

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

LEWIS D. BADER (1898-1977), Inductee 2003

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351



Lew Bader in Ringling Spec costume. *Photo taken at Charleston, WV on July 15, 1954 by Sverre Brathen (WJU Hall of Fame 2009.) Photo Courtesy of Special Collections, Milner Library, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois.*

One of the greatest trombone players with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Band was Lewis Dewey "Lew" Bader. He also served as Merle Evans' "right hand man" for more than three decades. When Merle was asked to name his ideal All-Star Circus Band ensemble, Lew Bader was at the top of the list, leading a trombone section that also included Stanley Czerwinski, Charles Duble (WJU Hall of Fame 1980), and Gene Miller.

Lew Bader was born on October 4, 1898, in Green Hill, Indiana. The family later moved 160 miles east to Greenville, Ohio, just over the Ohio state line. From there,

they moved to Springfield, OH in 1917. Lew was the fifth of nine children -- five boys and four girls -- although the first girl died as an infant. It was a musical family with all members playing an instrument. The mother, Elizabeth Belle (Thompson) Bader (1870-1958) was a piano teacher, and the father, John David Bader (1865-1946), was skilled on violin. John was once described as "one of the best square-dance fiddlers around the little Indiana town where he lived." Yes, there was a "Bader Band" with dad directing and mom on piano. Percy and Russell were on trumpet, William and Lew on trombone, John on clarinet, and Avis, Mary, and Nona sharing time on the piano and likely doing some percussion work as well.

Lew never married and after his retirement late in 1955, he lived with his mother in Springfield, OH. She died December 27, 1958. Later, when his health declined, he moved into a nursing home where he died February 1, 1977, at age 78.

Little is known of Lew's early years, but during 1918-1920 he was working as an electric motor assembler with Robbins & Myers in Springfield. Then after the 1920 Federal Census happened, it appears he embarked upon his first paid musical assignment, having learned a big carnival needed a trombonist. He decided "he was their man."

By 1921, he was playing trombone with the Sells-Floto Circus Band. He was joined in that band by his cornet-playing brother, Russell Albert "Rusty" Bader, who was only 17 at the time. In 1923, Lewis took his trombone over to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, and when Russell learned of an opening for a trumpet player on the Ringling band, he also made the switch.



During the offseason from the circus, Lew generally played for touring vaudeville shows, often those where his brother, Rusty, was playing cornet.

Lew considered Springfield, OH, as his hometown. On a visit there with the circus in July 1954, he told the local newspaper that at least once a year he threatened to quit the nomadic life and settle down in Springfield. But then, he says, with the spring blossoms coming out, he gets the urge to be under the big top once again. His brother Percy added, "Once a trouper, always a trouper. Circus life is in his blood, and he will never quit." But, of course, there always comes a time when one has to leave the sawdust life.

Like Merle Evans, Lew Bader had concerns about Ringling's future viability as the 1955 Ringling season was drawing to a close. Both left Ringling at that time, and Izzy Cervone took on the Ringling bandmaster role for the 1956 season, which terminated abruptly on July 16, 1956, when the



decision was made to no longer perform under canvas. Merle returned to Ringling from his "leave of absence" in 1961, but Lew remained in retirement.

Certainly, during his 33-year career with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus playing under the baton of maestro Merle Evans, there had to be many highlights. However, Lew claimed that one in particular topped the rest. That special event was his participation in Cecil B. DeMille's movie, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, with Betty Hutton, Charlton Heston, Cornel Wilde, Dorothy Lamour, and Jimmy Stewart.

Lewis D. Bader was an honorary member of the Harold Barnes Tent No. 110 of the Circus Fans Association of America, a member of the Circus Hall of Fame, and was inducted into the Windjammers Unlimited Hall of Fame in January 2003.



