

#### 4. BRASS, PERCUSSION, FRETTED AND MISCELLANEOUS INSTRUMENT MANUFACTURERS

##### a. *Some Important Nineteenth Century Manufacturers*

Boston was perhaps preeminent about fifty odd years ago in connection with the manufacture of brass instruments. The reason for this was undoubtedly the fact that the first *brass* band formed in this country was organized in Boston in 1835. This subsequently led to Boston's becoming a centre of brass bands. This first band was the Boston Brass Band<sup>1</sup> with Edward Kendall (1808-1861), called "The King of the E-flat Bugle," as leader. He was succeeded by Joseph Green. Later Eben Flagg was leader.

Before the advent of the Boston Brass Band there was a Boston Band. A contributor to the *Boston Musical Gazette* in 1838 wrote of his great thrill as a boy when he first heard the clarinet, French horn and bassoon played by this group at a time when the bass-drum, bugle and octave clarinet were not introduced into the field in this country.<sup>2</sup> There were only four performers for this military muster, the fourth playing the hautboy.

Three notable inventions in Europe of brass instruments preceded the formation of the Boston Brass Band. The first of these was the invention in 1790 by M. Regibo of the bass horn, the first bass instrument made of brass. The bass horn played in the Band in 1835 by James Hill had three finger-holes for each hand and several extra keys. The next notable instrument was the keyed bugle invented by Joseph Halliday, bandmaster of Cavan Militia in 1810. This had five keys and was called the Kent-horn in compliment to Field Marshall, the Duke of Kent. It was used to a great extent as a coach horn. Keyed chromatic instruments then became popular rapidly and greatly changed military music and brass bands. "The principle of the keys was adopted by bass instruments as well. These early bugles were of copper, but the metal was so soft that finally it was discarded for brass, as the instruments were thicker and heavier than practicable. Keyed bugles were produced in A-flat,

<sup>1</sup> For an interesting picture and description of this band in 1851 see *Gleason's Pictorial*, Boston, Vol. 1 No. 12, September 20, 1851, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> *Boston Musical Gazette*, "The Boston Band," Vol. 1 No. 7, July 25, 1838, p. 52.

F, E-flat, D, C, and B-flat.”<sup>3</sup> The third invention was that of the ophicleide in 1817 by Halary, a professor of music and an instrument maker at Paris. It was an enlarged key bugle, the first complete instrument with ten to twelve keys, made as an improvement on the bass horn and serpent and predecessor of the tuba. James K. Kendall was a well known player of this instrument. It is interesting to note that the first maker in London of this instrument was George Astor, elder brother of John Jacob Astor. The double bass or monster ophicleide in F and E-flat, a fifth below the bass ophicleide is another kind of ophicleide. Both an ophicleide alto in F and a second alto in E-flat were used in the Boston Brass Band. Beside these changes pistons were introduced into trombones in 1818.<sup>4</sup>

For James A. Bazin’s cornet with a rotary disk made in 1824 and Nathan Adams’ invention of the rotary valve before 1825, applied in his “Permutation Trumpet,” see page 302. Apparently both devices made possible the playing of a diatonic scale.

By the decade 1860 to 1870 there were other fine bands, namely—Germania, Boston Brigade,<sup>5</sup> Bond’s, Hall’s Boston Brass and Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore’s famous band. Mr. Gilmore’s band traveled all over the country giving concerts, and he conducted festivals for years. The climax of his career was the Great National Peace Jubilee held in Boston in 1869, to which President Grant and his cabinet, governors, army and navy officers and citizens from all over the United States came to hear the chorus of 10,000 voices and an orchestra of 1,000 players. A later jubilee held in 1872 was not so successful because a chorus of 20,000 voices and an orchestra of 2,000 were too unwieldy. A little later there were a number of other bands, Boston Cornet, Suffolk, L’Africain’s, Carter’s, Edmands,’ Metropolitan, American, Boston Cadet, and Boardman’s.<sup>6</sup>

In such a brass band centre the manufacture of brass instruments naturally developed. Several of these leaders were good players and apparently went into the business of making instruments in order to have the kind of instruments they desired to use in their bands. Brass instrument making in Boston dates back at least to

<sup>3</sup> Historical Musical Exhibition Under the Auspices of Chickering & Sons, Horticultural Hall, Boston, January 11th to 26th 1902, Catalogue of, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Formed in 1821 as a reed band and converted later into a brass band.

