

1876 Trade Card for D.W. Stone's Grand Circus with Joseph A. Emidy as bandmaster for the Musical Brigade
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WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

Joseph A. Emidy (1835-1905), 2005 Inductee

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351

In 2005, Windjammers Unlimited honored Joseph Antonio Emidy by inducting him into the Windjammers Hall of Fame. Charlie Conrad's article on Emidy was included in the March/April 2019 *Circus Fanfare*. We now honor him again, triggered by his band's feature on the **D.W. Stone's Grand Circus** promo card shown on this edition's cover.

However, if you were to do a quick Google search on Joseph Antonio Emidy, you would most likely find a number of articles about his grandfather, also named Joseph Antonio Emidy. The senior Emidy (1775-1835) died the year our WJU Hall of Fame laureate was born. An amazing man and talent, the older Emidy was kidnapped as a young boy from the Guinea coast of West Africa and enslaved by the Portuguese and then the English. He was brought to Lisbon, Spain by his then owner, and while there his talent for music became apparent. While still in servitude he joined the Lisbon Opera Orchestra. Following a performance, he was again kidnapped, this time by a British frigate captain who kept him enslaved on ship as a sailor (musician) in the British Navy. As a 24-year-old, he was finally freed. He quickly earned a reputation as a proficient musician, violinist, composer, music teacher, and conductor. He became music director of the Truro Philharmonic Orchestra in Cornwall County, England.

The Emidy we honor in our Hall of Fame was born April 19, 1835, in Truro, just four days before the death of his now-famous grandfather. He was raised as a musician and married Elisa Anna Bunn, who gained fame as a circus equestrienne. Together, they were in various circus performances throughout England, most notably the Sanger Brothers Show. In 1871, they came to the United States with the Howe's Great London Circus and Sanger's English Menagerie. Emidy's title was "Leader of the British Cornet Band." He was in that role for three years, with press such as the September 30, 1874 **New York Tribune** mention: "Mr. J. A. Emidy and his Celebrated Grand Orchestra, from her Majesty's Theatre, London, England are playing for a variety show at the New York Colosseum."

In December 1874, Emidy "went rogue", abandoning his employer and going out on his own here in the United States. He was quickly hired by the **Montgomery Queen Circus** as their bandmaster and relocated from New York to San Francisco. He performed with "Emidy's

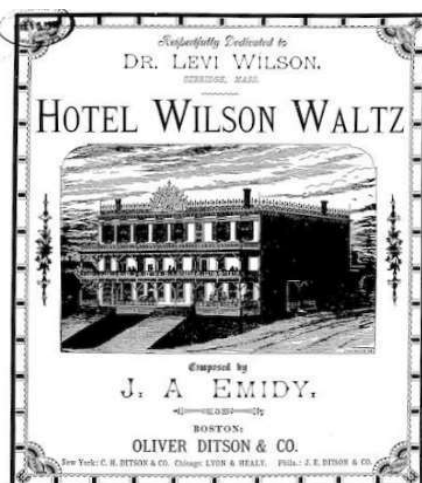
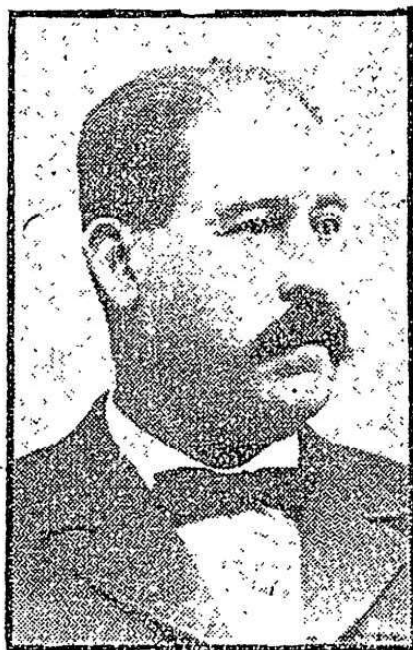
Transcontinental Band" with advertising promoting "the golden band chariot Great Pacific containing Emidy's British Comet Band."

