

# The Maddern Family Female Brass Band, 1853-1855

*Gavin Holman, 1 August 2022*

Richard Maddern was born in Truro, Cornwall, on 17 January 1799. He married Grace Matthews (b. 1805), of St Just, Cornwall, at Madron in 1823. One report stated that Grace actually eloped with her music master, and was subsequently cast off by her family. The couple moved to London, setting up a shop with Richard also working as a carpenter, at 6 Little Albany Street, Regent's Park; then later moving to Old Warden, Bedfordshire; Palace Row, New Road; Perry Street, Somers Town; and lastly to Tunbridge Wells, by 1831. Richard's brother, William Thomas Maddern (b. 1804), was also involved in their business at various times. In November 1832 their business failed, and the brothers were declared bankrupt.<sup>1</sup>



*Little Albany Street, just to the east of Regent's Park, London, c. 1830*

William went on to open a clothing shop in Tunbridge. In June 1836, Sophia Walters, aged 23, was indicted for stealing a gown, worth 1s., from William's shop. She was convicted and sentenced to three months' hard labour at St. Augustine's Gaol and House of Correction, Canterbury.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, Richard and Grace had started their family, with the birth of Louisa in May 1833, Amelia in 1834, and Mary in 1836. These were followed by Elizabeth, 1838, Richard, 1840, and William, 1842.

In the late 1830's, Richard became the leader of the local band in Tunbridge Wells. Sadly, nothing more is known about this particular musical organisation, though the town, like

<sup>1</sup> South Eastern Gazette, 13 November 1832

<sup>2</sup> South Eastern Gazette, 5 July 1836

several similar spa towns across the country, was well served by musical groups in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to entertain the visitors.<sup>3</sup>



*The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells – where musicians and bands often played*

At the time of the 1841 census, the family living in Brick Kiln Fields, Tunbridge Wells, together with his widowed mother, Elizabeth, and Richard had a shop and was also working as a gardener. Later that year, in August, Richard was accused of receiving stolen goods, a quantity of leather, which had been obtained under false pretences by Samuel Blunden, some of which was found at the shop, and more at their house. Happily, when the case came to court, he was acquitted due to a legal objection. Richard was held in high regard in the town, being of ‘irreproachable character’, and the leader of the town band.<sup>4</sup>

The following year, 1842, saw the death of his mother, Elizabeth, and the family’s emigration to the United States. The reason for this departure was that they thought America was more roomy than England for a family that increased so rapidly. They clearly thought a better life awaited them on the other side of the Atlantic.

The family settled in Buffalo, New York, with the last member of the family, Emily, being born there in 1845. In 1848, Richard had set himself up as a well-borer to the citizens of Buffalo and Erie County, New York, and he had started to train his children in the musical arts.<sup>5</sup>

By 1849 he was well established in the musical life of Buffalo. He was a member of the Buffalo Cornet Band under the leader, W.H. Barnhart, and he was on the committee which

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<sup>3</sup> Holman, Gavin – *Tunbridge Wells: the Corporation Band (1896-1902) and Matthew Marks* - <https://ibewbrass.wordpress.com> – 15 October 2020

<sup>4</sup> South Eastern Gazette, 26 October 1841

<sup>5</sup> Buffalo Daily Republic, 19 July 1848

arranged concerts at the Concert Hall. In August 1851, Richard was presented with a new saxhorn by his friends:

A fine brass tuber saxhorn was presented to Mr. Richard Maddern, of the Buffalo Cornet Band, on Saturday evening last, at the Cottage on Eagle and Pearl streets, kept by Messrs. Boggis & Novere, by some of his friends as a token of esteem and admiration. The presentation was made by Col. G.A. Scroggs in the following appropriate speech: "Mr. Maddern:- I am here for the purpose of presenting to you a token of kindness, procured by a number of your friends, citizens of Buffalo. You have been a long time among us and have earned for yourself a respect of which you may well be proud. I am told you were the person who played on the first bugle manufactured in the United States. You are esteemed for your private worth as a citizen and your superior qualities as a musician. Your friends have procured this instrument as a token of their esteem and hope that you will receive it with the same feeling that prompted its presentation. I need not here remind you that it is the fervent wish of all present that you may live a long time and have abundance of breath to blow it." After a neat reply by Mr. Maddern, the company was entertained by music from the band, led by Mr. Barnhart and a happy evening was spent.<sup>6</sup>

By the beginning of 1853, Richard had moulded his family of young musicians into a band, and his daughters by this time were also accomplished dancers. The four older sisters' first appearance was as part of the corps de ballet in the comedy "*Money*", which was put on at the New Metropolitan Theatre, Buffalo, in early March 1853.<sup>7</sup>

The Maddern Family Female Brass Band, which consisted of the five sisters Louisa (20), Amelia (19), Mary (17), Elizabeth (15), and Emily (7), assisted by their brothers Richard (13) and William (11), and father, Richard, made their first public appearance at the New Metropolitan Theatre, Buffalo, on 4 November 1853, as part of a benefit concert in aid of Mr C.B. Hill.<sup>8</sup>

Elizabeth was the first cornet in the band, and she appeared on stage in a '*high comb and queer pantalettes*'. She was an accomplished arranger, even at this early age, and scored music for the band.

