

THE WIZARD BUGLERS ... Almon Edgar Menter, Sr. & Jr.

By Charles Conrad, WJU #1525

Almon Edgar Menter was born in 1845 in Covington, KY, located just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. His father, also named **Almon Edgar Menter** and born March 29, 1821, received his earliest known press reference in an advertisement in the November 20, 1848, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. The senior Menter was called the "Wizard Bugler" and was credited with leading the band for the **Dan Rice Circus**. He was still with that entourage two years later according to a story in the August 24, 1852, edition of the Keokuk (IA) *Dispatch*, in which he was identified as the keyed bugle soloist with the Dan Rice Circus.

The senior Menter generally went by "Almon", "A.E.", or Captain, and his son by "Edgar", or "E.A."

An article in the September 3, 1852, Davenport (IA) *Democratic Banner* reports: *"The spectacle is accompanied and enhanced by strains of the choicest music by a double brass band led by Almon Mentor (sic), the Wizard Bugler. The immense pavilion will hold comfortably 10,000 persons and is provided with every convenience."*

In 1855 Almon was leading an ensemble called **Menter's American Cornet Band** in Cincinnati. By 1860 this band was important enough to be mentioned on the cover and dedication of the sheet music to Paul Jones' composition *"Get Out of the Wilderness and Dixie's Land"*, published as a piano solo in Cincinnati by John Church, Jr. and nationally by Oliver Ditson of Boston and others. The cover states that these are "Two Popular Airs as played by Capt. A. Menter and his American Cornet Band." The interior dedication refers to "Menter's Brass Band."

Young Almon was a prodigy on the cornet, playing solos at a young age, and advertised as "Edgar, the Boy Cornetist" when he played with his father's band. It is possible that there is some confusion between father and son in the early 1860s, but one or the other, likely Menter, Sr., led the band for the 1861 National Theater Circus, owned by Dan Rice.

Rice was one of the most important early circus impresarios and was a tall and lanky former clown. Some historians believe that Rice was the original model for Uncle Sam. In 1862, Dan Rice announced that Almon Menter's Silver Cornet Band from Cincinnati had been permanently engaged and would play from horseback. In 1863, the advertisements for Dan Rice read: *"Menter's Brass Band, made up of musical artists culled*



with infinite pains from every portion of the United States, directed by the Wizard Bugler Almon Menter, who conjured forth such magical musical efforts, whether in a solo, the soft and dulcet strains which lull the heart to repose, or the shrill and stirring sounds which animate the equestrian to renewed exertion, and the spectator with revived attention, or pouring forth, in accompaniment, those piercing notes that rise immeasurably above the thundering blasts of the whole band."

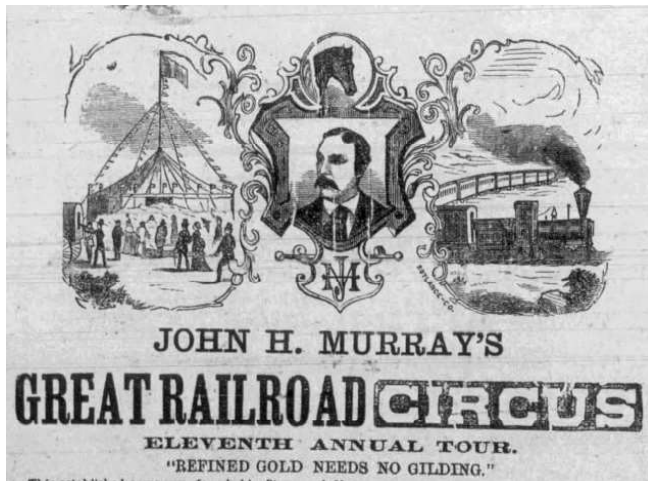
With the death two years earlier of Ned Kendall (WJU Hall of Fame 2006), the original "Wizard Bugler", Rice must have felt safe using that title again for Menter. A composition entitled *Lincoln's Funeral March* by Charles Hess was published in 1865 in Cincinnati by A. C. Peters and Bro. with a statement that it was played by Menter's Band.

By 1866, Almon was bandmaster for Mike Lipman's Circus, an entourage that consistently misspelled his name as "Mentor." The ad line was "Capt. Mentor's World Renowned Metropolitan Opera Band appearing in the Car of Aelus." However, we know that Almon was murdered by a burglar in Covington on June 6, 1866. According to an article in the Burlington (IA) *Daily Hawkeye*: *"Between one and two o'clock this morning, Capt. A. Menter, whose well known brass band is connected with Lipman's Circus Company, now performing in Cincinnati, returned to his home ... accompanied by his son, a young man of 21 years. Captain Menter and his son seized the villain when a desperate struggle commenced. Menter, Sr. was shot once in the abdomen. Young Edgar wrestled the revolver away and stabbed the burglar."* Almon's widow was Lucretia L. Root (1822-1893). In addition to Edgar, they had daughters Cynthia M. (1843), Mariah Ann (1847), Martha (1852), and son Graham (1861).

