

American brass bands engaged with travelling shows and circuses

*An interim extract from “Brass Bands of the World”,
which is to be followed by “Brass Bands of the USA”*

Gavin Holman, July 2019 - <https://gavinholman.academia.edu/research>



Circus band at St Petersburg, Florida

AM EXP Shows Band - A circus band active in the 1910s

Atwood's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1872, performing with Mike Lipman's Queen City Circus, Animal & Balloon Show

Bamberg's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1868, performing with Gardner & Kenyon's Colossal Philadelphia Circus

Beeler's Cornet Band - Active in 1850. A professional band, led by Professor Beeler, which toured in conjunction with S. Burgess' American Circus

Bergan's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1862, leader E.S. Bergan, performing with Thayer, Noyes & Company's Great United States Circus

Blakney's Chicago Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1874, touring with the Great Chicago Zoological Exposition combined with M.V.B. Howell's Oriental Circus, Caravan, Menagerie, Grecian Hippodrome, and Balloon Show

Bleanmenshine's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1868, performing with Thayer, Noyes & Company's Great Circus and Menagerie of Trained Animals

Boos Band (Jackson, Michigan) - Active from the mid-1870s to around 1920. Leader Louis F. Boos, a leading cornet player who had performed with Patrick Gilmore's 22nd Infantry Regiment Band. He then joined a traveling circus band that landed in Jackson in 1876 because of bad weather. The rest of the band moved on, but Boos remained in Jackson. He he toured for a season with the Berger Family. Then in 1878 Boos became leader of the Central City Band in Jackson, renaming it the Boos Band. Members in 1877 included: Henry Teal (drum major), Charles Sautter (bass), Jay Barrett (baritone), John Hanna (solo baritone), George Barnard (bass), Henry Dyer (trombone), Henry Wilkins (trombone), Charles Stark (alto), Frank Gibbs (alto), Addie Wilson (alto), Cy Van Etten (alto), Charles Aniba (cornet), John Weeks (cornet), Lew Hoffman (cornet), Charles White (bass drum), Billy Luce (snare drum), Louis F. Boos (solo cornet and director)

Brand Brothers Brass Band - A professional band, active in 1854, touring with Wesley Barmore's Grand Adriatic Circus

Brill's Concert Band - Active in 1916, associated with Barnum and Bailey's Circus

Britner's Keystone Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1864, performing with the Great National Circus and Model Show (under the control of Mrs Charles Warner, formerly Mrs Dan Rice)

Buckskin Ben's Family Brass Band - Ben Stalker married his wife Mary in the mid-1880s and was inspired to start his Wild West show. Mary picked up a rifle for the first time, and practiced until she became a crack shot. She also agreed to participate in what would become their featured "Human Impalement Act", where she stood stock-still against a wooden backboard while Ben threw knives around her profile. They raised five children (Alice, Jennie, George, Myrtle and Ella), and all became full-fledged sharpshooters and musicians. Each show consisted of six to eight half-hour acts and began with a musical performance by the exceptionally popular Buckskin Ben Family Band in which every family member played an instrument. The band consisted of father Ben (trombone), mother Mary (euphonium), Alice (tuba), Jennie (trombone), Charles Davis (Alice's husband, drums), Myrtle and Ella (alto horns), George (cornet) and Noah Waddell (Ben's trick-rider sidekick, cornet). It appeared for 14 weeks at Coney Island in 1905, and travelled for entire seasons with larger circuses and carnivals throughout the East, Midwest, Canada, and Mexico. In July 1904, in Penn Park, York, Pennsylvania, the Layton Carnival Company show opened. One of the acts was Buckskin Ben's Wild West Show, which was a family of 11 typical westerners, all of whom were accomplished musicians and played in the family band in addition to their more tradition "wild west" skills of bronco riding, sharp-shooting, throwing knives and amusing acts with their dogs and ponies. By May 1907 the family had added lassoing and a monkey to the act and was giving performances at the Riverside Amusement Park in Indianapolis, Indiana. When not on tour, the Stalker family and their show resided in Cambridge, Indiana. The show, renamed Buckskin Ben's Wild West Dog and Pony Show, continued in operation until 1929 when Ben retired at the age of 86

Buffalo Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1865 to 1868, leader Professor Emil Wahle, performing with Lake's Hippoolympiad & Mammoth Circus

Canham's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1867 to 1868, leader Thomas Canham, performing with John Robinson Combination Circus & Menagerie

Choate's Philadelphia Brass Band - A professional band, active in 1853, touring with Spalding & Rogers' North American Colossal Dramatic Equestrian Circus