Lew Bader (left) on July 15, 1954 in Charleston, West Virginia. Merle Evans in white shirt. *Photo by Sverre Braathan (WJU Hall of Fame 2009) Photo courtesy Special Collections, Milner Library, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois*



Ringling trombonist Lew Bader

X
REGISTRATION CARD

SERIAL NUMBER 2047 ORDER NUMBER 6128

1 *Lewis Dewey Bader*

2 PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS: *1319 Lagonda Springfield Clark Ohio*

Age in Years: *19* Date of Birth: *Oct 4 1898*

RACE: White Negro Oriental Indian

U. S. CITIZEN: Native Born Naturalized Alien by Father's Naturalization Alien by Declaration Alien by Naturalization

15 If not a citizen of the U. S., of what nation are you a citizen or subject?

PRESENT OCCUPATION: *Assembler Robbins & Myers* EMPLOYER'S NAME: *Robbins & Myers*

18 PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS: *Lagonda Springfield Clark Ohio*

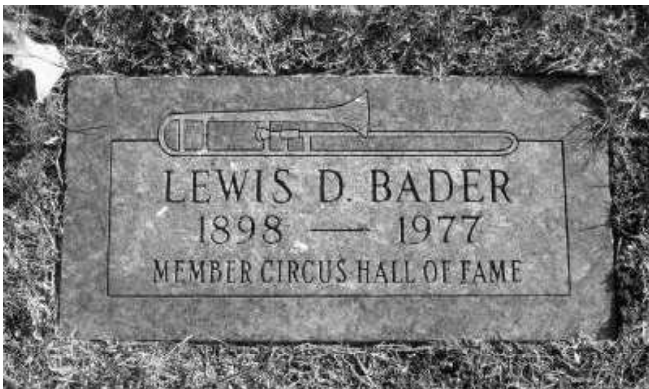
19 NEAREST RELATIVE Name: *Belle Bader*

20 Address: *1319 Lagonda Springfield Clark Ohio*

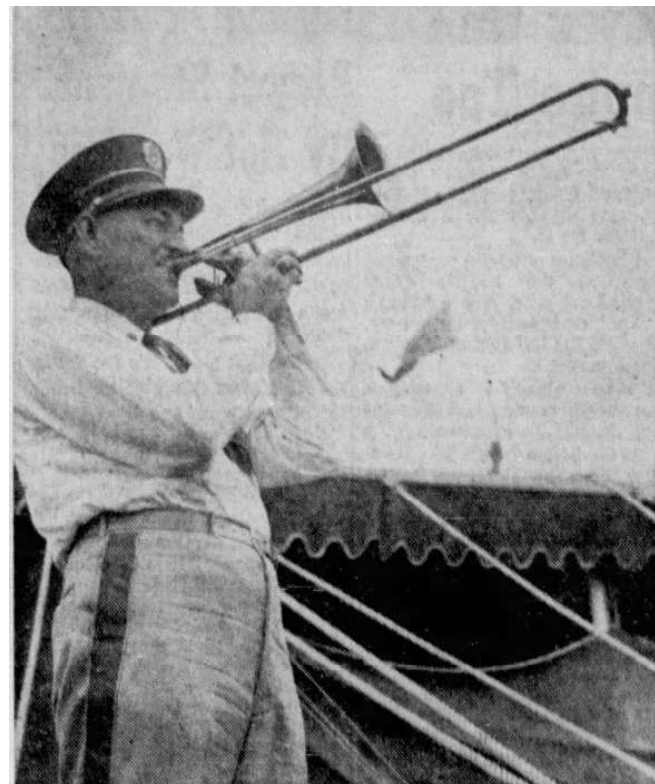
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE AND KNOW FULLY THEY ARE TRUE

F. M. G. O. *L. D. Bader*

Word War I era draft registration signed September 18, 1918. Lew was employed at the time as a 19-year-old assembler of electric motors with Robbins & Myers in Springfield, OH.



Lew Bader died February 1, 1977 at the age of 78 and is buried in Ferncliff Cemetery in Springfield, OH. It would appear Lew was a member of the Circus Hall of Fame organization, but not enshrined as an inductee.



Lew performing in his hometown on July 15, 1954. Photo from Springfield Daily News.