<sup>6</sup> Information supplied by Thomas M. Carter, leader of Carter’s Band.

1841 when the name of Elbridge G. Wright, who was also a good cornet player,<sup>6</sup> appears in the city directory as a musical instrument maker. From 1842 to about 1860 he had his own brass band instrument manufacturing business. Then he, like the others in this field, changed his affiliations several times as Section D of Appendix IV shows. Among the instruments made by him was a double bass or monster ophicleide, an octave below the alto ophicleide, for Thomas David of Concord, New Hampshire. According to the catalogue of Chickering & Sons' Exhibition held in 1902 it was the only one made in America. Unfortunately it had been lost track of even then. His firm also made a silver E-flat keyed bugle with eleven keys used by Rudolph Hall, second leader of Hall's Boston Brass Band. He like his brother David was a bugle and cornet player.

Another early maker of brass band instruments was J. Lathrop Allen of Boston. He made in 1845 the silver cornet in the unusual key of A for Harvey Dodworth, whose family obtained the Dodworth patent in 1838, an American invention for cornet, first made in pump valve and later in rotary style. This instrument was a gift from the members of his band and was used by him for over forty years while leader of the Dodworth Band of New York. He played this cornet in the Central Park Concerts for over twenty-five years and at ten inaugurations of Presidents of the United States. It is bell over the shoulder, rotary action, with five valves and is the only one known to have been made.<sup>7</sup>

In 1852 Mr. Allen formed the partnership of Allen & Richardson which seems to have been the start of two firms whose names became well known in brass instrument manufacturing, namely—Allen Mfg., succeeded first by Allen & Hall, then Hall & Quinby and finally Quinby Brothers; and B. F. Richardson, followed by Richardson & Bayley, manufacturers of the Bayley Model Cornet used by a famous player of the day, Mathew Arbuckle, and finally Richardson & Lehnert.

David C. Hall, first leader of Hall's Boston Brass Band and a partner in Allen & Hall, was born at Lyme, New Hampshire, about 1820, and came first to Lowell and then to Boston. He was one of the most noted key bugle players of the day along with Joseph Green, second leader of the Boston Brass Band, later in Providence,

<sup>6</sup> Information supplied by Thomas M. Carter, leader of Carter's Band.

<sup>7</sup> Historical Musical Exhibition Under the Auspices of Chickering & Sons, Horticultural Hall, Boston, January 11th to 26th 1902, Catalogue of, p. 38.

Rhode Island. For nearly fifty years Mr. Hall used a gold plated E-flat keyed bugle, an exact replica of the solid gold one presented to him by the Lowell, Massachusetts, Brass Band. This had twelve keys and one rotary valve to extend the tone.<sup>8</sup>

A silver E-flat cornet, bell over the shoulder with three rotary valves, Boston style of action, and a slide trombone alto in E-flat<sup>9</sup> made by D. C. Hall & Co. were exhibited in 1902. A complete set of instruments with echo attachments, made by Mr. Hall's firm according to his design, was used by Hall's Boston Brass Band in their concert tours. When the echo attachments were used the audience generally supposed that there was an extra band behind the stage. The set of echo instruments loaned from the collection of Mr. D. S. Pillsbury for Chickering & Sons' Exhibition in 1902 was stated by the catalogue to be the only complete set known to be in existence. With the exception of the trombone which had three valves, these instruments were made with four valves, rotary action. They consisted of

B-flat Tenor made of copper with echo attachment.