Coosaw Island Band - Active in 1927, associated with Spark's Circus

Douglass' Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1868, performing with Bryan's Caravan & Circus

Eckhart's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1866, performing with Dan Castello's Great Show. In 1868 it toured with Forepaugh's Grand Menagerie and Gigantic Circus

Feagans' Family Band (Petersburg, Illinois) - Active in 1911. Members were: father Joseph Rufus Feagans (cornet), mother Emma Kate Feagans (drums), Flora Feagans Kern (tuba), Flossie Feagans (trombone), Fern Feagans (alto horn), Fredona Feagans (alto horn), Edna Feagans (drums and traps), H. Kern (cornet), L. Feagans (clarinet), Frank Feagans (baritone), Rex Feagans (alto horn). In 1911 the band performed at the following shows: Cosmopolitan Carnival Company, Bulger and Cheney Shows, Glacier Lyceum Bureau, Lakeside Ohio Park, Nixon Brothers Carnival Company, Kemp Sisters' Wild West Show, Riggs Amusement Company, Gay's Dog and Pony Show, Robison's Shows, Gollmar Brothers Shows, Great Carver Shows, Texas Bud's Wild West Show, Buckskin Ben's Wild West Show.

Fisher's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1869, performing with DeHaven's Combination of Circus and Animals

Frank's Choice N.Y. Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1869, leader Tony Frank, performing with James L. Thayer's Zoolohippozonomadon: Circus and Pantheon - Menagerie of Trained Animals. In 1872 it toured with Adam Forepaugh's Celebrated Menagerie, Museum & Aviary, Aquarium, Caravan & Zoological & Equestrian Aggregation

Gordon Silver Cornet Band (North Platte, Nebraska) - Founded in 1883, conductor Nicholas Klein. Still active in 1896. Its uniforms were provided, at a cost of \$1,000, by Buffalo Bill - consisting of white broadcloth with gold braid, boots, gloves and helmet. The band subsequently toured with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show

Hart's Girl Band (Hicksville, Ohio) - O.V. Hart gathered five of his female music students together in 1915. As the band added more instruments and musicians, its reputation for excellence spread to surrounding counties. With World War I depleting the ranks of the Boys' Band, the All-Girl Band aptly filled the void. Successful street concerts led to requests to ballyhoo area fairs, because Hart's Girl Band always drew a crowd. 1918 marked their first annual tour. By 1921, twenty-four band members were making yearly tours into different regions of the United States, eventually traveling in a special B & O coach with the band's name on the side. Musicians earned \$40 a week beyond expenses, and held membership in the American Federation of Musicians. Sometimes billed as the Scottish Lassies or the Ohio All Girl Band, they were advertised as being the country's first (and some say only) traveling professional all girl band. During their heyday in the 1920's, Hart's girls crisscrossed America and Canada's Maritime Provinces. Their venues included state fairs, conventions, Vaudeville theatres, and Murphy's Circus, where they accompanied the acts.

