

## History of the BN-Community Concert Band

March 31, 2020

The Bloomington Normal Community Concert Band (CCB) has been entertaining the public in the twin cities since 1978. The Band expanded on a musical tradition that has been in the twin cities for more than 150 years. The following describes the initiation and development of the CCB with some comments on the bands that preceded CCB and other musical groups today.

The information that follows has been gleaned from records provided by the City, the McLean County Historical Museum, online issues of the local newspaper, and from band members, as well as from interviews of current and previous band directors and band members. This is an ongoing project; additional information is welcomed. Send comments and suggestions to ....

### Preceding the BN-Community Concert Band

The nation's first known community band was started in 1828 in Allentown, PA. Community bands across the country experienced periods of revitalization following the Civil War and World War I. (Chicago Tribune, 22 May 1975)

In the 1800s there was a rich history of music in Bloomington, Illinois. Documents indicate some bands started soon after the Civil War. For example, Charles Kadel started Kadel's Brass Band, one of the first to gain fame in Bloomington. In the late 1800s there was an Amateur Musical Club (AMC) made up of influential members of the community. In 1894 the AMC organized Star Concerts that brought world renowned artistic talent to the community. The group remained active for a long time as noted in article in the Pantagraph on January 20, 1980 that announced an event for the Club.

In the 1870s H R Seidel started a band after arriving in Bloomington from Germany. In 1886 the Masonic Fraternity took over the band and called it the DeMolay Band. The first director was Richard Hurst. In the 1890s the band met on the second floor of 106 W. Front St. in Bloomington. A local musician, Fred Ashton, was the director in 1913 and then George Marton became director in 1914. An article in the Pantagraph on March 12, 1913 described the DeMolay Band. The article listed 24 members and described a 17-year history of concerts at Miller Park, Bloomington. (Pictures of directors Ashton and Marton.)

In 1913 the Bloomington Band and Orchestra Association received \$11,000 in donations from the public to create a band. A Pantagraph article described an effort to launch a metropolitan band and the need for a better practice facility. In 1918 the band was renamed the Bloomington Municipal Band. Band uniforms were purchased. There is a picture of the Band in front of the McLean County Courthouse, now the McLean County Museum of History. (Picture of band)

For more than 50 years the Muny Band provided as many as two dozen concerts each year at holidays and summer concerts in the park. The musicians were members of the Musicians Union and were paid a stipend by the City of Bloomington for playing each concert.

In 1925 The Band Tax Act provided that the City could levy a tax not exceeding one mil on the dollar for the maintenance and employment of a municipal band.

A 1929 Pantagraph article reported on a contract between the City of Bloomington and the Muny Band to provide concerts during the summer. George Marton, director, was paid \$15 per concert and the band members received \$4 per concert. Marton had played clarinet in the DeMolay band. A Pantagraph article in 1930 reported 48 concerts as of Sept. 12 so far that year with more anticipated in the fall. Improved equipment and new uniforms were purchased.

The Muny band leased rehearsal and storage space at 313 North Main Street in Bloomington. (Across the street from the current Bistro restaurant) Later the band moved to 118 E. Front Street. (Location of current Bloomington City Government building)

Tim Calhoon was the Muny Band director in 1973. The last director was Bill Lawyer, appointed by the band board after being associate director and principal horn player for three years. He earned a Master of Music degree from Illinois State University (ISU) in 1974. He was on the music faculty at Bradley University and played with the Peoria and Bloomington-Normal symphonies. In 1976 the band of 32 members played a 4:00 pm concert every Sunday of the summer as well as playing for the Parks and Recreation production of Hello Dolly. Concerts were often two-hours long. (Picture of Bill Lawyer)

In 1976 the City of Bloomington decided to stop paying \$20,000 to the musician's union for concerts and to create a volunteer band. This led to two years of communication between the City and the Musicians Union. The new volunteer community band was initiated in 1978.

### The First Decade of the BN-Community Concert Band

So how does a community concert band begin? The band needs a director, musicians, music, a practice site, chairs, music stands, and other equipment. In the first decade the band depended on other organizations to provide these resources.

The first director of the volunteer band in 1978 was Bill Lawyer, the former director of the Muny Band. He was a Normal resident. Articles in the Pantagraph March 18, 1978 and May 5, 1978 invited community members to join the band. The first rehearsal was held May 25 in Room 10 of the ISU Centennial Building. A document labeled June 1978 lists 24 band members. The Pantagraph announced concerts in Miller Park beginning June 18 at 6:30 pm on Sundays. No information was found on other concerts or rehearsal sites during the first year. There were five concerts in 1979.

From the beginning of the Bloomington Band, the Bloomington Parks Department supported the continuation of the Band but not much financial support. The Band has never charged admission to concerts but has accepted donations. More about that below.

Fortunately, the two local universities recognized the value of having a community band and provided support from 1980 to 1990.

