



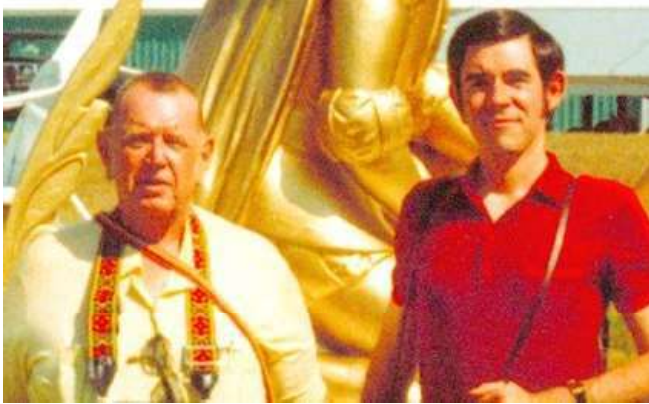
WINDJAMMERS UNLIMITED'S Co-Founders, Art Stensvad and Charles Bennett, Jr. and the Cinderella Float at Baraboo, WI Fairgrounds circa 1985

Celebrating 50 Years

PRESERVING ♦ EDUCATING ♦ PERFORMING

THE FOUNDING OF WINDJAMMERS UNLIMITED

By Charles H. Bennett, Jr., WJU #1



WJU Co-founders Art Stensvad (1919-1998) and Charles H. Bennett, Jr.

To still be on this planet to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Windjammers Unlimited is both amazing and an honor. However, one could properly argue I was just a “kid” at the time. **1971.....2021. Wow!**

Having grown up in a family where circus music was loved and going to every possible circus performance was the rule, it is not surprising that traditional circus music was in my blood. While my dad was a railroad guy through and through, he also became a circus model builder at an early age. When we went to the circuses, we always sat near the bandstand. When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus came to the Chicago area virtually every year, my dad ... with me in tow ... would meet Merle Evans at the end of the show. My dad once gave him a “Circus Wagon Wheel” tie clasp he had made, and Merle was quite proud to wear it. As a result, Merle remembered us.

In 1970, the summer before my last semester at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Merle Evans wrote me and asked if I could put together a circus band for the first of what became Delavan Circus Historical Society's annual Circus Festival in Wisconsin. It was held on the Elkhorn Fairgrounds. The circus ran for three days and had displays consisting of 25 top-caliber acts. Merle was the bandmaster. It was an awesome honor to assemble the band, but with Merle as the conductor, the task was a proverbial “piece of cake.” Musicians jumped at the chance to play under Merle's baton. Merle laid out a great collection of circus tunes which, combined with the popular selections furnished by the acts, made for a well-rounded musical program.

Without question, that Delavan circus event had a profound impact on me. Each night, perhaps a dozen of us would gather in one of the hotel rooms to shoot the breeze. Of course, I did not have much to contribute, but the pros such as Ringling percussionist Rollin Sherbondy or tuba player Harvey Phillips (WJU Hall of Fame 2010) had so many yarns to spin. Likewise, circus tuba player Ed Livingston had tales to tell. As I sat there in awe, listening to these

“windjammers” talking, I thought “Man, we’ve got to get these stories down before this generation of players pass on.” I came away from that Delavan event convinced we needed an organization to preserve the musical culture of the traditional American circus.

When I talked to my dad about it, he encouraged me strongly. In 1936, he had co-founded the Circus Model Builders club, and he said, “Why not something like it for circus music?” Now my father had met and corresponded with Art Stensvad, another career railroad man, several times before. Art was from North Platt, Nebraska and my dad knew Art was a fan of circuses and, in particular, wild west shows. Buffalo Bill's Wild West had been headquartered in North Platte. One year they had a Wild West Show festival to celebrate that history and Art put together the music for that show. It happens that the most significant trigger to Art's love of circus music was in 1930 when RCA came out with the first record of Merle Evans and his Circus Concert band. Art was only 11 or 12 at the time, but those circus tunes had a significant impact on him. (The six sides of that 1930 Victor album are accessible to members on our MYWJU.ORG website. If you have not already, you ought to listen to that band. I still have my dad's set of those original records.)