Edgar finished the 1866 circus season in his father's place, with the advertising continuing as before relative to Captain Menter and his Metropolitan Opera Band. Menter's Band had an office in downtown Cincinnati and there are no mentions in 1867 or 1868 of Menter's name in circus circles. One would assume that Menter, Jr. was in charge of the Cincinnati operation for those two years.

In 1869, E.A. Menter was back with Dan Rice and the ensemble was now referred to as "Edgar Menter's Admirable Silver Cornet Band." The band played on horseback, but Rice did not use a parade, one of his mottos being *"Inside performance without outside display, rather than outside display without inside performance."*

The 1870 show had a remarkable title - "Dan Rice's Great Tripartite Circus, Ampilation, and Spectacle." The 1871 show was called "Dan Rice's Paris Pavilion Circus."



Menter's Band was a part of both and returned again in 1872 and 1873 when the feature was Alf. Hindley, the famous English Cornet Player.

Edgar moved in 1874 and 1875 to John H. Murray's Railroad Circus, leading the parade in the "new Great Golden Car, 'TRIUMPH', bearing therein Menter's Band, richly uniformed, drawn by eighteen Arabian Steeds." Edgar married German-born Christine Boeswald on September 9, 1877. Their son, Edgar George Menter was born June 13, 1878.

The years 1878 through 1881 found Edgar with W. C. Coup's "New York Circus and Equesscurriculum College of Trained Animals", which advertised a "Cephalopodian Monster of the Deep," a thirty-nine foot giant squid. An advertisement from October 2, 1879 in the Cambridge City (IN) *Tribune* describes Coup's bandwagon: "Edgar Menter's Silver Cornet Band; \$10,000 Tally-Ho Coach, with Four-in-hand and \$2,000 Harness; the Magnificent \$10,000 Imperial Coach of Napoleon III, once the actual property of the late French Emperor, drawn by four magnificent horses from the Imperial Stables."

A sad moment occurred in August 1879 when the infant son of two Coup Circus performers died in the sleeping car en route from Scranton to Carbondale in Pennsylvania. The child was buried that afternoon following a processional led by Menter's Band. (*New York Clipper* 8-16-1879)

From 1883 through 1886, Edgar was bandmaster for the Great Forepaugh Show, one of the largest circuses on the road. The 1883 band included three members of the Ganweiler family, including George (WJU Hall of Fame 2008) on solo alto. The band's instrumentation was piccolo, Eb clarinet, 3 Bb clarinets, 4 cornets, 3 altos, 3 trombones, euphonium, 2 tubas, and 2 percussionists.

It was an eventful, if rough, year, as one canvas man was sent to jail for biting a property man (many times!), a ticket holder was forced at gunpoint to marry a young lady he had "wronged," and a driver killed one of the show's waiters. The concert program in the side show included Hebrew songs as sung by the McMahons.

The 1885 program mentions the use of Rossini's *William Tell Overture* and features three separate advertisements from the C. G. Conn Musical Instrument Company whose display ads would become a regular feature in circus programs for decades to come. Edgar was announced as the orchestra leader for the Barnum & Forepaugh Circus in 1887, but probably never performed with the ensemble, as he died of pneumonia on April 3, 1887, in New York City, leaving a wife, and their young son, Edgar. Edgar George Menter (1878-1952) went on as a life-long career musician in New York City.

Edgar's obituary from the *New York Clipper* indicates both the esteem in which he was held and the confusion about his name: "Last week we recorded the death of Almon Edgar Menter. Such was his name, and not, as was supposed, Edward A. Menter. This country had no better leader, arranger, and composer for circuses. He led as well for string as for brass. He was a thorough musician and so had been his father. In the West and the South, the senior Menter's band had acquired deserved fame, and Edgar, the boy-cometist, is well-remembered in that section."

Charles H. Day pays his memory a tribute:

"He teemed with originality. No matter where performers came from, no matter whose arrangements of music they brought with them, when they returned to the circuses of Europe they all carried with them Menter's music; and it is played and performed to all over the world today. He was particularly happy in music for grand entries and for special acts, and was aptness in choosing medleys of 'the very latest' for overtures. Although a strict disciplinarian, yet he was held in high esteem by those who served under him, all of whom will have good cause to shed a tear while keeping in mind a generous, talented, large-hearted comrade. He has laid down a baton that will long wait for someone to take it up who was his equal in his peculiar sphere."

It is certain that both Menters were involved in circus music, and we will likely never know with certainty which was associated with some of the shows, but both Almon Edgar Menters deserve, in any case, mention as among the most important circus bandmasters and arrangers of the nineteenth century.

CIRCUSES PLAYED BY ONE OR BOTH THE MENTERS

1848-52	Dan Rice Circus
1863	Dan Rice Circus
1866	Mike Lipman's Circus
1869-70	Dan Rice's Great Tripartite Circus
1871-72	Dan Rice's Paris Pavilion Circus
1874-75	John H. Murray's Railroad Circus
1878-79	W. C. Coup's Circus
1881	New York Circus
1883-86	Adam Forepaugh Circus