

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XLV

ISSUED IN JULY 1964

No. 7

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Bands and Orchestras

It was a common sight in early Davenport to see a group of local citizens parading through the city streets on Sundays and holidays headed for the picnic grounds accompanied by a band. Musical life in Davenport kept abreast of the times and was always ready to take advantage of progress. When the railroad was completed from Davenport to Washington, the Artillery Band, a Davenport organization, played on board the train on its first trip to that city. Later, when telephone lines were completed to Keokuk and Burlington, a group of Davenport musicians gave concerts over the long distance lines for listeners in those cities. Many Davenport musicians performed on excursion boats on the Mississippi River, journeying sometimes as far as Minneapolis on the steamboats.

Certain factors stimulated the growth of music in Davenport. One was the town's location as a gateway to westward migration. Another was the influence of the German immigrants who had settled in the city after the Revolution of 1848 in Ger-

many. Again, there were many educated, freedom seeking people among these immigrants, who were highly appreciative of their newly-found freedom and celebrated the Fourth-of-July with parades and picnics even when the "American" citizens did not. The Germans were a gregarious people who often sponsored community entertainments which took the form of dances, parades, picnics, and concerts. They worked hard all week, and many, in contrast to the attitude of their American neighbors (which was that the Sabbath should be a day of solitude and quiet), felt that Sunday should be a day of relaxation and merrymaking. Consequently, their Sundays were often spent at the local beer gardens and at the picnic grounds.

The more "Puritan" American citizens sometimes resented their German neighbors' freer conduct and, from time to time, expressed this resentment in articles which appeared in the local newspapers. Thus, the *Gazette* of June 23, 1859, declared:

Every Sunday afternoon and evening the strains of a band of music can be heard all over the city. Those in the more immediate neighborhood of the place of festivity complain severely of these public concerts on the Sabbath. Strangers are amazed at such proceedings. Citizens at home are ashamed of them. . . . Let them so regulate their Sunday amusements as while enjoying themselves in their own way, in no manner to interfere with the comforts and fixed way and opinions of others.

One of the major organizations to accompany the Germans to America was the Turner Society, an organization that became active immediately upon the arrival of the German citizens in Davenport. The philosophy of this society was the basic principle by which these Germans had lived. "Building a sound mind in a sound body" was accomplished by placing equal emphasis upon physical, emotional, and mental endeavors. Music and gymnastics were valued on a par. The characteristic activities of the Turners were frequently combined in public exhibitions which were called "concerts." These "concerts" interspersed orchestral music with gymnastic displays.

Antoine Le Claire, Davenport's pioneer citizen, was a prominent supporter of music even before the German immigrants came to Davenport. The first indication of the presence of instrumental music in the city was an announcement of a pioneer ball held at his home on January 8, 1836. Le Claire is known to have played the violin at some of the pioneer dances, and he may have supplied the music on this occasion. He was also one of the chief supporters of St. Anthony's Church. The music at this church, the first in Davenport, was furnished by a flute, clarinet, violin, and cello. In 1844, Le Claire presented a bill to the town council for the purchase of musical instruments for the Davenport Band which had been formed about two years previously. The bill was rejected, however.

The Davenport Band was first mentioned in the *Davenport Gazette* in 1842 when the editor expressed his gratitude to the group for a serenade. Other activities of the band that year and the following year included marching in the local Fourth-of-July parade and playing for the Temperance Society meeting. It appears that the band was short-lived, and it was necessary for the Moline Band to play at the Davenport fair in 1847.

New attempts were made to stimulate interest in the organization of a brass band the following year, and the new Davenport Band was formed under the leadership of John Pope. This band was still in existence in 1856 under the leadership of A. W. Read.

Evidence exists to show that the German citizens also had organized a band as early as 1852 when this group played for a reception for Congressman John P. Cook. The band also furnished music for the Whig rally later that year.

The Davenport Band and the German Band, representing the two factions of Davenport pioneer culture, acted as the stimulus for the principal bands which dominated the musical activities of the city for the remainder of the century. Since the bands were so numerous, only the most important will be discussed here.

Probably the most outstanding instrumental groups to be formed in Davenport were organized by Jacob Strasser, a German immigrant who was

to be the most influential musician in the city until the turn of the century.

The first mention of the German Union Band under Strasser's direction was in 1856. The activities of the group in the early years included providing music for picnics, excursions, dances, and for other social functions. Many of the concerts were held in the various beer gardens of the city. The blue uniformed band, varying in size from sixteen to thirty pieces, also participated in numerous street parades. At the beginning of the Civil War, it was engaged by General Baker to furnish music for the regiments. However, it appears that the band ceased to function temporarily, probably because of the war. In 1862, it was reorganized by Jacob Strasser, and although the group was referred to as Strasser's band throughout its existence, from time to time, several other musicians served as director. The most prominent among them were Theodore Reese and C. F. Toenniges.

In 1873, a subscription concert series was given at Schuetzen Park and continued to be an annual event until the turn of the century. Season tickets for these concerts were two dollars and fifty cents per family. Later, a winter series of weekly subscription concerts was inaugurated at Turner Hall. Drive-in concerts, a popular form of entertainment by 1886, were held in Central Park and sponsored by the Davenport Driving Club. Carriages were admitted for fifty cents; seats were ten cents.