Art loved the Victor recordings so much that he soon began buying any record he could find that included circus music. As an 18-year-old, Art joined Circus Fans Association of America, and became increasingly passionate about his circus music hobby, although he was not a musician himself. It was not long before he bought reel-to-reel tape-recording equipment, recorded circus performances with permission from the bandmasters, and started trading tapes with other music hobbyists. Eventually, my dad was one of those, again through their mutual railroad connection. During the 1960's, Art also did some letter-writing campaigns trying to convince circus managers to bring back traditional circus music. Unfortunately, that yielded virtually no positive results. But that did prime him for what I was about to propose.

Knowing Art's passion for things similar to mine, my dad suggested I contact Art. I wrote Art Stensvad a letter outlining my thoughts and plans for an organization, and he responded with enthusiasm. It was also quickly apparent that Art was a most knowledgeable circus historian. Long distance phone calls were too expensive so, instead, we adopted an approach of sending a 60-minute cassette tape back and forth by mail between Chicago and North Platte. Things moved fast and we agreed on forming the organization effective January 1, 1971. We also quickly agreed on the name “Windjammers, Unlimited.” (The comma was soon dropped. And yes, we sometimes referred to our creation as “My WJU.”)

When my father formed Circus Model Builders along with Bert Backstein, Bert was the more senior co-founder age-wise so they agreed Bert would be Member #1, and my dad would be #2. Art was 28 years older than me. So, I offered the same to him, but he instantly rejected it, saying "Your dad was #2, so now it is your turn to be #1." And so, it happened.

Our first "unofficial" Windjammers Unlimited (WJU) circus band was in 1971 in conjunction with a Circus Model Builders Meet in Park Ridge, IL. There were only seven or eight of us in the band, but we had a great time. In addition, the model builders loved the circus spirit our music added to their event. All these players joined WJU.



Matt Lower (172), Rex Benson (157), ??, Charlie Bennett (1), Howard Numbers (146), Jim Holm (160), Johnnie Lower (171).

As a locomotive engineer for Union Pacific Railroad, Art was on call 24/7. He had to be on the job when he was called, no matter what. So, vacations were nearly impossible to schedule. The odd thing about our friendship and co-founding of WJU was that the first time we were able to meet in person was at the Summer Meet in Delaware, Ohio in July 1974. We had worked together on a long-distance basis for four years and had no idea what each other looked like. It was a thrill to finally meet Art at this 2nd Annual Summer Meet, which was hosted by WJU President Robert P. Hills, Jr. I have always cherished the one and only picture of the original leadership team, taken at the one and only time all four of us were in the same place at the same time.



The Team that got Windjammers Unlimited rolling (left to right): Art Stensvad, Bob Hills, Ward Stauth, Charles Bennett, Jr.

Just as happened in 1970, Merle Evans asked me to again form the band for the June 25-27, 1971 Delavan Circus Festival. At the time, it was known as "The Elkhorn Wisconsin Circus Band." I played trumpet and other early WJU members included Bob Harrison (WJU #8) on tenor sax, Lloyd Fengel (#42) on trumpet, and Ed Livingston (#44) on tuba. We had an excellent 23-person circus band with five trumpets, Byron Autrey on cornet, two clarinets, a tenor sax, an alto sax, five trombones, two baritones, three tubas, two percussionists, and Merle Evans (WJU #22) conducting. While this was not a WJU event by any means, it certainly became a reinforcement of the organization we had created and a super promotional opportunity for recruiting new members.

After the Elkhorn event, I appointed myself as WJU Editor and produced the first edition of what soon became the *Circus Fanfare*. Back then, that first, painfully typed, 8-page newsletter was simply labeled **Vol. 1 FANFARE No. 1**. In the intro, I pleaded with members to submit reviews on traveling circus bands, articles about circus music composers, and news information on upcoming concerts or record releases. I noted in that edition we already had several of the nation's leading circus music historians as part of our organization, as well as several past and present circus band directors. At that point in mid-1971, we had members from 20 states plus Canada. We considered the first 100 members to be Charter Members of Windjammers Unlimited and it did not take us all that long to achieve that goal.