- Helm's National Brass Band** - A professional band, with 12 players, active in 1856, touring with Levi J. North's National Circus
- Herman Ludwig's Cornet Band** - A professional band active in 1857 to 1868. Performed with the Van Amburgh & Company Menagerie and Circus in Indiana in 1857; the Metropolitan Circus (proprietors M.J. Robinson & Deery) in 1864; Howe's Great New York Circus in 1868
- Hetheby's New York Cornet Band** - A professional band active in 1855, performing with Ballard, Bailey & Company's French Circus
- Hetherby's Brass Band** - A professional band active in 1852, leader W. Hetherby, touring with Rivers & Derious's Grecian Arena Circus
- Holloway Brothers Band** (Clem, Georgia) - Active in 1910. The eight Holloway brothers, sons of J.J. Holloway, toured the USA and Canada. In 1910 they were performing with the John Robinson Circus. They included Joseph Oscar (leader - b. 1880), , Claude Robert (b. 1888), Boyd Watson (b. 1893), Arthur Daniel (b. 1876), John Thomas (b. 1878), William Jasper (b. 1882), Lon Alton (b. 1886), Homer Weaver (b. 1891), and Denver Ralph (b.1897)
- Hoon Family Brass Band** (Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania) - Consisted of James Hoon (b. 1847), daughters Grace Merlynn (b. 1870) and Leola Belle (b. 1873), and son Albert James "Al" (b. 1871) – their mother was Elizabeth Rosalind (née Sterling, b. 1850) who was not part of the band. Their first appearance was when Pat Harris opened his museum on Sixth Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They were engaged for a week, but made such a hit that they were retained for three months. They gave a grand concert in White Hall, New Castle, Pennsylvania in May 1883. In March 1884 it appeared at the Hagar, Campbell & Co.'s Dime Museum, 9th and Arch Streets, Philadelphia – sharing the bill with Eli Bowen "the legless man", Patrick O'Brien, "the Irish Goliath and his blushing quarter-ton bride", the "strangely spotted Leopard Boy", Miss Amelia Hill "only 12 years old and weighs 320 pounds", Dondretti "the man with the iron jaw" and others. It performed again at the Sixth Street Museum in Pittsburgh in September and October 1884, as a quartette (again with Eli Bowen); and Forepaugh's Dime Museum in Philadelphia in November 1884. They were then engaged at Robinson's Dime Museum, Canal and St Charles Streets, New Orleans, Louisiana, in December 1884; Cole's Dime Museum, 319 Felix Street, St Joseph, Missouri, in February 1885 (for four weeks) – sharing the bill with Major Littlefinger and Wife, the Wild Girl, and Carter the Thaumaturgist. In addition to their contracted shows they performed one-off concerts, e.g. at the Masked Ball of the Ladies of the Jewish Congregation, at McLaughlin's Hall, St Joseph, on 2 March 1885. Moved on to St Louis, Missouri in April 1885, performing at Gregory's Dime Museum, when the band was seven in number (sharing the bill this time with the Congress of Fat Women, "over 25 of the largest women in the country being exhibited". Thence to Stanhope & Epstein's New Dime Museum, Randolph Street, Chicago, Illinois, in June and July 1885 (with the Fire King, or Human Salamander, the Alligator Queen, Josie the fat girls and Hager's waxworks – which included Victor Hugo and Gladstone). The band returned to Robinson's Dime Museum in New Orleans in November and December 1885 (with P.T. Barnum's Zulus, Little Flora, "the child snake charmer", and Lizzie Sturgeon – "who sews, plays the piano, paints, writes and embroiders with her feet"). Further engagements were Stanhope & Epstein's, Chicago, June & July 1886; Sackett & Wiggins' Mammoth Dime Museum, 94 East Seventh Street, Saint Paul, Minnesota, in October and

November 1886; Wonderland, Detroit, Michigan, in February to April 1887; with Beckett's Circus at the Princess Rink, Detroit, in April 1887; Wonderland, Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington D.C., in December 1887. The family toured for ten years overall until the girls finally married, James Hoon setting up a jewellery business in New York, and his son Al taking to the stage with song illustrations and a moving picture machine

Kane's Metropolitan Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1868, performing with the De Mott & Ward's United Circus and Menagerie

Kauffman's Centennial Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1874, leader Charles Kauffman, touring with James A. Bailey's Great International Menagerie, Museum, Aquarium, Grecian Circus, and Grand Roman Hippodrome

Kendall's Brass Band - A professional band, active in 1854, 1855, leader Ned Kendall, touring with Spalding & Rogers' North American Circus & Floating Palace Co.

Koppel's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1872, performing with Haight & Co.'s Circus, Museum, Menagerie & Balloon

Kopp's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1867. Performed with the Van Amburgh & Company Mammoth Menagerie and Egyption Caravan. In 1871 it toured with the Great Empire City Circus, Menagerie and Balloon

Lederhaus' Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1872, performing with Older's Museum, Circus & Menagerie

Lehmann Family Brass Band (Mississippi) - Performed as part of Harry Heike's Dime Museum when it visited Vicksburg, Mississippi, in May 1885. The Museum had just arrived from the World's Exposition and also featured Professor Ryland's dog and monkey circus, Thespia the wonderful London \$25,000 half lady illusionist (a living swinging bust), and Mademoiselle Salvina, the feminine Samson

Lemen's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1874, leader F.R. Lemen, touring with Hall's Menagerie & Museum, Cooper's Equestrian Aggregation, & Lemen's Real Roman Hippodrome

London Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1872, leader J.A. Armstrong, performing with Grady's Great American Circus & Grand Giatuitius Mammoth Menagerie

Lutymen's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1868, performing with Lake's Hippoolympiad & Mammoth Circus

Menter's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band, leader Edgar Menter, active in 1869, performing with Dan Rice's Own Circus

Merline's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band, leader Christopher Merline, active in 1872, performing with Noyes' Great Crescent City Circus, Hippodrome & Egyptian Caravan