In 1885, the Union Band became associated with the Second Regiment of the Iowa National Guard, and from that time through 1898 it was often referred to as the Second Regiment Band as well as the Union Band. In addition to its numerous concerts, the band accompanied Company B to its various encampments. In 1886, the camp was held at Oskaloosa, Iowa. Two years later, they went to Camp Crapo at Burlington. The band also assisted the Iowa State Band of Des Moines at the G.A.R. encampment at Dubuque in 1891.

C. F. Toenniges and seventeen members of the band volunteered to go with Company B to Cuba during the Spanish-American War. These men were sent to Camp McKinley at Des Moines. After a concert given at the Y.M.C.A., the Des Moines *Register* is quoted as saying, "The band from Davenport is regarded by judges of such music as one of the best in the state, if not *the* best." Because of unstable economic conditions at home, and because of the poor physical condition of some of its members, the band was forced to return to Iowa when the regiment left for Cuba. Thereafter, it was no longer called the regimental band.

The following statement from the Cedar Rapids *Republican* is typical of the attitudes expressed toward the band during its many years of existence: "Strasser's Band has justly won the reputation of being one of the crack musical organizations of the West."

Another popular Davenport band which developed in 1870 under the leadership of C. F. Schoenert was the Great Western Band. Among the many activities of this group was the responsibility of accompanying Company C of Muscatine to its military encampment. Under the leadership of Professor Ernst Otto, the first instrumental music teacher of Davenport's public schools, the band reached its peak. In 1885, the renowned trombonist Frederick Innes appeared in a concert with the Great Western Band. Proudly displaying their new uniforms, styled after those worn by the Gilmore Band, the Great Western Band presented a series of weekly concerts at Schuetzen Park in 1887, as well as a series of subscription concerts at Black Hawk's Watch Tower in Rock Island. The band participated in many of the local parades which took place in the city. Probably the largest celebration in which they marched was the first Labor Day parade in 1890. The Great Western Band was called the "largest band in Iowa, and one of the best in the United States." Later, this group became known as Otto's Orchestra and Military Band.

In 1890, a group of Davenport business men engaged Professor Otto and Henry Restorff to organize a new band of forty players. The group was to be supported by a stock company with a capital of three thousand dollars and was to be a professional organization with a certain number of

players whose sole occupation would be to play in the group.

Otto and Restorff were signed to a five-year contract; forty new uniforms costing eight hundred dollars were ordered from Philadelphia, and a twelve hundred dollar set of new instruments of the finest quality was ordered from Boston and New York. Shortly afterwards, the grand opening concert, featuring both the band and the orchestra, was given at the Burtis Opera House.

The band rapidly gained a reputation throughout Eastern Iowa and performed in various cities, including Burlington, Cedar Rapids, and Clinton. Its popularity was to be short-lived, however. The gradual decrease in the band's membership and the scarcity of employment led stockholders to sell the instruments in order to retain as much of their initial investment as possible.

No further mention was made of the band in the Davenport newspapers until March, 1893. Then, an article appeared stating that the Davenport Band, which was composed of forty to fifty members supported by one hundred thirty stockholders, had disbanded. Monthly expenses were eight hundred to nine hundred dollars. These were greater than the band's engagements could support.

One of the last outstanding bands to appear before the turn of the century was formed in 1897 by Albert Petersen, a protégé of Jacob Strasser.

Petersen was a principal figure in Davenport's musical activities throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. He began the instrumental music program at St. Ambrose College. His son, Arthur Petersen, is presently president of the Davenport local of the American Federation of Musicians.

The bands discussed here represent a fraction of the number that existed in early Davenport. Other bands which deserve to be mentioned include the following: Storm's Band (1850), Milo White's Band (1857), Rowley's Cornet Band (1867), Davenport Silver Band (1867), Colored Band (1869), Davenport Cornet Band (1882), Germania Band (1883), Metropolitan Brass Band, Timm's Band, The Light Guard Band, Biehl's Band (1880), St. Patrick's Band (1873), St. Mary's Band, Albert Wyatt's Band, Citizens' Band, Standard Brass Band, Davenport Artillery Band, The German Rifle Band, Cotillion Band, and Schillinger's Band (1893).

A fitting culmination of the community's Nineteenth Century musical development was the uniting of the professional musicians of the Tri-Cities' area in Local 67 of the American Federation of Musicians. On September 26, 1897, musicians of Davenport, Rock Island, and Moline organized for the common purpose of "enforcing good faith and fair dealing among its members, and to promote the cultivation of the art of music." Earlier,

some local musical organizations had actually accepted engagements without remuneration in order to prevent their competitors from receiving the employment.

Otto's Band was one of the last organizations to join the musicians' union. Because of its popularity in the area, the band had no trouble finding employment and therefore felt less need for a union. Shortly after the turn of the century, however, this band also joined. The local Tri-Cities Musical Society has continued to serve musicians of the Davenport area to the present, and it now has a membership of nearly one thousand musicians.

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