Clyde Beatty – Cole Bros. Circus bandmaster Charles "Chuck" Schlarbaum joined WJU as Member #61. He was the driver behind our first Annual Convention, which was held in Key Biscayne, Florida in January 1973. For our first Convention, tuba player Loren Geiger (WJU #12) composed a piece dedicated to me. He titled it "*Charlie Bennett's Screamer*." As far as I know that tune was only played once. I do remember it had a tough baritone part.



1st Convention. Back: Bob Hills (71), Ward Stauth (82), (student), (student), Bob Weiss (103), Doc Dettman (144), Chuck Schlarbaum (61). Front: Bob Harrison (8), Tex Maynard (134), Richard Whitmarsh (143), Charlie Bennett (1)

Our Secretary, Ward Stauth was Member #82 and he hosted the first Summer Meet in July 1973 at his farm in Corydon, Indiana.



1st Summer Meet: H. Conrad (153), C. Conrad (154), Bob Hills (71), Charlie Bennett (1), Ward Stauth (82), "Doc" Dettman (144).

In addition to those formal Conventions and Meets, we sometimes had more informal, regional ones. No doubt my favorite of those was what I called "Windjammers in the Woods." For five years (2000-2004), we joined the Fall Convention of the Iowa Chapter of Circus Model Builders at the Forest Lake (church) Camp in Ottumwa, Iowa. These were in October. Initially we had 9 or 10 playing, but that grew to 21 as word spread. Typically, there would be 10 or so model builders from two or three states and they would set up their displays in the main room of the lodge. We rehearsed in a large room in another building. That room had one wall of windows looking out on the woods. At one rehearsal, we were surprised to see eight deer staring at us through those windows. They seemed entranced by our music and stayed watching for almost a half hour. At each of these events we would also do a public concert for the local townspeople.



2002 "Windjammers in the Woods" -- All WJU members.

In 1972, our three-term first president, Robert P. Hills, Jr. (WJU #71), using his R. Paul Harper pseudonym, composed a tune called "*Windjammers, Unlimited.*" It was a grand entry piece and in the early years we often played it during our rehearsals, but not at our public concerts. Obviously, it was composed by one of our members specifically for our organization. And it is a worthy march. I would love to see WJU resurrect that piece and routinely play it as the opening number at each of our public concerts, just as we always end with Karl King's "*Barnum & Bailey's Favorite.*"

As this 50th Anniversary Edition of *Circus Fanfare* goes to press, our newest member has Member Number 3966. Sitting here with badge Number 1 is quite humbling, I have to say. My hat goes off to all of those over the years who have provided the needed leadership to keep WJU alive, prospering, and accomplishing the originally intended mission of preservation, education, and performance as it pertains to the music of the circus. My thanks to each of you for being a part of this mission and heritage. MAY ALL YOUR DAYS BE CIRCUS DAYS!

AMAZON SMILE

Purchasing via Amazon? Use Amazon Smile and WJU receives 0.5%.

Here is the link: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/23-7356228>

WINDJAMMERS APPAREL

Available with the 50th Logo - Go to the Apparel Tab on our website.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP ... ONLINE or VIA CHECK

MYWJU.ORG or Mail to WJU Secretary, Joe Shearin,
1169 Belle Meade Island Dr., Miami, FL. 33138-5253

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

CHARLES H. BENNETT, JR., WJU #1, WJU Hall of Fame 2013

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351



Charles H. Bennett, Jr. is the co-founder of Windjammers Unlimited and WJU #1. Charlie inherited his passion for the circus from his father, who was a co-founder of Circus Model Builders, an organization along with Circus Historical Society and Circus Fans Association of America that are sister organizations to our own. At 50 years, WJU is by far the youngest of the four.