Mettler's Banda Familia (Gaffney, South Carolina) - It was recognised for many years as the champion family band of the county, in Gaffney, South Carolina. It performed, in its own bandwagon drawn by six beautiful spotted Shetland ponies, at the Lawrenceburg Fall Festival, Indiana, in September 1931. Over the years they travelled from coast to coast, from lakes to gulf, with circuses and shows, culminating with the Bantley All American Show playing at the Cherokee County Fair in Gaffney, in September 1937. Mary Mettler played mellophone, little brother Gene was known as the world's youngest animal trainer. There were five children, including George Mettler

- Mills Concert Band** - Active in the 1900s. Associated with the Walter L. Main Circus
- Ned Brill's Band** - Active in 1911, associated with Barnum and Bailey's Circus
- Neuber's Philadelphia Brass Band** - A professional band active in 1852, touring with Welch's National Circus, Raymond & Co. and Driesbach & Co.'s Menageries United. In 1855 it was touring with Signor Chiarini's Italian Circus
- New Sheridan Cornet Band** (Wyoming) - Founded in 2001. A historical re-enactment band playing the music of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Cowboy Band for their local Buffalo Bill Days activities, and playing music of the 1860s for events at nearby Fort Phil Kearny State Historic Site
- New York Knickerdicker Brass Band** - A professional band active in 1850, leader D.S. Neeve, performing with Welch, Delevan & Nathan's National Circus
- Nicholl's New York Cornet Band** - A professional band active in 1870, leader Adolph Nicholl (or Nichols), performing with James L. Thayer's New Circus. In 1874 it was touring with Maginley & Co.'s Museum, Circus, Menagerie & Trained Animals
- Norris' Silver Cornet Band** - A professional band active in 1873, performing with Montgomery Queen's European Menagerie, Trans-Atlantic Circus, Roman Hippodrome, & Bedouin Arab Troupe
- North Brothers Brass Band** - Active in the 1900s. Associated with the North Brothers' circus (later Ringling's circus)
- Nosher's New York Brass Band** - A professional band, active in 1850, performing with Robinson & Eldred's Grand New York Circus. In 1851 it toured with G.C. Quick & Co.'s Mammoth Menagerie
- Noss Family Band** (New Brighton, Pennsylvania) - Also known as the "Noss Jollities of Musical Comedy". They were a family of eight including the parents, Henry Noss (b. 1837) and Charlotte (later Mary after Charlotte died), the children being Flora (b. 1865), Ferdinand (b. 1866), Charlotte (b. 1868), Frank (b. 1870), May (b. 1872), and Bertha (b. 1877). Their first professional local performance was in Homewood, around 1880, where a circus man from Maine saw them in action one day and offered to manage them on a 16-week tour of Maine. Their career took off from then. They played at the Library Hall in Indiana, Pennsylvania in November 1886; the Ralston Hall, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in February 1887; and the Skating Parlour, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, in March 1887. When the parents dropped out of the act, Ferd, Flora, Lottie, Frank and Mary billed themselves as "The Five Musical Nosses" and made for New York. There they became a vaudeville success. They retired in 1925 with the coming of the "talkies". They toured the entire United States, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico many times over
- Obernier's Brass Band** - A professional band active in 1855, leader William Obernier, touring with the Grand Olympic Arena and American Circus
- Olds' Silver Cornet Band** - A professional band active in 1866, performing with Yankee Robinson's Colossal Moral Exhibition, Menageries and Circuses. In 1867 it was associated with George W. De Haven's Imperial Circus & Grand Mammoth Show
- Orton's Female Cornet Band** - Active in 1867, leader Miss Irene Orton, with 10 ladies. A professional ensemble which toured as part of Orton Brothers' Great American Circus

Otto Horn's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1856, performing with L.B. Lent's New York Circus. Performed with Van Amburgh & Company's Mammoth Menagerie and Great Moral Exhibition in 1862

Parmelee's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1867, performing with W. French's Great Oriental Circus & Egyptian Caravan. In 1871 it was touring with Van Amburgh & Co.'s Mammoth Menagerie

Perry's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1867, performing with Stone Rosston & Murray's Circus. In 1872 was again with the Stone & Murray Circus, with 13 plays

Professor Colson's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1859 and 1860, when it was connected with Mabie's Circus and Menagerie as it toured the USA. In 1866 it was touring with Dan Rice's Mammoth Circus and Menagerie. In 1867 it was associated with Forepaugh's Gigantic Circus and Menagerie

Professor Peter's Mounted Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1864, performing with Robinson & Howe's Champion Circus

Putnam's Brass Band - A professional band active in 1852, leader P.S. Putnam, touring with E.F. & J. Mabie's Grand Olympic Arena & U.S. Circus