The family gave their own grand concert at the Townsend Hall, Buffalo, on Thursday 8 December 1853. The programme featured the 'most pleasing and popular music of the day', and Julia F. Barton, the celebrated soprano from New York, was their guest artist for the evening.<sup>9</sup> The Townsend Hall was located on the southwest corner of Main and Swan streets, but it was later destroyed by fire in February 1861.

The Maddern family are a hand of young performers, quite unique, whose home is here, and who are just setting forth to try their fortunes as caterers for the public ear. Their chief performance is upon cornets; and when I say that they are a band of eight, all of one family, five sisters and two brothers (the youngest girl seven years old), assisted by their father, "unique" will at once appear the right word by which to characterize them. Of course, they are by no means a Dodworth's band; but you would have to look a great ways to find a family of eight, who, young as are most of them, and girls at that, would make as much music with cornets as did these last evening. As they gain confidence and experience in public, they will of course greatly improve. <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Buffalo Daily Republic, 19 August 1851

<sup>7</sup> Buffalo Daily Republic, 2 March 1853

<sup>8</sup> Buffalo Daily Republic, 4 November 1853

<sup>9</sup> Buffalo Commercial, 1 December 1853

<sup>10</sup> New York Musical Review and Choral Advocate, 9 December 1853

## GRAND CONCERT.

At the request of many citizens, the  
**Maddern Family Female Brass Band,**  
Will give one Grand Concert at TOWNSEND HALL, on  
**Thursday Evening, Dec. 8, 1853.**

On which occasion Miss JULIA F. BARTON, the celebrated Soprano, from New York, has kindly consented to make her first appearance in this city assisted by Mr. HOBSON.

The Cornet Band comprises the following :

Miss Louisa Maddern,

Miss Amelia Maddern,

Miss Mary Maddern,

Miss Elizabeth Maddern,

Miss Emily Maddern, only seven years old,

Master Richard Maddern, Jr., Master William Maddern,  
assisted by their father, Mr. Richard Maddern.

It is believed that this is the only band composed of Ladies in the world, or at least the only one which has appeared before an American public.

The programme will comprise the most pleasing and popular music of the day.

Tickets 25 cents—to be had at the Music and Book Stores, and at the door on the evening of the Concert.

Concert of the Maddern Family - We very much doubt if ever Townsend Hall presented a more crowded and delighted auditory than on the occasion of the first concert by the Maddern Family last evening, Long before the hour for the commencement of the concert every portion of the room was densely packed, and hundreds were obliged to go away without obtaining admission. The execution of the young artists excited the most rapturous applause, and the singing of Miss Barton was much admired. At the conclusion of the performance. loud calls were made for a repetition of the concert, which we understand will take place soon. All in all, it was one of the most successful concerts given in this city the present season.<sup>11</sup>

The concert was such a success that it was repeated on Friday 16 December, again at Townsend Hall, allowing those that were unable to gain admittance for the first concert to attend.

The family took part in another concert, held on Saturday 11 February 1854, at the Metropolitan Theatre, Buffalo, again featuring Julia Barton as a guest, this occasion being a benefit for Miss Maria Barton, which included a farce "*Man and Tiger*" and a comic opera "*John of Paris*".

The Maddern Family Band gave a final concert in Buffalo, on Saturday 17 June 1854, just before they departed for a concert tour of western states, having been engaged by Mr S.C. Thayer for that purpose.<sup>12</sup>

The concert of the Maddern Family, on last Saturday evening, was well attended, and the entertainment was a pleasing one. These performers start forthwith on a western tour, and will doubtless meet with good success. Their concerts will be popular up the Lakes, and we shall be mistaken if they do not prove to be profitable.<sup>13</sup>

The family next appear in concert at Elmira, Ontario, on Saturday 15 July 1854.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Buffalo Commercial, 9 December 1853

<sup>12</sup> Buffalo Commercial, 16 June 1854

<sup>13</sup> Buffalo Commercial, 19 June 1854

<sup>14</sup> Buffalo Daily Republic, 19 July 1854

The last week of October 1854 saw them performing in the theatre at Ingersoll, Ontario:

The Maddern Female Brass Band have favored us during the week with three of their delightful entertainments. On Tuesday and Wednesday evenings it rained heavily; but notwithstanding, the house was well filled on both evenings. At the request of many of the residents of Ingersoll, a third concert was given, which took place on Thursday evening, to the delight of a large audience. The performances of Little Emily, the infant drummer, astonished the audience exceedingly. The musical ability displayed by the leader, Miss Elizabeth Maddern, on the Tenor Sax Horn, met with loud applause. We hope we may be favored with another concert from this talented and highly popular family on their return from the West.<sup>15</sup>

They moved on to Detroit, giving two concerts at the Young Men's Hall, on Thursday and Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> November, consisting of vocal and instrumental music, billed as 'the greatest novelty of the age!'<sup>16</sup>

Moving on to Toledo, Ohio, they again met with success in concert at the theatre, later in November.

The Maddern Female Brass Band are here, and have good houses. Little Emily, who is an excellent performer on the drum, was yesterday elected an Honorary Member of the Toledo Guards, who attended the last evening performance in full uniform.<sup>17</sup>

During December 1854, the band performed for four consecutive weeks in Chicago, Illinois. This was followed by a four-day engagement at the Masonic Hall, Springfield, Illinois, from 24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> January 1855.

The Celebrated  
**MADDERN FAMILY,**  
THE ONLY BRASS BAND COMPOSED OF  
**Females**  
IN THE WORLD,  
ON their way to play an engagement in New Orleans,  
will have the honor of giving FOUR of their Elegant and  
Refined  
**Vocal and Instrumental Entertainments,**  
AT MASONIC HALL,  
On Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday  
Evenings, the 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th, Jan.  
These Entertainments have been greeted with full and  
fashionable assemblages in all the eastern cities; and their  
success in the city of Chicago, where they performed for  
four consecutive weeks, is without precedent in the annals  
of public amusement.  
For particulars see programme. an22

*Illinois Daily Journal, Springfield, 26 January 1855*

<sup>15</sup> Ingersoll Chronicle and General Intelligencer for the County of Oxford, 4 November 1854

<sup>16</sup> Detroit Free Press, 10 November 1854

<sup>17</sup> Buffalo Commercial, 23 November 1854

On their arrival, later in February 1855, at St Louis, Missouri, it was reported that their agent had made off with their money, leaving them 'without a dollar to settle their bills with'. Sadly, this was not an unusual occurrence on the 19<sup>th</sup> century touring circuits, with many acts suffering similar thefts over the years. Thankfully, the citizens of St Louis helped out with concerts arranged for the family's benefit. The family had had plans to travel to New Orleans, but this misfortune may have curtailed their southern tour, as no mention of their appearances in the lower states has been found.

The Maddern Family. This interesting family, which arrived in our city a few days since, and who were advertised to give a series of concerts, have met with a serious misfortune in the absconding of their agents. They have been left in a disagreeable pecuniary condition, and one which appeals to the generosity of our citizens in their behalf, they bearing with them testimonials of regard, and commendation of a most flattering character, from persons of high standing and eminent respectability in the different parts of the east, where they have performed. We have not had the pleasure of hearing them, but they are spoken of, as artists of much merit. We trust from the disagreeable and very annoying position in which they have been thus, placed, that they will not be overlooked by our citizens, and that as strangers in our midst, they will be greeted by a large audience.<sup>18</sup>

Promenade Concert and Ball. The Maddern family, whose embarrassed condition was caused by the absconding of their agents, have, we are pleased to learn, consented at the request of a number of our prominent citizens, to give a grand promenade concert, and ball at Verandah Hall, this evening, and which promises to be a magnificent affair, and surpass anything of the kind in brilliancy, that has ever taken place in our city. Every step has been taken by the gentlemen who have the matter in hand, to carry it out in a most efficient manner. We advise ladies and gentlemen not to fail to be present, as the arrangements are excellent, and we trust the result will be propitious. Tickets have been placed at \$1 for single admissions, and \$1.50 for lady and gentleman.<sup>19</sup>

Following these benefit concerts, it appears that the family decided to stay in the area, at least for a while, moving to Alton, Illinois, where Richard advertised his musical services in the local press.

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**A MUSICAL CARD.**

**Brass, Reed, Martial & Cotillon Bands.**

**M**R. RICHARD MADDERN, father of the Celebrated Maddern Family, Female Brass Band, would respectfully announce to the citizens of Alton and adjoining towns, that being about to take up his residence in this city, he is enabled to furnish Music of any of the above descriptions, for Parties, Balls or Pleasure Excursions. Music arranged for any occasion for Bands, also newly organized Bands, local or at a distance, attended and taught. Notices of the press from all parts of the Union, shown as references.