Bennett, Sr. had a hobby of building little circus wagons. He was thirteen when he did his first one, a white cage wagon still on display in Charles, Jr.'s hobby room. The Ringling red ticket wagon was his last one 66 years later. In 1935, the *Billboard* magazine ran an article about "Backstein's Miniature Circus," which at the time was the largest complete ½" scale circus in the world. Bennett, Sr. saw it and wrote Bert Backstein concerning their shared hobby and interest. They discussed the possibility of forming a club to help model builders exchange ideas. They soon enjoined two others in the plan and then placed an article in *Billboard* explaining the club's objectives and soliciting new members. It worked, and in 1936 the "Circus Model Builder & Owner's Association" was born. Years later, in January 1965, it was incorporated in Pennsylvania as "Circus Model Builders, Inc."

Charlie, Jr. was born in Chicago and when he was three, the family moved to Norridge, IL, a northwest Chicago suburb near O'Hare Field. He was there until 1975, when a job

promotion took him and his wife, Beverley, to Wichita, KS. They are still there 45 years later.

During his childhood, Charlie recalls being called down to his dad's basement workshop on a regular basis so his dad could talk to him about the skills of model building, but also about circus history, its performers, and yes, its music as his father loved circus music, especially the music of Karl L. King. Around the house, the Merle Evans recordings of 1930 (Victor), 1941 (Columbia), 1949 (Capitol), and 1953 (Decca) were frequently playing on the turntable. Railroading was another significant topic of conversation as his Dad's entire career was with the railroads.

In those early years when circuses played the Chicago area the Bennett's were there. In 1949, as a two-year-old, Charlie was at the Ringling show and his dad held him up high in the menagerie to see Gargantua, the famous gorilla. Of course, Charlie does not actually remember that first trip to the circus, but he has heard the replay many times.

Being such a circus music fan, Bennett, Sr. would make a point of meeting Merle Evans after the show. Charlie remembers when they went into the Big Top, his father would always pay the head usher to get them seats right next to the bandstand wagon. [See pages 24-25 of the MAY-JUNE 2019 *Fanfare* for an article on Ringling's custom Bandstand Wagon #29.]

Back in 1965, when Charlie was a college student at Emmetsburg Community College (now Iowa Lakes C.C.) in N.W. Iowa, Bennett, Sr., learned of an upcoming St. Patrick's Day Concert by the Fort Dodge Municipal Band. He wrote Karl King about the possibility of attending and meeting the great composer and conductor. So, on what was Charlie's birthday, the two Bennett's were in Ft. Dodge, IA for the concert. As Charlie was a robust fan of the University of Illinois basketball and football teams, he was particularly thrilled when the King band played King's *Pride of the Illini* March. After the concert, King graciously invited them to the stage where they sat and had a wonderful 40-minute visit. There was quite a connection and King took an interest in Charlie and would subsequently write him, sending copies of music and programs, and even books that would be of interest.

So, with King's long-distance mentorship, Charlie became an outstanding trumpet player and circus band enthusiast. He also carried forward his dad's love of circus model building and model railroads, so much so that his basement is currently filled with the output. Bennett, Sr. was inducted

into the CMB Hall of Fame in 1965, and Charlie received a similar honor in 2017.

Clearly, Charlie Bennett, Jr. had a number of amazing influences in his life. Naturally, it started with his father (WJU #148), but also included Karl King (WJU Hall of Fame 1974), Merle Evans (WJU #22; H of F 1974), and Charles "Chuck" Schlarbaum (WJU #61; H of F 2007). But as an overall summary, Charlie says, "I am what my father was." Truly, the name fits -- Charles Herbert Bennett, Junior.

Growing up in a house filled with circus music, it was not a surprise then that entering 7th grade, Charlie picked up playing the trumpet. The choice of instrument was never in doubt because over the years, Charlie had grown to admire the solo cornet players in the various circus bands. When he began private lessons in 8th grade, his dad got him a professional French Besson trumpet which remains his main instrument, although he still has his first student Conn cornet.

From 8th grade on, anytime a tent show was anywhere close, Charlie would go to the circus with a notebook in hand. He took notes on the tunes played and the personnel included in the band. Often, he would also tape record the performances.

