

Tribute to John C. Heed (1862-1908)

By Loren D. Geiger (1946-2009), WJU #12

Edited & reprinted from Geiger's **Boombah Herald**, Easter 1974, (Vol 1, No. 2)

Though the great march "*In Storm and Sunshine*" (1905; Fillmore Bros.) has long been associated with the circus big top, its skillful composer, John Clifford Heed, as is presently known, had no actual show experience. Heed's marches are firmly rooted in the circus band repertoire, nonetheless.

John "Johnny" Heed was born on April 23, 1862. He reportedly showed considerable aptitude for music at an early age. From his birth in Hackettstown, NJ, throughout a busy life, he evidently suffered from a nervous condition. He was described as a "bundle of nerves."



J.C. Heed won first prize in the **Metronome Magazine's** music contest with his "**Metronome Prize**" march, and second prize in the **New York Clipper Magazine's** music contest by composing his "**Clipper March.**" Heed gained the appellation of "The March Wizard" during the era when John Philip Sousa had risen to the heights of "The March King."

Perhaps the greatest tribute to John C. Heed's musical mastery was written by Will Blythe, of Newark, when he wrote, "Heed's marches are of a spirit to lift the weary feet of marching hosts that they fail not with fatigue and spur them on to victory."

He was known for his "acute sense of rhythm accompanied by an equally sensitive faculty for tune, or pitch." He became noted for his skill on the cornet. At seventeen, Heed was in Providence, RI, where he succeeded A.D. Harlow as the director of George Herrick's Band. He then moved to Worcester, MA, where he married Mary A. Portal on July 28, 1886. After living there 7 years, they moved back to New Jersey, settling in Newark.

John C. Heed was featured as a cornet virtuoso soloist with Voss's First Regiment Band. The outstanding ensemble was described in the press as "the crack band of New Jersey." However, his nervous condition and general state declined, thereafter shortening his solo career, as well as his band directing work. He finally gave up cornet playing and conducting to devote his time to composition.

Such words do not fall short of the very similar tribute which Deems Taylor later paid to the spirit of John Philip Sousa.

Heed was still writing marches even in his hospital bed before he died. His last composition was "**American Victory March,**" which he finished in the City Hospital of Newark, NJ, shortly before his death on February 12, 1908. He reportedly died of tuberculosis, which caused so many tragic deaths, including that of another great band composer, Russell Alexander.

John C. Heed's marches are legion in number, and all apparently bear the spirit and lifting nature for which he was renowned.

John C. Heed, who has been known for a long time as "The March Wizard," has just died at Hackettstown, N. J. He composed more than 100 marches that became popular, and at his funeral a band of 35 musicians played selections from these march compositions.

Heed's best known works include the marches *In Storm and Sunshine*, *Regimental Pride*, *Metronome Prize*, *Clipper*, *The Rouser*, and *General Miles*. He also composed polkas, waltzes, orchestral works, and pieces for cornet and piano. His original cornet along with various photographs may be seen at the Hackettstown Historical Society Museum, where the cornet is on loan from Mr. Heed's family.

Solo B♭ Cornet 1030

In Storm and Sunshine March. J. C. Heed.



Copyright, 1905, by The Fillmore Bros., Co. Cincinnati, O.