

Our WJU Co-Founder -

A TRIBUTE TO ART STENSVAD, WJU #2

By Barbara Bailey, WJU #18

In a 1971 issue of the CFA's *WHITE TOPS* magazine my husband, Buster (Elden C Bailey), spied an advertisement for a new circus organization which was being formed to promote the use of and preservation of traditional circus music. As a circus fan and musician this had great appeal to him and he asked me if I would care to also join as we rarely had opportunities to play together anymore. I was happy to agree.

Buster sent in the application and received a speedy response from a fellow circus music enthusiast and one of the two founders of Windjammers Unlimited. His name was Art Stensvad. Art and Charles Bennett, Jr. had decided to try to organize this together and Art was obviously the one who was in charge of the communications and record-keeping. Over time, we gathered information about him from his letters which followed.

As a resident of North Platte, Nebraska, which was the home location of **Buffalo Bill's Wild West Ranch** show as well as a train hub for **Union Pacific Railroad**, I'm sure those two facts sparked Art's early interest in both subjects. But what attracted him to the music was known only to him as he didn't play an instrument.

Indeed, Art was an enthusiastic circus fan and a non-playing member of Windjammers. However, he truly enjoyed listening to the music of the circus. He had an extensive collection of various circus band tapes which he enjoyed exchanging with other music lovers. He traveled far and wide to hear and see shows, and when possible, made tapes of the music which he would then refer to in his letters. And yes, he had another significant hobby as well, and that was a love for American railroads and trains in general, triggered by his role as a railroad engineer.

Art was a circus fan, a train man, a family man ... and at some point information surfaced that he had some affiliation with an unidentified circus in the past. However, no further details have been identified.



When Buster received the first communication from Art, it included the details of what the organization planned to accomplish plus a letter requesting more information specifically about me as Buster had only sent in his own information. Based on a paragraph included in Art's response to our joining, it appeared to us that Charlie and Art had not anticipated a woman being a member:

"Congratulations on becoming charter members #17 and #18 in Windjammers Unlimited and by setting a new trend! — No Ladies Aux. — No! Each gal who wants to join will be equal to any other member and will have the same rights as anyone else. Again, Congratulations on becoming the first man and wife to join Windjammers Unlimited".

Further communication between Art and Buster included exchanging photos, tapes and information regarding specific shows that were playing in the Midwest at that time plus the various circus performers' locations and activities. Art was a good friend of ours and we loved his enthusiasm for the circus and its music. His role at the beginning of Windjammers and throughout the early years was immensely valuable. Thus, at the January 2018 Board meeting, the Hall of Fame committee, comprised of Charles Conrad (chair), Andy Glover, and myself, nominated Arthur Stensvad to be honored for his service to our Windjammers Unlimited with a new category of award: The Meritorious Service Award. Our nomination of Art as the first to receive this recognition was accepted by the WJU Board.

In Fanfare Volume 1, Issue No. 1, Charles H. Bennett, Jr. was listed as Editor, and Art Stensvad as Arranger.

That first Fanfare issue featured three articles, the first being on the 1971 Hoxie Bros. Circus and its musical program under the direction of King Charles Weathersby. That program included a rare inclusion of a Sousa march, in this case *The Thunderer* for use with the Liberty Horses. The second article was by Robert Mayer on Early Circus Music in America, and the third was about the band for the Delavan Circus Historic Society's 2nd Annual Circus Festival, with Merle Evans conducting.

Ad placed by a 24-year-old Art Stensvad in the *Lincoln Journal Star* on April 29, 1943:

WANTED—Negatives and photographs of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Also other circus and wild west shows. Will pay cash. Write at once. Arthur Stensvad Box 634, North Platte, Neb.

Arthur Edward Stensvad was born in North Platte, Lincoln, Nebraska on February 18, 1919. His parents were Edward Anund Stensvad (1882-1949) and Agnes Frances Stenzel (1888-1963). He had two siblings, John R (1918-1997) and Frances A (1921-1980). Art married Marie Jeanne Bullis (1921-2004) who was known as Betty. They had two children. Art died on July 18, 1998 at age 79 and is buried in North Platte.