

OUT OF THE PAST

by Rod Everhart, WJU #1351



Ellis Wilbur Goe was born March 25, 1900 in Springfield, OH. His parents were Frank Wilbur Goe and Ida May Ellis. Known as "Skinny", Ellis Goe became a band leader of note with a number of smaller circus venues and, according to the *Kokomo Tribune* in 1953,

was "known throughout the circus world as a musician and conductor of rare ability."

When Goe turned 18, WWI was underway and he was drafted October 11, 1918. He barely finished initial training in the Students' Army Training Corps at Wittenberg College in Springfield, OH, when he was honorably discharged on December 20, 1918, following the end of the war the month before. He soon landed in Beaumont, TX and was married to Alma A. Johnson (born 1905). The local directory listed him as working for Mag Pet Co. and being a musician. They had a son on January 10, 1925, who they named Ellis Wilbur Goe, Jr. The marriage failed, however, and on November 12, 1929, Goe married Inez N. Ford (born 1911) in Jefferson Texas, and they had a child, Thomas Jack Goe, March 3, 1931. By 1940, Goe was a resident of Lexington, KY and married to Ethel Wood (born 1893). Being a circus musician must be hard on marriages, as on May 4, 1955, he married for the fourth and final time: Jacklan M. (Laseuer) Tolliver (born 1911), a rings, traps and aerial display performer with Rogers Brothers Circus. They made Sarasota, FL their home base, where the local directories listed him as Shrine Circus Band Leader.

In reporting on the anticipated arrival of the Circus to Kokomo in June 1953, the *Tribune* newspaper reported: "With the Rogers Brothers Circus as the head of its band will be one of the veterans of the circus music fraternity. Ellis "Skinny" Goe started his career as a high school boy in West Liberty, Ohio. Always ambitious to get into show business, he joined the Gentry Brothers Dog and Pony Circus at the age of 15, later graduated to the old John Robinson Circus and still later was with the Hagenbeck-Wallace, Al G. Barnes, Christy Brothers, and Cole Brothers circuses as featured soloist. He also spent several Seasons with the famous Kilties Band of Canada. The Rogers Brothers Circus Band will be heard in half hour concerts ranging, from Beethoven, Bach, Strauss, Mozart and other noted composers down to present day jazzology, prior to the afternoon and evening performances."

Apparently, Goe's first bandmaster position occurred in 1945 with the Mills Bros. Circus. Also not listed by the *Tribune* was Goe's experiences 1946 through 1948, as the bandmaster for Bailey Bro's Circus. As that circus entered the 1947 Season, *The Billboard* reported: "Everything is going along okay. A new Chevrolet two-ton truck was delivered recently. All seats are practically completed and the semi trailers have their first coat of red and white paint. Bad Eye has all prop equipment ready with new ring curbs and statue tables. Ellis (Skinny) Goe, the band master, reports his boys are all set." For 1949, Skinny Goe was leading the Robbins Bros. band, and then in 1952 and 1953, he was apparently affiliated with both the Rogers Bros. Circus and the Diano Bros. Circus.

In 1954, Rogers Bros. had a spin-off enterprise called the Bill Bailey Minstrels. When it opened in January that year playing one night stands under canvas, the 12-piece band was under the direction of Goe. *Billboard* reported: "The show would make daily street parades that would include a band concert on the lot prior to each night's performance. The lot concert will be followed by a high act as a free attraction. Admission will be \$1, plus 50 cents for reserved seats. Top will have about 1,500 chairs and 1,000 blues." Later that year, however, Goe signed on with the Gil G. Gray Circus where he stayed on through 1961.

During the summer of 1960, the Gil G. Gray Circus toured Canada, with Goe as its musical director. *The Billboard* (July 4, 1960) reported the following from Regina, Saskatchewan: "Heavy rain cut short the fourth performance of a two-day Gil G. Gray Circus date here Saturday (June 25, 1960) and gave performers an earlier-than-planned get-away for a Sunday opening in Glasgow, Mont. Favored with excellent weather Friday, the unit played to an overflow matinee, with a full house of about 12,000 at night. Saturday's matinee was in the neighborhood of 10,000 and the night show drew near 8,000. Concessionaires were hard hit Friday evening when an explosion in the power house kayoed the city for three hours. The Show stalled for half an hour and then went on without sound system or lights, but daylight saving time helped. Popcorn, floss, hot dogs, etc. were nil, however." No doubt, however, the band played on throughout!

Ellis Wilbur Goe died February 27, 1973 in Sarasota, FL.



1947 Bailey Bro's Circus Band, Ellis "Skinny" Goe, bandmaster
 Photo courtesy of Buckles Blog, Scan 10144 posted April 19, 2017

BARNHOUSE LETTER RE: Neel's Fashion Plate March (See page 14)

Mr. W. P. English,
 Alais, France.

4/10/02

Dear Sir:-

Your favor of March 25th duly received and contents noted. In regard to the time when your march will be out would say I can not always state definitely just when I can have a piece done but will do it as soon as I can and think I can have it ready by June let and will do it sooner if possible. I am afraid now that it can not be put on a march size sheet, especially the Clarinets and Bassoon part. My staff cutter for marches is intended for 8 and 9 staves and your march will run 10 to 11 staves. When you get any more marches out it would be well to remember that a medium length sells as well as the long ones and in many cases the sale is much better. I could get the clarinet parts out on two pages but don't like to do that if I can avoid it as it adds expense and is unhandy to play from on the march. In regard to the title I will use March, "NEEL'S FASHION PLATE"

If you have any photos of yourself please send me one and will have a cut made when I advertise the march. I am partial to these cuts in my advertising and think they do good.

Yours truly,

C. L. Barnhouse