



## CHARLES GERARD CONN

Charles Gerard Conn was born in Phelps, New York, on January 29, 1844. In 1850, he accompanied his family to Three Rivers, Michigan, and in the following year to Elkhart, Indiana. Little is known about his early life, other than that he learned to play the cornet. With the outbreak of the American Civil War he enlisted in the United States Army on May 18, 1861 at the age of seventeen, despite his parents' protests. On June 14, 1861, he became a private in Company B, 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment Indiana Infantry, and shortly afterwards was assigned to a regimental band. When his enlistment expired he returned to Elkhart, but re-enlisted on December 12, 1863, at Niles, Michigan, in Company G, 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Sharpshooters. At the age of nineteen on August 8, 1863, he was elevated to the rank of Captain. During the Assault on Petersburg on July 30, 1864, Conn was wounded and taken prisoner. In spite of two imaginative and valiant attempts to escape, he was recaptured and spent the remainder of the war in captivity. At the end of hostilities, he was released from Columbia, South Carolina prison camp, and was honorably discharged on July 28, 1865. He was one of only six Union soldiers to be retroactively awarded the Silver Citation Star and the Civil War Campaign Medal for gallantry in action.

After the war he engaged in the grocery and bakery business. In 1871, while serving as a band leader in Buchanan, Michigan, Conn badly injured his hand while working at the local zinc horse collar-pad factory. The accident forced Conn to switch from violin to cornet.

In 1877, Conn and his wife, Catherine, relocated to Elkhart, Indiana, where Conn worked various jobs for two years. During this time, Conn sold health care products under the tradename "Konn's Kurative Kream", and invented parts for sewing machines. He also plated and engraved silverware, and manufactured rubber stamps. Drawing from the skills learned at his previous jobs, he invented a cornet mouthpiece with a rubber rim (apparently following a bar brawl where he suffered a split lip), which began his career in the manufacture of band instruments. After watching a French instrument maker named Dupont repairing instruments in Conn's shop for a few days, Conn believed he could build his own instrument – and that same year built the first American made cornet. Conn was an important innovator in the development of modern wind instruments, and established the C.G. Conn Company, a major instrument manufacturer, in Elkhart.

By 1879, Conn moved operations into larger quarters and began making other instruments. In 1880, the town of Elkhart, Indiana became so enamored with C.G. Conn they elected him as their Mayor. During his second term, he was forced to resign due to a factory fire in 1883. The factory was rebuilt bigger and

better and production continued. By 1893 his instruments were awarded the highest honors in the World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago.

Charles Conn was elected Mayor of Elkhart in 1880. In 1884 Conn organized the 1st Regiment of Artillery in the Indiana Legion and became its first Colonel, a military title which stayed with him throughout the remainder of his life. He was also the first commander of the Elkhart Commandery of the Knights Templar. Colonel Conn also served as Lieutenant Colonel of the 2nd Regiment of Uniform Rank, Knights of Pythias, and was re-elected many times as Commander of the local Grand Army of the Republic post.

Conn served as mayor of Elkhart from 1880 until 1883, and as member of the Indiana State House of Representatives in 1889. He established the "*Elkhart Daily Truth*" in 1889, which is still operating as The Elkhart Truth. Conn was elected as a Democrat to the Fifty-third Congress (4 March 1893 - 3 March 1895), but he was not a candidate for renomination in 1894. Conn bought the newly established Washington Times in 1894, during his congressional term.

After his term in Congress, Conn resumed the manufacture of band instruments at Elkhart, Indiana. In 1916 he retired and moved to Los Angeles, California. Conn authored books in his retirement, including *The Sixth Sense, Prayer: Brain Cell Reformation* (1916), *For the Good of the World. Finding the Real God* (1919), and *The Wonder Book: How to Achieve Success* (1923). Conn died 5 January 1931 in Los Angeles, and was interred in Grace Lawn Cemetery, Elkhart, IN

The Colonel loved strange and bizarre instruments. In 1907, he built an Immensaphone, the largest horn in the world at 12 feet in diameter and 35 feet long. Conn also continued a series of "firsts," building the first American made saxophone and the first sousaphone, built to John Philip Sousa's specifications.

Conn retired in 1915 and the company was purchased by Carl Greenleaf. The business was renamed C.G. Conn Ltd. During this era, Carl Greenleaf began the National School Band Movement. In 1923, Greenleaf established the first National Band Contest in Chicago, and the Conn National School of Music, also in Chicago. In 1928, he supported the National Music Camp located in Interlochen, Michigan.