B-flat Baritone Trombone made of copper with echo attachment.

B-flat Bass Euphonium made of copper with echo attachment.

B-flat Baritone Euphonium made of copper with echo attachment.

E-flat Alto made of copper with echo attachment.

F Ballad or French Horn made of German silver with copper echo attachment. It could be changed to G and C.

C Trumpet made of brass with copper echo attachment.

A B-flat cornet with piston box valve, by Hall & Quinby, called in the exhibit catalogue a very rare brass instrument, and a B-flat Tenor Trombone, "three valve piston box valve," B. F. Quinby patent of 1872 were also shown.<sup>10</sup> The Quinby Bros. were noted as makers of all kinds of fine brass band instruments.<sup>11</sup>

The firm of B. F. Richardson made fine cornets and trumpets and also trombones, but did not do much business in the larger instruments.<sup>12</sup> From 1866-1878, Richardson & Lehnert made an unusual contribution through their manufacture of Chinese and Turkish cymbals and also gongs, all instruments which previously

<sup>8</sup> Historical Musical Exhibition Under the Auspices of Chickering & Sons, Horticultural Hall, Boston, January 11th to 26th 1902, Catalogue of, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Formerly slide trombones were used in different keys, viz: Sop. E-flat, B-flat, alto E-flat, tenor C, B-flat, bass B-flat, and BB-flat. Most of these old slides had handles for extending to the lower notes.

<sup>10</sup> The writer has been unable to learn anything of the whereabouts of the instruments loaned for the Exhibition of Chickering & Sons from the D. S. Pillsbury Collection. It is to be hoped that this Collection is still intact, since the catalogue described it in 1902 as the most valuable collection of brass instruments in the world.

<sup>11</sup> See page 268 for more detailed information.

<sup>12</sup> Statement of Thomas M. Carter.

had had to be imported. Unfortunately at Mr. Lehnert's death the secret of the cymbal specifications passed on also. Mr. Richardson then turned to the making of music stands, thus being possibly the earliest such manufacturer in Boston. He was listed in this business from 1880 to 1895.

About 1852 the firm which may have been the oldest manufacturer of brass instruments in the United States, Graves & Co. (also known as Samuel Graves & Sons) was listed in Boston at 18 Harvard Place. This company had been established at Winchester, New Hampshire, and in 1864 advertised itself as the oldest musical instrument makers in the country, in this business for the past forty years.<sup>13</sup> Since the Winchester factory was burned some time after 1845 (exact year is not obtainable) the business may have been moved to Boston about 1852 or this may have been at first only a branch. The names of the sons were Alpha, Geo. M. and Cyrus. This noted firm made all kinds of brass and reed band instruments. "Its products were made use of in all parts of the country, and many very fine pieces were made on foreign orders."<sup>14</sup> They were the makers of the E-flat copper bugle used in 1837 by Edward (Ned) Kendall with the Boston Brass Band, which bore his name engraved on the bell. A copper keyed Bugle in B-flat used in the band in 1835 and an E-flat Alto made by this company in 1830 with three double slide valves and compensating pistons were also shown in the Chickering & Sons' Exhibition in 1902. Dr. Dayton C. Miller has in his collection a flute and a clarinet made by this firm.

In 1864-65 Patrick S. Gilmore became a partner in this company, which then was called Gilmore, Graves & Co. His duty was to examine and test personally every instrument made by the new combination. In 1866 the firm was listed just as Gilmore & Co. and the following year it was changed to Wright, Gilmore & Co., becoming simply E. G. Wright in 1868. This firm in turn was probably succeeded about 1870 by the Boston Musical Instrument Manufactory, makers of the Three \*\*\* Star cornets and trumpets. The firm members in 1874 consisted of Henry Esbach, L. F. Hartman and W. G. Reed.

