



# strike up THAT BAND!

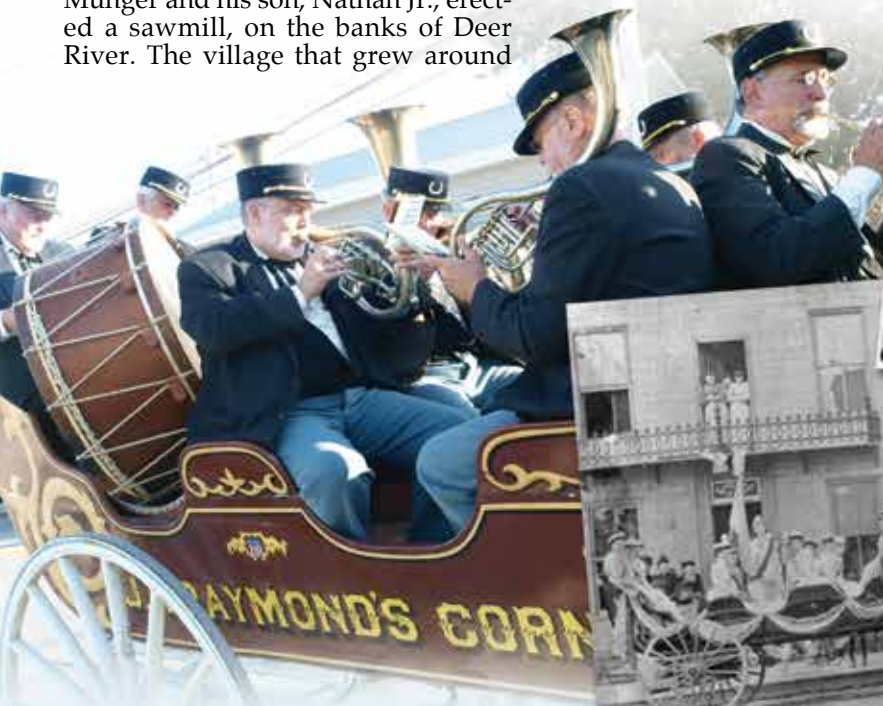
by Lynn Telleen

Copenhagen, New York, celebrated its 150th anniversary in August of 2019. Three days' worth of festivities included historical tours, a craft fair, pony rides, a petting zoo, a dance, fireworks and ice cream and pie socials. The unanimous highlight, however, were performances by a cornet band paying homage to a local musical troupe that had entertained residents in and around the Copenhagen area for nearly a century.

Copenhagen's origins are said to have begun in 1801, when Nathan Munger and his son, Nathan Jr., erected a sawmill, on the banks of Deer River. The village that grew around

them became known as Munger's Mills (in what was already the town of Denmark). According to the narrative, most of the residents of Munger's Mills were Federalists supportive of British rule, but after news arrived of Britain's victorious naval attack on Copenhagen, Denmark, Republicans at a village meeting agreed to take on the name of Copenhagen to shame locals for their support of the Brits. Sixty-eight years later, Copenhagen was incorporated.

During the "Gilded Age," (a term coined by authors Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in reference to the period of rapid economic expansion following the Civil War), if people wanted music, they had to create it themselves. As a result, every city, town, village, military group, police department, fire department, etc. had its own brass band, comprised of area





citizens that provided accompanying tunes to the various outdoor celebrations and activities. Among the more popular of such groups were ensembles involving valved brass wind and percussion instruments, commonly known as "cornet bands." What served this type of band well was that such instruments could be heard over a great distance without amplification. It was the "golden era" for brass bands.

Local cornet bands provided the rallying symphonies for Independence Day celebrations, Decoration Day observances, as well as playing for various political rallies, fairs, picnics and other community gatherings. The musicians for these bands were comprised of farmers, merchants, ministers and school teachers. Many of them also shared the distinction of having served in the Civil War. With few exceptions in the late-1800s, they were mostly all-male entourages.

One such cornet band, assembled March 31, 1843, was known simply as "the Copenhagen Band." In 1869, the same year the village incorporated, then band director John. H. Raymond, a local druggist, renamed it "J.H. Raymond's Cornet Band." Raymond was the second of four bandmasters to have led the ensemble during its 97-year existence.

