



Nodin Press

5114 Cedar Lake Road, Minneapolis, MN, 55416

Contact Norton Stillman (952) 546-6300 / Fax (952) 546-6303

nstill4402@aol.com

Crackerjack Bands and Hometown Boosters

the story of a Minnesota Music Man

Joy Riggs

Many today are familiar with the Broadway musical *The Music Man*, but few could name one prominent band director active in their own region during the early years of the twentieth century, when community bands were as important to mid-sized towns as professional sports teams are to large cities today. Among the most renowned in the Midwest in those days was G. Oliver Riggs, who was employed at one time or another by the cities of Crookston, Bemidji, Grand Forks, and St. Cloud, among others. He eventually developed a reputation as one of the most successful directors of youth bands in the United States. But after his death in 1946, few people outside of St. Cloud, Minnesota, remembered his name or his reputation for building highly disciplined ensembles that provided an extra spark to civic celebrations, while also instilling several generations of young performers with a love for music and a commitment to playing it well.

Six decades later, in *Crackerjack Bands and Hometown Boosters*, journalist Joy Riggs set out to learn more about the life and achievements of G. Oliver—her great-grandfather. Riggs follows the careers of G. Oliver, his talented wife Islea, and their children, through times of war, peace, economic hardship, and personal tragedy. She tracks down and interviews those who performed in G. Oliver's ensembles and scours the daily newspapers of many small towns for information regarding his movements, contracts, performances, and rivalries. In so doing, she opens a window onto an aspect of American culture that cannot be adequately conveyed by listening to one or two John Philip Sousa marches. Ultimately, this is a story about civic pride, community participation, and the power of music to transform lives and connect people across generations.

Joy Riggs grew up in Alexandria, Minnesota, and graduated from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1990 with a bachelor's degree in news-editorial journalism. She specializes in writing about history, travel, and parenting. Her award-winning columns, essays, and articles have appeared in numerous publications, including the *Star Tribune*, *Minnesota Parent*, *Minnesota Monthly*, and the *Des Moines Register*. She lives in Northfield, Minnesota, where she serves on the boards of the Vintage Band Festival and the Northfield Historical Society. For more of her writing, visit www.joyriggs.com.

ISBN: 978-1-947237-22-3 / \$19.95

◆ NODIN PRESS : MINNEAPOLIS ◆