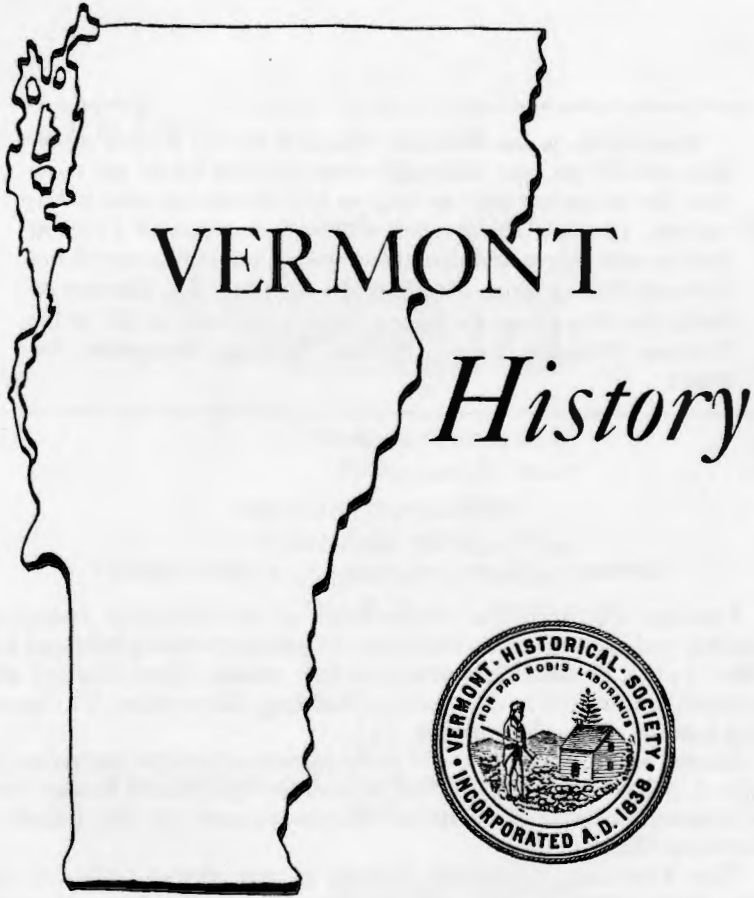
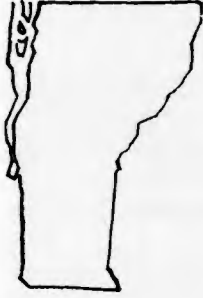


SUMMER 1981

VOL. 49, NO. 3



The PROCEEDINGS of the
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



John Philip Sousa ranked Bagley's "National Emblem March" among the best five marches written in America.

Vermont's "March King"

By WILLIAM H. SOULE

On those rare occasions when Americans play martial music, on national holidays such as Memorial Day, Veterans Day and the Fourth of July, the traditional marches have the quality of music of another era. Yet they still stir the blood and frequently bring tears and a swelling to the breasts of those listening at a concert or parade. The marches of John Philip Sousa remain a vital part of America's musical tradition. While many Americans still honor Sousa, most of them have forgotten Edward E. Bagley, Vermont's "March King."

Bagley, born in Craftsbury, earned his reputation chiefly as the composer of "National Emblem March," but he wrote a number of musical pieces. Though Sousa once ranked "National Emblem" among "the five best marches written in this country,"¹ Bagley occupies the unenviable niche in the history of American music as the almost unknown composer of one of the most popular patriotic marches. Yet the musicians of his era respected Bagley's ability and invited him to play with such prestigious groups as the Boston Symphony and organizations of lesser fame such as the Randolph, Vermont, Green Mountain Mechanics Band.

Bagley's talents apparently came naturally. Born in Craftsbury on May 29, 1857, the youngest of six sons of John and Hannah Bagley, the young boy spent his early years in a musical family. Several of his brothers became musicians, and Ezra, four years his senior, later gained a measure of renown as a solo cornetist with Gilmore's Band (then America's foremost concert band) during its successful European tour. Bagley could have received very little formal education, because at the age of nine he entered show business as a boy singer. Bagley's aunt, Mrs. C.C. Beedle of Keene, New Hampshire, was a member of the travelling troupe called Leavitt's Bellringers, and she took young Edward with her as a member of that

group as it toured the country. By the age of fourteen young Bagley was playing the cornet, and soon he left the Leavitt group to join the Swiss Bell-ringers as a cornetist.²

Bagley maintained his Vermont ties, however, and returned to Craftsbury in 1877 to marry Jannette Scott Hoyt. The following year when Ezra joined Gilmore's band which set out to tour the major cities of Europe, Edward stayed in the Boston area. By 1880 he had become solo cornetist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He also toured the country with the famed Germania Band.

In 1881 the Beedle family moved to Randolph, Vermont, and the Bagleys soon followed.³ Edward joined two of his older brothers, Henry and Mose, there. C.C. Beedle soon became director of the Randolph band and the Bagleys played in it. Edward took up the trombone and baritone, having vowed, according to family legend, never to play the cornet again after learning of the mysterious death of Ezra in Liverpool, England.⁴ A photograph of Edward with the Randolph Mechanics Band taken in 1891, however, shows him holding a cornet.