This company and the Standard Band Instrument Company started in 1884 by Thompson & Odell Company, after the demise of Quinby Brothers, in the factory which had been used by the

<sup>13</sup> *Boston Directory 1864*, Advertising Department, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Pierce, George W. Winchester. *The Granite Monthly*, November 1896, pp. 280-1.

latter, were the leading manufacturers of brass instruments in Boston for many years.

The chief difference between their instruments and those of today is that the bell of the former was made out of flat stock hammered into shape, and they did not stay in tune quite as well. The workmanship compares favorably with that of any brass instruments of the same kind made today. They were used by the leading bands of that time.<sup>15</sup> The companies which have taken these over, namely The Cundy-Bettoney Company and The Vega Company, are ably maintaining their standing.

The old Boston Brass Band Drum was in use over sixty-five years. So probably no other bass drum has had so important a history in America. It had the Boston coat-of-arms emblazoned on its shell, and also the names of the members on each side of it.

During the Civil War period the name of Elias Howe was particularly prominent in drum making, for his firm made and supplied drums to the Massachusetts Regiments of the Union Army. He also sold them fifes manufactured by the grandson of Jacob Astor.<sup>16</sup> Quite naturally one of his publications was a fife and drum instruction book used in the army.

During the war President Lincoln created the position of Director of Bands<sup>17</sup> for all the Union Army with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. This was offered to Elias Howe, Jr. who went to Washington to see about the post, but declined it. Despite hundreds of applications the position was never filled. One reason for this tender may have been that Harriet Howe Wilson, wife of Senator, later Vice President, Henry Wilson, was Mr. Howe's cousin.

Ira E. White, son of Boston's first master violin maker, and Peter Winn also made drums in the Civil War days. A little later the drum makers in Boston included—O. A. Whitmore of Reading, Vermont, who had made drum sticks and probably drums used in the Union Army; William J. Blair, who had been a drummer in the Civil War; and Blair & Baldwin.

Fretted instruments were also made early in Boston. An early master guitar maker was Charles Stumcka. He was listed in business directories in 1842 & 43 at 8 Winter St., 1847 at 13 Winter St. and

<sup>15</sup> Statements of Thomas M. Carter, leader of Carter's Band.

<sup>16</sup> Fact related by A. J. Oettinger.

<sup>17</sup> Facts related by Edward F. Howe.

in 1863 at 289 Washington St. A. J. Oettinger states that one of Stumcka's guitars once owned by himself showed the workmanship of a master maker. He was also a violin maker and repairer, but specialized in guitars. It is possible that Gemünder came to Boston to study guitar making with Mr. Stumcka for Gemünder made his first guitars while in Boston.

Another guitar maker whose shops were a training school for many later good makers was a Swede, Pehr A. Anderberg, who came to Boston about 1880. He later supervised the manufacturing of "Haynes Excelsior," "Tilton," and "Bay State" guitars and "Bay State" mandolins for John C. Haynes & Co.

The "Spanish Students," a strictly professional organization from California, introduced the mandolin to this country through their tours. This led to the formation of the "Boston Ideal Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar Club," trained by Louis T. Romero, who came to Boston from Mexico. This club of noted players and leading teachers of these instruments, George S. Lansing, Albert D. Grover, A. A. Babb and Burt E. Shattuck, made concert tours in every state of the Union for many years and were instrumental in creating a greater interest in the fretted instruments which were then becoming so popular. Their standing is shown by the fact that Wilhelm Gericke had Mr. Lansing and Mr. Babb play with the Boston Symphony Orchestra such parts of a Spanish number as called for their instruments.

About 1890 when the factory of L. B. Gatcomb & Co. was located on Hawkins St. the members of the Boston Ideal Banjo and Guitar Club were associated with Mr. Gatcomb by having their studios in his factory. In 1895 the Gatcomb Company made the "Lansing Banjo" and "Gatcomb Mandolin." Probably it was about this period that L. B. Gatcomb & Co. was the leading manufacturer in Boston in this line.

Information about other important banjo manufacturers like Wm. A. Cole, A. C. Fairbanks & Co. and about other makers of drums, guitars, banjos, zithers, etc. by firms now out of business or moved elsewhere is given in the different sections of Appendix IV.