In 1876, Emidy became the bandmaster for the **D.W. Stone's Grand Circus**, with the promo advertising proclaiming "37 Eminent Instrumentalists uniformed as the Imperial Guard of Napoleon III." During this time, he composed *Bronson's Galop*, inscribed to D.W. Stone. An engraving of Emidy and two bandmen is featured on the cover. In 1882, he composed *Hotel Wilson Waltz* and dedicated it to Dr. Levi Wilson. An engraving of the hotel was on the cover.

Some circus music scholars, such as Sverre Braathen (WJU #9, WJU Hall of Fame 2009), believe that Emidy may have been the first significant composer of music for specific circus acts. He is credited with arranging music for Almon Edgar Menter, James S. Robinson (WJU Hall of Fame 2020), Howe's Great London Circus, William Merrick (WJU Hall of Fame 2005), Carl Clair (WJU Hall of Fame 2004), and George Ganweiler (WJU Hall of Fame 2008). Emidy claimed he wrote his first arrangement for band at age twelve.

Emidy retired from sawdust life sometime in the 1880's and he and his wife settled at the home they had purchased in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. He was a music teacher and became the conductor of the Woonsocket Cornet Band, an ensemble of about two dozen talented and respected musicians. On many occasions he was the featured cornet soloist. On October 25, 1901, he became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Joseph Antonio Emidy died December 26, 1905. The local newspaper (full clipping to the right) reported "he had been gradually failing in health for some weeks past, but ... suffered a paralytic shock, which rendered him unconscious ... until his death. He was always a musician and played the violin as well as the cornet with the Woonsocket Opera House orchestra. For years he was the leader of the Woonsocket Cornet Band. He was also a teacher of prominence. He was a composer, meeting with much success in this line. His arrangements for military bands are noted all over the country. Prof. Emidy was an honest, upright man of kind and genial disposition, and he made many friends wherever he went."



Source: Library of Congress website

DEAN OF MUSICIANS.

Death of Prof. Joseph A. Emidy of Woonsocket.

Prof. Joseph A. Emidy, a highly respected resident of Woonsocket, and dean of musicians in that section of New England, died last evening at 9 o'clock at his home, 160 Third avenue, Woonsocket. He had been gradually failing in health for some weeks past, but Saturday he suffered a paralytic shock, which rendered him unconscious, in which state he remained until death.

Joseph A. Emidy was born in Turo, Cornwall, England, about 71 years ago. Early in life he showed an aptness for music, and he was not long in mastering the cornet, and his ability as a cornetist was soon recognized. When a young man he travelled with the Sanger Brothers show, which toured England. After his engagement with the Sanger Brothers, he accepted the responsible position as leader of the band at the Crystal Palace, London, which position he held for several seasons. There were 50 men in this organization, and Prof. Emidy made an enviable reputation, not only as a musician, but as a leader of men. His kindness to many struggling musicians has been notable. From the Crystal Palace he went to Agricultural Hall, Liverpool, where he held the position of leader of another big band. Mr. Emidy came to this country in 1872, under contract to the Montgomery Queen Company, but this organization disbanded during its first year here. He then was leader for a year of the gigantic Barnum show bands.

He was always a musician and played the violin as well as the cornet with

marked ability and success. Prof. Emidy played violin in the Woonsocket Opera House orchestra for many years. For years he was leader of the Woonsocket Cornet Band. He was also a teacher of prominence. He was a composer, meeting with much success in this line. His arrangements for military bands are noted all over the country. He had travelled extensively throughout this country and British Columbia. He did much journeying in California and British Columbia by team, as the modern railroads had not then found their way in those sections.

Prof. Emidy was an honest, upright man of kind and genial disposition, and made many friends wherever he went.

Besides a wife, he leaves a brother, James Emidy and several nephews and nieces. The funeral will be held Friday. Edward W. Clifford, a well-known musician, will have charge of the combined musical organizations of the city, the members of which will attend the funeral.

