

OUT OF THE PAST - William E. Strassner

by Rod Everhart, WJU #1351

Recent WJU Convention attendee Priscilla “Bish” Wolf (WJU #1834, flute/piccolo) shared some interesting information about her Great-Uncle and his connection with Karl L. King. Her “Uncle Will” lived in Canton, OH and “tutored” a young Karl King on cornet and euphonium.



Bish remembers her Great-Uncle with fondness for several reasons. As a young person she wanted a flute. But this was during WWII and musical instruments were not readily available. Her Great-Uncle Will somehow obtained a new Arnold flute and sent it to her as a Christmas gift. It was her only gift that Christmas. She was thrilled. She used that instrument until well after she was married. In the 1950's, her family traveled on vacation from their home in Lebanon, PA to Canton, OH, to spend time with the Strassner's. Bish still remembers his home studio, his singing talent, and the beautiful lighted paintings on the walls of his home.

William E. Strassner (1874-1958) was a talented conductor, instrumentalist, and vocalist. He was one of the original 18 members of the Thayer Military Band, named in honor of trombonist H. Clark Thayer. Strassner then directed the Thayer Military Band for 55 years. After his retirement he remained as director emeritus and treasurer of that organization. Members of his band played at Governor McKinley's inauguration in Columbus, OH, and for the former president's funeral procession in 1901. Years later, in 1968, the military band merged with the American Legion Band and the Nazir Grotto Band to form what is now known as the Canton Concert Band.

Strassner was also Supervisor of music for the Canton public school system, and thus, conductor of the Canton High School's orchestra and its chorus. In addition, he was director of Trinity Lutheran Choir and the Masonic Male Chorus. Strassner played baritone, a factor that influenced a young Karl King.

The King family moved to Canton, OH in 1902 when Karl was eleven. He used the money he earned from being a newspaper carrier to purchase his first musical instrument -- a cornet. Karl's abilities quickly attracted the attention of Strassner, who invited the young trumpeter to join the Thayer Military Band. Since he was paid, it became King's first professional position. The Thayer Military Band was originally “just” a boy's band, but its musical talent quickly evolved to compete fully with Canton's adult bands. Under Strassner's guidance, Karl was encouraged to switch to

euphonium. Strassner then provided instruction on that instrument.



Karl L. King in his Thayer Military Band uniform

In 1909, Karl King composed and published three marches. His first was *March T.M.B.*, dedicated to the Thayer Military Band. Next was the march “*Greater Canton*”, dedicated to “W. E. Strassner, Bandmaster, Canton, Ohio”. The third was *Canton Aero Club March*, dedicated to John A. Sherrick and the Canton Ohio Aero Club. The marches were published by Strassner. A year later, at the age of 19, King left Canton to join the Robinson Famous Circus, playing euphonium under conductor Woodring Van Anda (“Woody Van”). King's career blossomed and in 1917, he became bandmaster for the Barnum & Bailey Circus. When Ringling combined the Ringling Bros. Circus with its Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1919 to form Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus as truly “The Greatest Show on Earth”, King declined the opportunity and chose to retire from life on the road.

After a brief return to Canton to direct a local band, King and his wife moved to Fort Dodge, IA where he continued as a prolific composer of band music and director of the Fort Dodge Municipal Band. But looking back in time, he appreciated the foundation and career start he got from Bish Wolf's Great-Uncle Will.