In 1963, as an 11th grader, the Mills Bros. Circus came to town for an 8-day gig. Bandleader and trumpeter Joe Stephan (WJU Hall of Fame 2007) had a ten-person circus band, and when Charlie explained his interest, Joe invited him to come back with his trumpet and sit in with the band. When he did, they put Charlie on solo cornet, sitting between Bobby Danks and Ozzie Kristen. The Pre-Show consisted of five tunes, all at a "Joe Stephan tempo", which is faster than "circus tempo." The third number was Russell Alexander's *The Southerner*, which has an especially wicked Trio. As the Trio started, Charlie commenced with a serious coughing attack, recovering for the "dogfight" strain, and back to the coughing attack on the Trio repeat. At the next break in playing, Bobby and Ozzie had their own attack -- one of almost hysterical laughter. Charlie then realized they had not been fooled.

When Charlie was a high school senior, the high school band leader, Glen Mortenson, was persuaded by Charlie and the two others on solo cornet, to tackle *Bugler's Holiday* for a concert. The bandmaster was hesitant and doubtful but agreed. When the concert happened, the trio "took off" with unexpected speed and did a super job. But afterwards, Mortenson looked at them in amazement, saying "How in the hell did you guys do that?"

When Charlie headed off to college, he was thinking of being a Civil Engineer. He picked the community college in Iowa where his mother's father lived, so he could have inexpensive accommodations. Soon, however, he switched from engineering to a Liberal Arts curriculum. After three

semesters there, Charlie went back to Chicago and enrolled part-time at tuition-free Wright Junior College (now Wilbur Wright College). Later, he enrolled at the University of Illinois - Chicago Campus (UICC) for one semester. For his last two years of college, he was at Roosevelt University in Chicago, graduating in January 1971 with a B.S. degree in Marketing and an advertising major.

While still in school, Charlie had an internship at the largest ad agency in Chicago and got a firsthand look at how cutthroat the advertising world was. He saw several agency workers get the axe. One of his training assignments was to develop an ad campaign for a bubble bath product ... aimed at adult men! Despite his forthcoming degree, Charlie decided another path was needed.

When the Railroad Retirement Board recruiters showed up on campus, Charlie went for an interview. No doubt his family's detailed knowledge about railroads was a big plus. It was a match and he was hired. At the Board's offices, he met Beverley and they were married. When he accepted a promotion and transferred to Wichita in 1975, she quickly got a job there at the Department of Agriculture. Charlie's primary role was pension and unemployment counseling and sign-ups. It involved a lot of travel to small towns and was quite people-oriented.

While his job did not allow for much trumpet playing. Charlie would still get to sit in with the Mills Bros. show when they were in town. And later he would sit in with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. show when Chuck Schlarbaum was bandmaster. Charlie was also well-aware of an annual local circus in Delavan, WI, celebrating the town's circus heritage. A few small shows had wintered there. Also, P.T. Barnum's first circus was launched from Delavan in 1871, with William Cameron Coup and Dan Castello as P.T.'s partners. It was initially called "P.T. Barnum's Grand Traveling Museum, Menagerie, Caravan & Hippodrome". After a number of name changes and mergers, it became Barnum & Bailey's "Greatest Show on Earth," headquartered in Bridgeport, CT.

In 1970, Charlie was quite surprised to receive a letter from Merle Evans asking him to organize the band for the circus in Delavan that summer, which was staged outdoors at the city's grandstand. Charlie's informal network pulled it off. The tuba section had the top three tuba players -- Harvey Phillips, Bill Bell, and Ed Livingston. One of the drummers was Ringling's Rollin Sherbondy.

During this gig, lodging and meals were free, but were in another town. One night, Charlie and three others were not paying enough attention to the time and they realized they were going to be late for the evening show. Charlie thought Merle would not start without them, but Rollin knew better and was quite agitated. As they approached the bandstand, the Grand Entry was past and Act One was close to ending. Charlie remembers well that Merle never said a word, but if looks could kill, Merle's would have. Nevertheless, Charlie

was invited to again put the Delavan band together for 1971, and many of those in that band became charter members of Windjammers Unlimited.

