quadrilles for the riding acts, waltzes for the flying acts & trapeze acts, and a variation of music for other acts - such

as Polkas, Schottisches and Marches in double time. To hear Henry Kyes with his Big Top band on "Cole Bros." in 1948 would gladden the hearts of every circus music-lover everywhere - it was circus music at its best.

Windjammer member Jack (Tiny) Stagg (WJU #140) was also a big fan of Henry Kyes. In the 1980 *Circus Fanfare*, No. 3, he wrote about how Henry Kyes, who resembled orchestra leader **Paul Whiteman**, came to be known as the "Paul Whiteman of the White Tops", "Paul Whiteman of the Big Top," or "Paul Whiteman of Spangle Land." A recording of the ringmaster for the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in the 1937 season reveals the following announcement:



"Good afternoon, ladies, and gentlemen (with strains of "Stars in Your Eyes" by Fritz Kreisler playing softly). *Hagenbeck and Wallace present their famous Victor Recording Band under the personal direction of Mr. Henry Kyes, the "Paul Whiteman of the White Tops," presenting new ideas and sparkling interpretations of Modern Melody in the distinctive Kyes style. The theme song the band is playing holds true to the founders of the Hagenbeck and Wallace Circus which has always lived up to its billing of presenting the*

outstanding circus stars of the world before your eyes as the highest call circus on earth. We have a marvelous performance in store for you and we hope you enjoy it. The band will now play a half hour concert of the latest hits of the day and will be glad to play any number, on request, featuring numbers on the current hit parade. And now introducing in person, the Paul Whiteman of the White Tops, Mr. Henry Kyes."

Jack Stagg inherited the music library of Henry Kyes, and in turn later donated it to the American Circus Music Museum that Ward Stauth (WJU #82) planned to build on his Corydon, IN farm property. Kyes' cue sheets from the 1940-50 period were published by Stagg in *Circus Fanfare* 1980, No. 5. Stauth's museum never happened because of lack of funding. When Stauth died, his collection of circus music, audio tapes and other circus memorabilia went to the International Circus Hall of Fame in Peru, IN. Volunteers there have recently been sorting, cataloging, and putting on display these collections.

Henry Kyes never married. In addition to his music, he was a gourmet and an amateur chef. He also browsed pawn shops for diamonds, antique jewelry, and old coins, and collected books on graphology (handwriting analysis). He retired to Florida and died February 23, 1979 at age 86 in Sarasota.



This photo at left of Henry Kyes comes from a **1959 Shrine Circus** program. Henry's photo gets a full page in the program, equal to each of the acts.

The program lists the band as Henry Kyes, director; Bill Browning, percussionist; and Wynn Danielson, organist.

The show was produced by Harold Voise and included top acts including Professor George Keller's big cats, Roberto Vasconcellos' horses, Roland Tiebor's sea lions and Paul Kelly's elephants.

The photo was taken on a tent show much earlier than 1959, however. Kyes led bands on the Russell Bros. Circus, Clyde Beatty Circus, and Cole Bros. Circus among others. This same photo was published in the Austin (TX) Statesman on May 3, 1950.

IN CHARGE of the 21-piece band with the Ringlings' new Spangles Circus in Madison Square Garden, New York, is Henry Kyes, who had been a member of the Merle Evans band with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus prior to the recent opening of Spangles. A few years ago Kyes was band leader with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus.

Circus Bands of Henry Kyes

- 1914 – Wheeler Bros Greater Shows
- 1916 – Al F. Wheeler
- 1937-38 Hagenbeck-Wallace
- 1945 – Russell Bros.
- 1946 – Clyde Beatty
- 1947 – Sparks Circus
- 1948 – Cole Bros.
- 1948-53 Polack Bros. (indoor)
- 1956-57 Polack Bros. (indoor)
- 1958 - Harold Bros.
- 1959-72 Polack Bros.

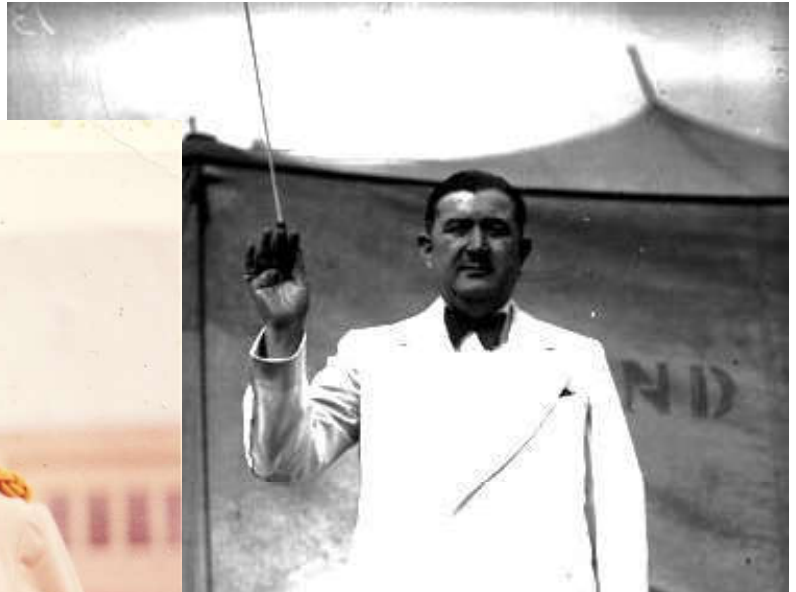
Ringling Circus Rome - Georgia

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REGISTRATION CARD (Men born on or after April 28, 1897 and on or before February 16, 1897)

SERIAL NUMBER 2020	1. NAME (Print) HENRY KYES	ORDER NUMBER
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 494 Maple St. Hathorne Mass.		
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]		
3. MAILING ADDRESS 494 Maple St. Hathorne Mass.		
4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS 49	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Laguerre County Ill.
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOU (Address) L. Kent Kyes - Rochester - Ill.		
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Ringling Bros. Circus Sarasota Florida		
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 4-1-42)		16-21630-2 Henry Kyes (Registrant's Signature)

Henry Kyes World War II Draft Registration Card



Bandleader Henry Kyes with Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus
Photo courtesy Circus World Museum



Photo courtesy animal trainer Roger Smith

**Henry Kyes born October 7, 1892 -
- died February 23, 1979
Inducted to the Windjammers Unlimited
Hall of Fame in 1976**