In 1980 Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU) provided needed resources of practice site, music, and equipment. The director was Steve Eggleston, a professor of music at IWU. He was assisted by Ann Gore, a Bloomington High School band director. The Band membership was open to high school and college students. An announcement in the Pantagraph on January 20, 1980 invited community members to audition for the Illinois Wesleyan University Community Band. Concerts were held on the IWU campus, the first being on May 4, 1980. The Band played on July 4 that year in Towanda. The concerts were usually a combination of the Community Band and other IWU bands. There was one concert presented jointly with the Bloomington High School Band.

The first reference in the Pantagraph to Bloomington's volunteer band as the Community Concert Band (CCB) was May 29, 1982.

In 1986 the Community Concert Band moved to Illinois State University (ISU). Dr. Paul Rosene, professor of music at ISU, was named Director. Rehearsal was in ISU's Centennial Hall. In 1987 the rehearsals were held in a renovated room on the top floor of Cook hall.

Michael Wallace moved to Bloomington in 1982 to become a District 87 music teacher at Oakland School. He joined the Band in 1982. In 1988 he became Associate Director and started directing the summer concerts.

During Dr. Rosene's tenure as director the CCB's concert pattern was established of seven summer concerts, most in Franklin Park, and several concerts during the rest of the year. This schedule gave visibility to many in the community, fulfilling the CCB's goal of "bringing music to the people". All concerts were free to attendees. (Rosene Picture)

Under the leadership of Director Paul Rosene, the CCB provided local concerts and several special activities.

- The Band began a tradition of playing at the Towanda July 4<sup>th</sup> parade (Band on float picture)
- In 1987 the Band played for the Bloomington Public Library Centennial celebration. (Band at library Picture)
- In 1988 the Band took a bus to Springfield to play a concert at the Lincoln Library Carnegie Room and was part of the "The Sounds of Christmas" at State Farm Atrium
- In 1989 there were seven concerts in Franklin Park in June and July and four concerts in the spring and fall. (Picture in FP with band on stage)

- The Band sponsored a French Horn concert on April 6<sup>th</sup> that involved players from schools and adults of the area. Then Mayor Jesse Smart narrated “America The Beautiful”. Also, that weekend was a band clinic for students in area schools. (Pic French horn concert picture)
- In 1990 a concert featured the premier of a new composition that came from a competition that began the previous fall. Robert Champagne, Whittier, CA, won the competition by his composition, *PSALM 47*. He directed his creation, with Richard Veselack, narrator. The runner up, John Prescott, conducted the premier of his composition, *Renaissance*. The concert was in Braden Auditorium, ISU.

In May 1990 the Band Board appointed Michael Wallace Director of the Community Concert Band following Paul Rosene’s retirement from ISU in April. Mr. Wallace continues to be the Director of the Band. Except for an occasional substitute director, he has led more than 300 performances. For many years Dick Veselack was Assistant Director. (Picture of Dick directing?)

### Coming of Age as an Organization

Also important during this time was the development of the Band’s governance and organization structure. A Charter and Bylaws were developed and adopted in 1988. The officers applied for and received a not-for-profit 501c3 status. This enabled the Band to initiate an aggressive fund-raising process. Examples:

- When the Band performed at the local malls a small donation was made to the Band.
- The Band applied for and received grants from foundations.
- State Farm Insurance provided funds based on their employees participating in the Band.
- In 1989 John Schultz worked with the Parks Department to hold an ice cream social fund-raiser at one of the summer Band concerts. This practice has continued to this day with other non-profit organizations hosting ice-cream social fund-raisers at the other summer concerts.
- The Band also applied for and received funds from the Town of Normal Harmon Grants.

These funds were necessary to move the Band toward becoming self-supporting.

The Band used several local facilities as rehearsal sites. The difficulties of storage and movement of equipment led the Band to look for a permanent facility. Sites that were considered included the Normal Soldiers and Sailors facility, Lincoln Leisure Center, and others. The Band practiced at Oakland school where Mike Wallace was teaching when he came to town.

In 1994 there was a major breakthrough when the Bloomington Parks Department partnered with Normal’s Unit 5 school district to add space to the new Pepperidge Elementary School: made the school band room larger with a higher ceiling and added a storage room on the side of the gym to house Band equipment and recreation equipment for City Parks Department programs. (Picture of band in music room)

The CCB's first webpage was developed by Jim Yarbrough in 1996. A new and enlarged web page was initiated on March 3, 2001 by David Williams as [bn-communityband.org](http://bn-communityband.org). He continues to manage the web page for the Band, identifying information for the public and for use by the Band members. The CCB also has a Facebook Page.

Other ways the CCB demonstrated its identity included the following:

- In the early 1990's a Band logo was developed.
- In 1991 Band shirts with the logo were initiated and are still in use today as the summertime "uniform".
- In 2001 a banner was purchased for display at concerts with funds donated to the CCB by Drake Zimmerman and Jan Elflin.
- In 2002 ball caps with the Band logo were offered.

### Programming

The CCB performed throughout the twin cities to show that music can continue after school as adults. "Bring music to the people" was a theme adopted by the Board.