Charlie Bennett, Jr, and Art Stensvad (WJU #2) officially formed Windjammers Unlimited on January 1, 1971. That was just a couple weeks prior to Charlie's graduating from college. Ward Stauth (WJU #82), of Corydon, IN, was one of the original "Big Four" leadership team members for Windjammers Unlimited. That team also included WJU's first president, Bob Hills, Jr (WJU #71). Not only did all four have a love for circus music, but they were all serious railroad buffs as well.

In 1972, Charlie and his clarinet-playing friend, Bob Harrison (WJU #8), decided to do a circus band gig on their respective vacations. They drove to Lake Placid, NY and then trouped with the King Bros. Circus' six-person band in New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire. While in Vermont with King Bros., Charlie was shocked to see Ward Stauth on the lot. Turns out, Ward had driven the over 900 miles from Indiana to Vermont specifically to tape record the show because of Charlie and Bob's participation in the King

Bros. band. When that night's show was over, Ward drove back home. In 1973, Charlie and Bob did a bit of a repeat vacation excursion, this time with the Clyde Beatty – Cole Bros. circus band under Chuck Schlarbaum's baton.

When Charlie left the Railroad Pension Board, his parents were having serious health issues and that motivated his early retirement. So, Charlie embarked on frequent trips from Wichita, Kansas back to the Chicago area to be with them. Charlie's father died September 17, 1996. Charlie and Beverley then moved his mother to Wichita. She died January 7, 2005.

Along the way, Charlie started having some serious vision problems. He came to the Lincoln, Nebraska Windjammers Unlimited Summer Meet in 2014, but the vision issue was such a problem that he decided he could no longer play with our group. He also dropped in on the Oscaloosa Meet in 2018, but just listened. However, his situation has certainly not dampened his spirit for our organization or circus music in general. Fifty years after the WJU launch, he is as enthusiastic as ever about our mission, wishing for all our members that "All our days may be circus music days."

CIRCUS BUSINESS CARDS

By Max Kramer Goodall II, WJU #1060

There was never a time in my life when I did not love and appreciate the art of the circus! My great-grandfather, Robert Knight, was the original circus fan in our family. I not only inherited his circus library but also his high regard for all forms of outdoor entertainment. Therefore, it was a little bit strange that no one took me to a real circus until 1970, when I was 15 years old. Still, I have been a faithful follower of the Big Top ever since.

It was not until 1979 that I joined the Circus Historical Society (CHS). Then in 1980, just after my 25th birthday on May 5th, I joined the Circus Fans Association of America (CFA). A membership in Windjammers Unlimited (WJU) came in 1987, even though I had been observing WJU recording sessions and Sailor Circus performances for years before that. Because I do not play an instrument, I later dropped out for a few years, but I am glad to have rejoined a couple years ago in support of the Windjammers Unlimited mission of preservation and education ... while still listening to the circus music I love!

My grandparents lived in Bradenton, FL. They were only



Max Goodall II with his Circus Business Card albums

ten minutes from the old Circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota and the Ringling Circus Museum. So, from my earliest days I was exposed to circus topics and learned to have a keen appreciation of this art form. And years later ... to this day ... I am still a big circus fan. Also, my sister lived in Venice, FL. With family in the area, it was not much of a strain to get to the Windjammers recording sessions, where the bands would practice and record circus music. And I went to many of those before I became a member and started doing recordings myself. My most active years of circus music recording were from 1988 to 1992.

Back in the 1960s, the Circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota, FL always had a section of old circus books for sale.

When I was 10 my grandmother bought me a copy of "Lord" George Sanger's "*70 Years a Showman*". I soon had it read from cover to cover. It remains today as one of my favorite books ... a masterpiece of literature! It was wonderful to grow up in a world where no one thought it odd that a ten-year-old boy would rather be reading serious books about the circus than the *Hardy Boys*! For me, even the *Sherlock Holmes* short stories had to wait until I was in college.