## *b. Present Day Manufacturers*

### THE VEGA CO.

This business was founded in 1881 as a cooperative enterprise by Julius Nelson with five or six other men, among them C. F. Sundberg and a Mr. Swenson, who had worked in Pehr F. Anderberg's guitar shop in Somerville. Julius, a fine cabinet maker, was the foreman of the guitar and mandolin factory. Gradually Julius and his brother Carl, both of whom came from Sweden to the United States at an early age, bought out the interests of the others who continued as workers in the company,<sup>1</sup> which was then called Vega, meaning star. Carl Nelson became the office and sales manager.

In 1904 the Nelsons took over A. C. Fairbanks & Co.<sup>2</sup> which had made only banjos, while The Vega Company had made only guitars and mandolins. After the union of the companies the latter made all three kinds of high grade fretted instruments, under the direction of David L. Day, from the Fairbanks Company, as Sales and General Manager, until 1922 when he went with the Bacon Banjo Co. In 1905 the Nelsons absorbed the plectrum instrument making of Thompson & Odell and added to this about 1909 the brass instrument manufacturing business of the same concern.<sup>3</sup> This was done under the name of Standard Band Instrument Company established in 1884 at 62 Sudbury St.

As the result of the taking over of the business of these companies,<sup>3</sup> this is the only firm in Boston making simply brass and fretted instruments. The present head of The Vega Company, now located at 155 Columbus Ave., is William Nelson, the son of Carl Nelson.

This company's business is primarily manufacturing, of which about 60 per cent is in fretted and plectrum instruments and 40 per cent brass instruments. They make all kinds of brasses except French and Bass horns and more models of trumpets than any other manufacturer in this country, a total of about 1000 a year.

<sup>1</sup> Information about the founding supplied by A. J. Oettinger whose partners the Nelsons were in the formation of the Musicians' Supply Co.

<sup>2</sup> For further information about this company see p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> See also Appendix IV pp. 226-7 and 277.



Their trumpets, trombones and fretted instruments are exported as well as sold all over the United States. To date they have manufactured over 96,000 banjos, 40,000 guitars, 40,000 mandolins, and 30,000 trumpets.

This firm has many patents for improved construction and tone of trumpets and fretted instruments.

"The four most prominent players on national radio broadcasts, Tony Colucci, Earle Roberts, Eddie Connors, and Eddie Peabody all use the Vegaphone Guitar."<sup>4</sup>

Their best trumpets are silver plated and are played by artists like Walter Smith and members of the Metropolitan Opera House Orchestra; Cleveland, Minneapolis and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras; and Roxy and Paramount Theatre Orchestras.

This firm also imports low and medium priced violins and accessories, and jobs these and goods of other manufacturers at wholesale. They also sell at retail some three thousand items, including the steel strings which they manufacture; and appraise, trade in, and repair all kinds of instruments.

A special feature is their band organization and service department for helping to organize and teach school and legion bands, drum corps and orchestras. They arrange for special teachers to do this on any basis desired by a school director or music supervisor.

After taking over the H. F. Odell Company in 1925 they published the "Odell Edition" of fretted music for five years until November 1931, when Walter K. Bauer of Hartford, Connecticut, purchased the plates and stock and still publishes and sells this music.

The "Odell Edition" consisted of original compositions of Mr. Odell and arrangements made by him for banjo, mandolin, guitar and mandolin orchestra. They also published the Odell Company's music journal *Crescendo* till 1930.

#### GEORGE B. STONE & SON, INC.

This firm was established at Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1890 by George Burt Stone who had had forty years of experience as band instructor, director, drum major and professional drummer in many musical and military organizations in the Eastern States. Practically

<sup>4</sup> Advertisement in *The Guild Reporter*, Official Organ of the American Guild of Banjoists, Mandolinists and Guitarists—March-April 1935 p. 7.