### ***The Bandwagon***

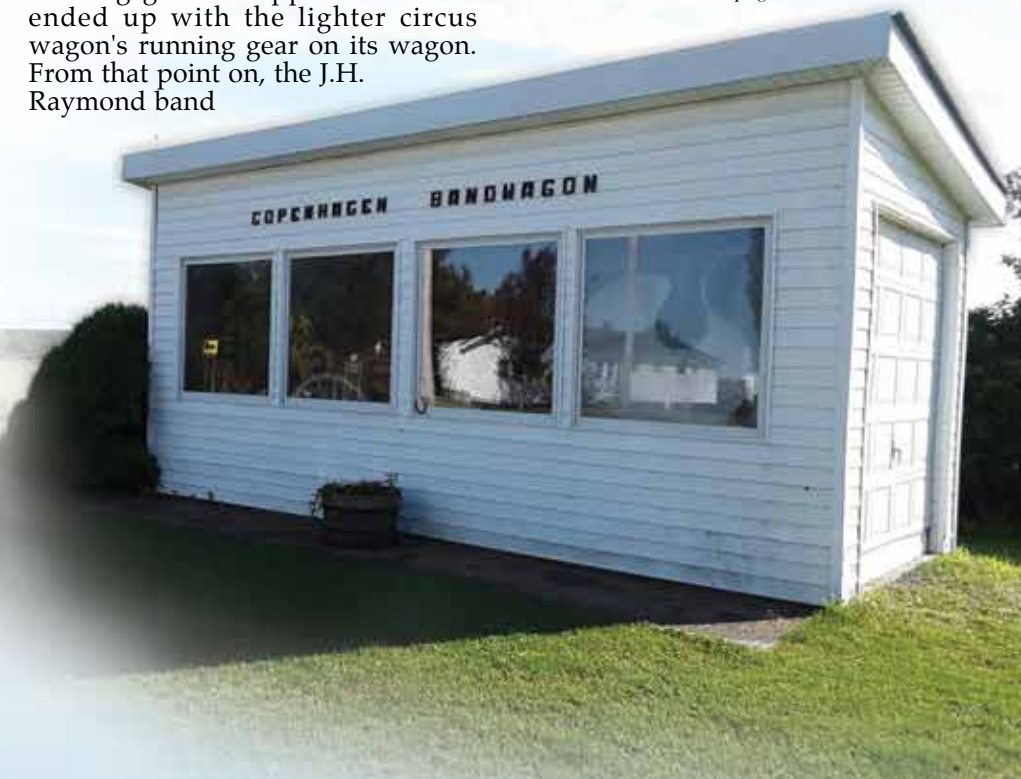
In or about 1847, the Corcoran Brothers Wagon Builders (also of Copenhagen) built a bandwagon for

the Raymond band. The cost of the finished bandwagon was purported to be \$500, which was a significant investment for a country village band of the time. According to the late C. Leon Ryel, fourth director of J.H. Raymond's Cornet Band (and its last member to have survived), the bandwagon and a band chariot made-to-order for the Van Amburgh Circus, the first trained wild animal act of modern times, were both built in the same shop and at the same time. Once completed, the circus bandmaster, however, preferred the heavier wheels found on the Raymond bandwagon, so he had the running gears swapped. The band ended up with the lighter circus wagon's running gear on its wagon. From that point on, the J.H. Raymond band

traveled in and performed on their bandwagon, pulled by four horses owned by Lyman Mitchell, a member of the band who also operated a local livery. It was the only bandwagon in the "north country" and immediately became a point of pride for both the band and the village. Reports indicate that it was repainted in 1897 by Joseph Wolff, a noted circus wagon painter.

After the J.H. Raymond's Cornet Band disbanded in 1940, the Village of Copenhagen assumed ownership of the iconic bandwagon. With no real means of displaying it, however, the wagon was loaned to the

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*Strike Up that Band continued*

Cooperstown Farmers' Museum (100 miles away) in October of 1948—with the stipulation that it would be returned to Copenhagen if and/or when a Lewis County museum should be created. One never was, so in the late-1960s, the bandwagon was moved to the Historical Building at the Lewis County Fairgrounds in Lowville—a much handier 13 miles from Copenhagen.

In 1969, the wagon was once again unveiled for use in a parade celebrating Copenhagen's Centennial. Afterwards, it was stored in the village barn. In 1990, the village raised \$8,000 to hire Neil Trueworthy of Hamilton, New York, to perform a restoration of the wagon. Alice Van Cour, a resident business owner, then donated funds needed to build a custom garage to

house the vehicle on village land in Copenhagen, where it has remained ever since.

Randy Nicol, a contractor and lifelong resident of Copenhagen, has become the bandwagon's caretaker and it's official teamster.

Using his Belgian geldings, he's pulled the bandwagon in the village Christmas parade for the past

22 years. Himself a hitch wagon builder and restorer, Nicol is a regular advertiser in *The Draft Horse Journal*. With the help of his son and granddaughter, he's been exhibiting a four-up since 1994.

### ***The Horn Collector***

Eric Totman is a successful gymnastics coach from Stockton, California. He's coached over 20 male gymnasts that have been on USA Gymnastics National Teams. He's also a cornet player in San Francisco's Fort Point Garrison Brass Band and the founder of the American Historical Brass Band Society.

Any reference to him as an "enthusiast" of the Golden Era of brass bands or a "fanatic" of antique brass instruments is a deafening understatement. Totman's interest in historical horns began when he was in high school, after which it flourished, expanded and took on a life of its own. Widely known today as "the horn collector," he buys, restores, sells and trades antique and vintage brasswind instruments. Totman has also been involved in several historical performances, including a Civil War band reenactment on HBO's "Family Tree" mini-series. His crowning achievement, however, has been amassing the largest personal collection in the world of rare Schrieber horns.