Rock Hill Cornet Band (South Carolina) - Founded around 1876, with 12 members made up mostly of Main Street merchants with John Gary Anderson playing the bass drum. It had its own band wagon painted in gold and yellow much like a circus cart. Band members rode on top the wagon which was pulled by either 2 or 4 horses. Still active in 1909

Schippert's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1874, leader Charles J. Schippert, touring with the San Francisco Circus & Collection of Performing Animals

Scott's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1868, performing with the Great European Circus

Seeley's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1862, performing as part of R. Sands Grand Multiserial Combination Circus and Homohippodeal Amphitheater

Sewell's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1869, performing with Hemmings, Cooper & Whitby's Extensive Menagerie & Circus

Sheets Family Brass Band (Columbus, Indiana) - Joseph J. Sheets (b. 1866) created his family band around 1901. He lived in Columbus, Indiana, with his wife Josephine (b. 1867) and children Clara (b. 1889), Alta (b. 1888), Albert (b. 1893), Carl (b. 1894), William (b. 1897), George (b. 1899) and Edward (b. 1902). The original band consisted of himself, his elder four children, and also Gary Davis and Will Gresham. One of their earliest concerts was at City Hall, Columbus, in June 1901. Other engagements included: Hartsville, August 1902; Perry's Grove, August 1903; Clifford, April 1904; Taylorsville, May 1904; carnivals in Madison and Vevay, June 1904; joined the Dixie Carnival Company in Shelbyville for the season from June 1904, providing music for the Sipe Dog & Pony Show; Jefferson County Fair, Madison, July 1905. They obtained new uniforms in 1906 – khaki trimmed with purple. Went into vaudeville in March 1907 at the Orpheum Theater, Columbus. Played with the Vaudeville theatre at the Grand Opera House, Marion, Ohio in May 1907. Went on the road with Buckskin Ben's wild west show during summer 1907. In February 1909 the band returned from a season on a theatrical boat which sailed the Mississippi River to New Orleans. It was still active in 1915

Silloway's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1860, performing with G.K. Goodwin & Company's Royal Menagerie and Great Moral Exhibition. The band was also supported by Jonathan Forbes the "champion trick drummer"

Silver Family Concert Band - Charles Earl "Bert" Silver was born in 1861 into a show business family. In 1904 he started tent shows and had the first motorized circus in the United States, with four touring cars, four trucks and an advance car. Bert and his entire family played in the Silver Family Concert Band as part of the circus, and also gave concerts. In 1916 the circus had to be disbanded because the tents and trucks were confiscated by the U.S. Government for use in World War I. When the circus disbanded the family settled in Greenville, Michigan. His family consisted of wife Ellen Vescelious (b. 1872) and children Martha Frances (b. 1885), Guy Earl (b. 1887), Laura (b. 1889), Pearl (b. 1891), Ruby (b. 1893), Richard (b. 1895) and Kitty (b. 1897)

Sperl's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1870, performing with G.G. Grady's Old Fashioned American Circus. Toured with James E. Cooper's Monster Caravan, Menagerie & Circus in 1872

Steele's New York Brass Band - A professional band, active in 1853, leader F.A. Steele, touring with Herr Driesbach & Co.'s Menagerie Combined With Mabie & Co.'s United States Circus

Stevens Family Brass Band (Pennsylvania) - Active from September 1883, when they were on the bill of Hagar & Campbell's Dime Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, advertised as "the Greatest Musical Marvels of the Age". They continued to perform in and around Philadelphia for the next few years. The band was resident in Reading, Pennsylvania in July 1888, when they took a contract to tour with the Rexford Brothers' Circus for the season

Story's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1869, leader W.D. Story, performing with J.M. French's Great Oriental Circus

Swan's Silver Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1872, leader Thomas Swan, performing with Kleckner & Co.'s Monster Circus, Museum and Menagerie

Tinney's Band - Active in 1911 to 1913. Associated with Howes Great London Circus

Welker's Golden Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1871, performing with Hemmings & Cooper's Grand Consolidated Circus & Menagerie

Wentor's Brass Band - A professional band, active in 1853, leader Almore Wentor, touring with Dan Rice's Great Hippodrome & Menagerie

Willis's New York Brass Band - A professional band, active in 1851, leader R. Willis, performing with Robinson & Eldred's Grand New York Circus

Wither's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1869, performing with G.F. Bailey & Company's Gigantic Caravan Menagerie and Equestrian Combination

Zimmerman's Cornet Band - A professional band active in 1858, performing with Robinson's Grand Combination Circus and Menagerie