C.C. Beedle moved to Keene in 1893 to open a music store, and Bagley joined him later that year, taking a room at Beedle's store.⁵ The Keene City directories from 1893 until Bagley's death in 1922, list him simply as a "musician." In Keene the Beedles and Bagleys began a tradition of musical entertainment which lasted for twenty years. Both Beedle and Bagley wrote music and directed musical programs which even included a comic opera.⁶

Despite his long career in Keene, long-time residents of Randolph claim that Bagley lived there and while in Randolph wrote the "National Emblem," which they said was first performed there. By remarkable coincidence, the United States Census for 1900 lists an E.E. Bagley in Randolph, whose occupation matched the Randolph people's description of the composer.⁷ This Bagley from Randolph did work in a furniture factory as local stories have the composer doing, which probably gave rise to the story that Bagley composed his great march by whistling the tune as he trudged to the factory each morning. The Census also lists the Randolph Bagley as five years younger than the composer.

Other stories about Bagley's ties with Randolph, doubtless, contain elements of truth. His brothers remained in Randolph, and he probably visited them often. On these visits he joined in making music with his old friends in the local band. Was the "National Emblem" premiered in Randolph on a Fourth of July? Were it first played there, the local papers from 1900-1905 make no mention of the event, though during these years the Randolph papers reported only one celebration of Independence Day. Possibly Bagley carried the manuscript of "National Emblem" with him, and he may have prevailed on his friends to join him in playing it long before he



E.E. Bagley, fourth from right in back row, as a member of the Randolph Mechanics Band when it played at the Newport Military Muster in 1890. Bagley's brothers Henry (second from left in back row) and Mose (next to base drum in front row) also played in the band.

thought it necessary to copyright the march.⁸ The first march, which Bagley finally had copyrighted in 1902, remained his most famous. He thought that the bass of the march represented "the rumble and thunder of the buffalo" which Bagley had seen on "the western plains in the 1870's."⁹

As his efforts as a composer did not bring much bread to the Bagley table, he and Carl Beedle continued travelling to Boston and elsewhere, playing at New England resort communities and wherever an appearance could be arranged. They were members of the Boston Orchestral Players managed by the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, and Bagley joined the musicians' union in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, in 1902.¹⁰

By 1911, Bagley, possibly tired of constantly touring the vaudeville circuit, became bandmaster and director of the American Band of Claremont, New Hampshire.¹¹ He continued to write marches, including "Ambassador" and "America Victorious" after World War I, both of which still appear in band repertoires. The Beedle-Bagley comic opera had at least one performance in Keene in 1918. And in 1922, just after his death, the "Farm Bureau March," which he wrote for the American Farm Bureau Federation, was published. Other marches which he composed included

“Imperial,” “Father of His Country,” “Front Section,” and “Knight Templar.”

Bagley worked as a bandmaster and music teacher in Keene and for at least three years, 1915-1917, led the Keene City Band.¹² Another Randolph story has Sousa offering Bagley a position in his entourage in order to compose and arrange music for the band, an offer which, the story claims, Bagley refused. Although Sousa certainly knew of Bagley and admired his “National Emblem,” no corroborating evidence supports the story.

Bagley died in poverty on Sunday, January 29, 1922, at the age of sixty-four in the Elliott Community Hospital, and he was buried in Greenlawn Cemetery in Keene. There he lies all but forgotten, though his memory lives on through the “National Emblem March.”¹³

NOTES

1 “The five most effective street marches according to a list made out by Sousa (some years later) . . . were the following: ‘The Thunderer,’ ‘National Emblem,’ ‘Semper Fidelis,’ ‘Washington Post,’ and ‘High School Cadets.’ The second of these was written by Bagley; the other four by Sousa.” H.W. Schwartz, *Bands of America*, (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 106.

2 *Keene Evening Journal*, Monday, January 30, 1922, obituary, E.E. Bagley.

3 Karl Beedle to author, July 13, 1980, on file in the Wilbur Collection, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington.

4 Interview, Reginald Bagley with the author, May, 1980. Mr. Bagley, Bradford, Vermont, is a relative of E.E. Bagley.

5 David Proper, Keene, N.H. to author, August 20, 1980. Mr. Proper, who had written several articles on Bagley for the Keene area newspapers, offered much valuable information about the composer.

6 Beedle to author.

7 Randolph Village, Sheet 3, line 46.

8 Reginald Bagley said the composer supposedly threw the manuscript in stove, at one band rehearsal, out of frustration. Band members retrieved it and played the march over and over. In a letter to the author, Frank Bush of Claremont, N.H., related “. . . a select group of band directors who started out in a railroad baggage car at White River Junction and as they moved towards their ultimate goal, Greenfield, Mass., kept adding various musicians. Bagley joined them in Bellows Falls (having come from Keene). He passed the “National Emblem” out in manuscript and they rehearsed in the railroad car. As the piccolo player was having difficulty with his part, he [Bagley] whipped out his baritone and played the part for him.”

9 Sue F. Scribner to the Editor, *Keene Evening Sentinel*, September 30, 1973.

10 *Ibid.*, January 30, 1922, Bagley obituary.

11 Program fro April 27, 1911, in the possession of Frank Bush, Claremont, N.H.

12 Proper to author, August 20, 1980.

13 *Ibid.*, November 28, 1980. Mr. Proper kindly researched the records of Cheshire County Probate Court for Bagley's will, which unfortunately failed to mention his manuscript or disposal of musical instruments.