A pattern of CCB concerts evolved in recent years: two concerts in the Spring, six concerts in the summer, and two concerts in the Fall. Some concerts were noted with seasonal themes such as costumes for an October concert and a title of "Ice Concerts" in December. The majority of the summer concerts have been in Franklin Park or Miller Park. Eastland Mall and College Hills Mall were frequent venues in fall and spring in the early years. Recently Wesley United Methodist Church and Westminster Village retirement community have been used. Concerts have also been held in celebration of local events such as an anniversary celebration for the Bloomington Library. In 2019 the CCB held its Christmas Concert on stage at Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts

Ensembles of various instrument configurations have been incorporated as part of concerts and as special performances. In 2019 six ensembles of Band members played a Sunday afternoon concert at a Bloomington senior citizen facility.

In 2012 the CCB premiered *Sangamon River Waltzes* which Dr. David Williams edited and arranged from an old band manuscript in the CCB library by Henry W. Cary. It was performed at the Spring 2012 CCB concert at Westminster Village and again that summer at a Franklin Park concert. The revised work was dedicated to the BN Community Concert Band.

In 1991 the CCB started sharing a joint concert once a year with Champaign's Parkland College community band, alternating concerts in Bloomington-Normal and in Champaign. In recent years the CCB has held a joint concert with the Honor Band from the Normal junior high schools.

### Music Library

In the early years the CCB used music provided by IWU and then ISU. Paul Rosene received music free from Music Shoppe. Don Sherard donated his library of music which occupied several file cabinets, that was used by the CCB from the 1990s to 2005. Early purchase of music was made possible from funds raised by the Band from various sources. The city of Bloomington found music files in the attic of the Consistory (now BCPA). Over the years the music collection grew to fill 21 4 or 5 drawer file cabinets. In 2004 there were 4,322 compositions in the library. Over the years the cabinets were stored in several places in the community and now are stored in a climate-controlled facility. The decision was made to clear the music files of unused music, reducing the collection to 11 file cabinets. Ellen Hagen has been the Band Librarian since 2003

### Equipment

The CCB Inherited a base drum and three tympanies from previous bands; the first acquisition by the CCB was a base drum beater. Through the years fund raising has allowed for the purchase of more percussion equipment. In 2003 chairs were purchased. Music stands have been purchased over time starting 10 years ago. In 2007 the Band Board created the position of Band Manager to coordinate the accumulating equipment storage and to coordinate moving equipment for concerts.

### Continuing to Evolve

Establishing a permanent facility for Band rehearsals and equipment storage has been a long-time ambition of the Band. In 2019 the Bloomington Parks Department's Creativity Center staff approached the Band about locating in their facility located one block north of the BCPA. Rehearsal will be on the lower level with ample storage in adjoining rooms for stands, chairs, percussion equipment, and music. (Picture of Creativity Center)

The CCB held a social in 2017 as celebration of Mike Wallace's 30 years in music education. The Band has continued the social as a way for Band members to get to know one another.

### Fun Facts About Bands in Bloomington

- In 1932 the Alton Locomotive and Car Shop on the West side of Bloomington started a band to present concerts locally and in towns along the Alton railroad line that ran from Chicago to Alton, IL. Joseph Schneeberger, a shop foreman, organized the band. A. V. Manskey, a night agent, directed the band of 55 members. The band ended after two years.
- Mrs. Gray's College of Music and Dramatic Art, which began in 1907, was located at 911 North Main Street, Bloomington. In 1917 there were 1400 students, mostly in the field of music.
- The Bloomington Parks and Rec owns the CCB's bass drum.
- In summer 1978 the percussion section consisted of two ISU professors and their high school age sons.
- At the time the CCB was forming in 1978, the Pantagraph identified concerts by bands in area small towns including Atlanta, Clinton, Danvers, Saybrook, and El Paso. Many continue today.

- CCB played July 4 concerts in Miller Park until 2005.
- Two members of the current CCB played in the volunteer band in 1978.
- There have been marriages as result of people meeting while playing in the CCB, including John (deceased) and Char Fesler, Matt and Tori Dahim, and Time and Lynn (Deceased) Byrne.
- Some band members formed a Dixieland Band in the mid-1980s.

### Epilogue – Beyond the CCB

This article started by noting the long-term development of bands in the twin Cities. It is worth noting that this tradition continues. Here are some examples:

The Brass Band of Central Illinois which is based in Bloomington, Illinois was founded in 2005. The band regularly presents two indoor concerts each year (May and December) in Bloomington-Normal and multiple outdoor concerts each summer. The band is comprised of approximately 32 volunteer musicians who come multiple communities in central Illinois.

The 33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment Band was re-created in 1996 by musicians from Central Illinois. Like the original band, the musicians were recruited from the same geographical area in Illinois and come from all walks of life. The band is an authentic re-creation of the actual Civil War Era band that was mustered at State Normal University in 1861. ([www.33rdband.com](http://www.33rdband.com))

Community bands are active in nearby cities including Metamora, Danvers, Peoria, Pontiac, Charleston, Spring Valley, Streator, Rock Island, Carbondale, Gibson City, and Mattoon,