Louis Schrieber (1827-1910) immigrated from Germany in the 1850s and became a trumpet player for New York's Metropolitan Opera House and the Philharmonic Society of Brooklyn. He also made instruments from 1866 until he went bankrupt in 1869. The elaborate teardrop design of his instruments set them apart from others. "It's an over the shoulder instrument, but the bell curves upward. I've only documented 33 Schrieber instruments (only 36 are known to exist) and I've got six in my collection," Totman said in an interview on *The Early American Brass Band Podcast*. The Ford Museum, incidentally, owns the largest known collection.



Enamored with Schrieber, Totman has been working on a book documenting the man's accomplishments and his unique and rare instruments. Totman's research led him to Copenhagen's J.H. Raymond's Cornet Band, one of just a few such ensembles that performed on Schrieber instruments, as they had purchased a full set in 1869. Totman even came into possession of historical photos of each individual musician holding their Schrieber instruments taken that same year. Enthralled by the connection, Totman reached out to the Village of Copenhagen, and was elated to learn of their upcoming Sesquicentennial extravaganza ... and that the village owned the original bandwagon used by the cornet group. Recognizing the enormity of the opportunity it presented, he offered to bring his own instruments to New York and organize an authentic re-enactment of the band.

One final link—and quite possibly the most significant—connected Totman to the small village in upstate New York. His illustrious collection of rare musical instruments—consisting of 280 brass horns made from 1830 to 1900—also includes a number of drums. Unlikely as it may seem, a number of years ago he came into possession of the original bass drum of the J.H. Raymond's Cornet Band—complete with the band's name emblazoned on its wooden rim. Two other collectors had owned the drum prior to Totman, who noted that it was unusable when he acquired it—he had it restored at a cost of \$3,000. Even more remarkable, the Raymond bandwagon contains a drum "saddle" into which Totman says the instrument "fits like a glove."

For the celebration, Totman had the bass drum and six of his Schrieber horns FedEx'd out to Copenhagen. His arrival did not go unnoticed. Village Clerk Sue Parker says it wasn't long before everyone in town knew who he was. "He spent the weekend visiting in our village and going out of his way to speak to people," she recalled. "He was so polite, and people were in awe of him. Throughout the day, [his reenactment band] played several concerts at our bandstand."

The remainder of the band that Totman assembled consisted of members of the Excelsior Cornet Band, a Civil War re-enactment band from Syracuse, New York. This outfit, the

state's only authentic Civil War brass band, is led by Jeff Stockham, a good friend of Totman's who played his own Schrieber cornet for the occasion. Very much like-minded, Stockham appeared as a musician in Steven Spielberg's movie *Lincoln*.

To complete the package, Totman also provided period-appropriate costumes for the band. Perhaps the least authentic aspect of the gig were the horses themselves ... but nobody seemed to complain, least of all Randy Nicol, who says the reenactment was an experience on a different level.

Once the band was loaded on the wagon, the first stop for the entourage was the local cemetery where John H. Raymond is buried. Nicol drove his team right up to Raymond's headstone, where the band played "Taps" as a graveside tribute. The band continued to play as Nicol then drove the outfit around the village, eventually arriving at the start of the parade.

During the parade itself, Nicol stopped periodically to allow the band to play for people gathered along the route. He says they played a number of songs and the sound was "so good, it was unbelievable." The band members themselves were equally amazed, he added, "because they had never had an experience like this or done a re-enactment with so much authenticity. I've had horses for 34 years and this was the best thing I've ever done with them. It was the history of it, knowing he [band originator J.H. Raymond] was doing the same thing we were in his day. It was just incredible."

Sue Parker concurred, "When [the] band came down the street at the end of the parade, I cannot tell you the emotions that I observed looking around the crowd. It was seriously the biggest thing that has happened in this village that I can remember. People were proud of their village and its heritage."

Neither was the significance of the experience lost on its facilitator. "It's fun to do re-enactments," notes Eric Totman, "but to get *this* specific, re-enacting this band, with their original drum, on their bandwagon, all with Schrieber instruments ..."

Speaking of the drum, the day before Totman was scheduled to fly home, he was preparing to ship his instruments via FedEx. Nicol recalls, "I just thought it was crazy for him to ship the drum back to California,

so I asked what he wanted for it. He said \$3,000. Since village bureaucracies don't move that fast, I just wrote him a check for it." (The village later raised the funds to reimburse him.)

Returned to its native home, the drum will be stored in the village's municipal climate-controlled office, in a special case built by Nicol, to preserve it for future generations to enjoy.

### **FINAL BOW**

Until that day in August 2019, a Schrieber instrument band hadn't performed on a bandwagon in at least 140 years. In so many ways, John H. Raymond, who passed away April 19, 1912, would be honored to know the efforts made to re-enact his ensemble. When asked if there were any plans to bring this band back together, Nicol said, "No, but I've offered!" If or when it does occur, without question it will involve Eric Totman, as he is very likely, as anniversary organizers now agree, the only person in the world that could have pulled it off.

"Everyone still talks about that weekend and about this stranger who appeared out of nowhere," states Sue Parker. "We are indebted to him." 🙏