All communications addressed to, or left with Mr. George Thorp, Auctioneer, Third street, will be immediately attended to.

*Alton Weekly Telegraph, 15 March 1855*

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<sup>18</sup> St Louis Globe-Democrat, 26 February 1855

<sup>19</sup> St Louis Globe-Democrat, 1 March 1855

One of the family's early appearances in Alton was at the Exhibition of the Junior and Sophomore classes at Shurtleff College, on Tuesday 3 April 1855, in Upper Alton.

The Maddern Family enlivened the proceeding by the performance of some very fine music. The Overture, "*Glory be to God on High*," from Haydn, elicited especial commendation, and too much praise cannot be given to the whole of their performance. It was pure, artistic, and perfect in melody and time.<sup>20</sup>

A grand complimentary benefit concert for the family was given by them at Hope's Hall, Alton, on Friday 19 April 1855. Richard Maddern promised an evening of vocal and instrumental music, with a new and varied selection of sacred and secular melodies. Mr J.W. De Frewer, a ballad and scenic vocalist was a guest artist at the concert.

The Maddern Family next appear at the Concert Hall in Keokuk, Iowa, on Tuesday 29 May 1855. Once again, Emily was singled out for praise, described as '*only 8 years of age, considered to be the best drummer, and for execution on the Saxe Horn challenges the world for a child of her age*'. Richard Maddern is also billed as a '*Professor of Music from the Royal Academies of Paris and London*.' However, there is no evidence of these qualifications.<sup>21</sup>

The family spent some time in Michigan, during July 1855, performing at Jackson on Wednesday 11 July, and Detroit on Thursday 19 July.

This was the last appearance of the full Maddern Family Female Brass Band for several years. They appeared to have made Keokuk their home at this point, and the older children started to break away with their own lives and careers.

The last known event with the Maddern Family was a concert at the Athenæum in Keokuk, on Saturday 6 August 1859 when, besides their musical performances, '*they enacted a comedy or two with competent assistants*.'<sup>22</sup>

Louisa Maddern married Sigmund Gates, a stage carpenter from St Louis, in 1855. Amelia, Mary, Elizabeth (Lizzie) and Emily all became actresses. The latter three later joined the St Charles Theatre Company in New Orleans in 1859.<sup>23</sup> Emily later returned to Keokuk in July 1863 to appear at the theatre singing popular songs and accompanying herself on the drum.<sup>24</sup>

Richard junior & William enlisted in the army as musicians in 1863. It is not known which regiment or band they served with, but it would probably have been the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> Iowa Infantry Regiment, each of which had been raised in Keokuk. Formal regimental bands had been abolished by the U.S. Congress in summer 1862, due to their expense. Both men survived the war.



*Two unknown Civil War musicians*

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<sup>20</sup> Alton Weekly Telegraph, 5 April 1855

<sup>21</sup> Daily Gate City, Keokuk, 29 May 1855

<sup>22</sup> Daily Gate City, Keokuk, 6 August 1859

<sup>23</sup> Times Picayune, New Orleans, 18 October 1859

<sup>24</sup> Daily Gate City, Keokuk, 24 July 1863

Richard Maddern junior became a successful composer and band and orchestra leader.

William was a theatrical musician and also led various bands.

Amelia married James Hodges, a stage manager, probably in 1859. Their daughter, Clara Victorine Hodges, also became an actress and performed under the stage name of Clara Everett. Their other daughter, Beatrice Hodges was a companion to Clara through her travels.

Emily married James Nixon, in 1866.

Elizabeth married Thomas Davey, who managed a chain of theatre houses in the south and west, probably in 1864 – their daughter Marie Augusta Davey was born in New Orleans in 1865, and she was acting onstage by the age of three. She went on to become the famous actress 'Minnie Maddern'. Minnie herself made her debut as a star, opening at the Park Theatre in New York as "Chip", in 1882. At that time, she had been three years a wife, having married at the age of fifteen Legrand White, a clever xylophone soloist. They were to divorce in 1888, and she then married her long-term partner, Harrison Fiske.



*Minnie Maddern – the famous actress*

Richard Maddern senior died in October 1861, in St Louis, Missouri. His musical and theatrical legacy living on in his children and grandchildren. His wife, Grace, died much later, in 1878, and was buried with him at Bellefontaine cemetery, St Louis.

### **Further information:**

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- Pascal, Samuel - *A history of musical preparation and performed musical activity in the community of Buffalo during the first half of the 19th century* – PhD thesis, Canisius College, Buffalo, 1950