

Early Choral Groups

Choral organizations far outnumbered instrumental groups in Davenport. Participating in singing societies or attending concerts presented by these organizations appears to have been a favorite pastime for many Davenport citizens. From all indications, the German citizens of the community were unparalleled in their active participation in and promotion of these groups.

As was their custom, the Germans combined music-making with social activities. Consequently, many of the parties, which were held at Turner Hall and at the numerous beer gardens and parks of the city, were often referred to as "concerts." Since many of the musical gatherings took place on Sundays, the Germans were often considered ill-bred by the other citizens of the community. Witness the understated rebuke in this note in the May 28, 1859, *Daily Iowa State Democrat*:

There was a German concert and ball at the Flora Garden on Second Street, opposite Cannon's Mill last night. Lager was encored frequently. These concerts are to be kept up by the Germans every Wednesday and Sunday during the summer.

On special occasions the German singing societies combined for mammoth performances. A

typical Fourth-of-July celebration included a morning parade by the German singing societies and instrumental groups, which was followed by feasting, dancing, and singing at Schuetzen Park. One grand occasion in which the German singing societies participated was the dedication ceremonies of the Turner's new building in 1888.

Not all of the vocal organizations can be attributed solely to the German citizen's zeal for music, though German musicians figured prominently in the organizations and activities of nearly all of these groups. Choral organizations were present in Davenport prior to the German immigration to the city. The first singing society was active as early as April 4, 1844. A few years later, in 1848, M. J. Rohlf's organized the *Liedertafel*. This men's chorus was the predecessor of another long-lived German male chorus — the Davenport *Männerchor*.

In order to provide a more detailed account of the vocal activities in Davenport, each of the major organizations will be discussed separately.

The German's love for vocal music manifested itself in the formation of a men's choir by Reverend G. Wiehle, a local clergyman, in June, 1851. The German *Männerchor* was destined to remain active well into the 20th Century. According to a local Davenport newspaper account, only two singing societies existed in the United States in 1888 which were older than the Davenport *Män-*

nerchor. These organizations were located in Philadelphia and in Baltimore.

Forty members signed the constitution for the organization of this group in 1851, and officers elected for that year were August F. Mast (president), Gustav Schlegel, August Smallfield and Reverend Wiehle. Shortly after its organization on September 8, 1851, this group presented its first concert for the benefit of the German Lutheran Church. The reporter for the local newspaper made the following criticism of the concert in his review:

It was all Dutch to us, but we could perceive that their time and voices were good, so of course concluded that the whole performance was of the same nature.

During the early years of its existence, the *Männerchor* met for rehearsals on Tuesday and Friday evenings at Lahrman's Hall.

Since the *Männerchor* was affiliated with the Davenport Turner Society, many of its performances were given in conjunction with the gymnastic exhibitions of the Turners. The group also participated in many of the special activities of the Turners. It sang at the ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone for the new Turner Hall building in 1887, provided music for the anniversary celebrations of the society, and entertained for Turner subscription drives.

Many of the entertainments of the *Männerchor*

centered around the celebrations and benefit concerts sponsored by the German citizens of the community. It sang for the benefit of the German Free School in 1853, participated periodically in festivals perpetuating the memory of the German poet Schiller, and provided music for the benefit of the German patriotic fund to aid the widows of the German soldiers of the Franco-Prussian War. In 1889, the *Männerchor* and ten thousand German citizens of Davenport celebrated "Forefather's Day," the 206th Anniversary of the landing of the first Germans in America.

The *Männerchor* was a member of the Northwest *Sängerbund* and participated in the *Sänger-fests* (German singing festivals), traveling many times to other cities for the festivities.

On numerous occasions the Davenport *Männerchor* assisted the *Deutches Lieberhabertheater-verein* in its productions at the German Theater. A noteworthy production was the operetta, *Preciosa*, presented in 1858 by a cast of local talent. Frequently, concerts were given by instrumental and vocal groups of Davenport in conjunction with the Davenport *Männerchor*.

Another popular singing group of the city was the Philharmonic Society, which was organized on August 5, 1856, by some of the leading male and female vocalists of Davenport. Only capable musicians were invited to be members of this society. Rehearsals of the forty performing members were

held weekly at St. Luke's Episcopal Church and at Grigg's Hall. The first three concerts were given under the direction of Mr. Charles Davie at the Congregational Church. Members of the congregation objected to the presentation of concerts in the church, and subsequent concerts were presented at the German Theater.

At a meeting of the society in August, 1857, it was determined that Handel's oratorio, *The Messiah*, would be presented in its entirety the following spring. Jacob Strasser was secured to organize an orchestra of from twelve to twenty players to accompany this production. The use of the new Metropolitan Hall was offered at "liberal terms" by its manager, Mr. Hill.

The performance of *The Messiah* was staged on April 7, 1858, with a chorus of fifty voices, and an orchestra of twenty members. "Two celebrated performers," of Boston and Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Mozart, assisted in the presentation. The concert was a success and was repeated on the following two nights. Two other performances of it were given that year in Rock Island and in Davenport. Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation*, was also presented by the society that year at Metropolitan Hall.

Believing that the "knowledge of music is an unfailing source of enjoyment that will last a lifetime," the Philharmonic Society originated a singing class for children under the instruction of Pro-

fessor Hugo Braunlich, a leading musician of the community. The students met at St. Luke's Church, and particular attention was focused upon psalmody in the instruction. Tuition was three dollars for twenty-four lessons. A preparatory class for young singers was also originated by the society. This class, consisting primarily of young ladies who aspired to membership in the Philharmonic Society, was under the instruction of Mr. Charles Davie at the Baptist Church.

Several of the Philharmonic concerts and benefits were presented with vocalists and instrumentalists of the city, including the Davenport *Männerchor*, the Davenport Orchestral Society, and the Union Band.

In 1862, because of the loss of several of its members and by "common consent of those remaining," the Philharmonic Society disbanded.

A society with the same basic philosophy as the Philharmonic Society was established in 1865. Its purpose was the promotion of vocal culture, and it became known as the Mendelssohn Society. The weekly rehearsals of the group were conducted by Mr. J. C. Wallace, a local music store owner. He was assisted by Mrs. J. S. Altman and Professor R. Trench, who served as piano and organ accompanists.

One attempt to promote interest in vocal culture took the form of a convention sponsored by the Mendelssohn Society in 1866 and directed by Pro-



"Saenger Fest Hall," Davenport, Iowa.

William Paarmann Photo Collection

Saenger Fest Halle — Scene of the Great Midwest Music Festival of July 28-31, 1898. It was later renamed The Coliseum and was located on the S.E. corner of Myrtle and 4th Street, just across the street from the new Coliseum.



Courtesy Bawden Brothers Photo Collection

Claus Groth Hall at 1224 West 3rd Street. Used by many musical groups including the Harugari Society.



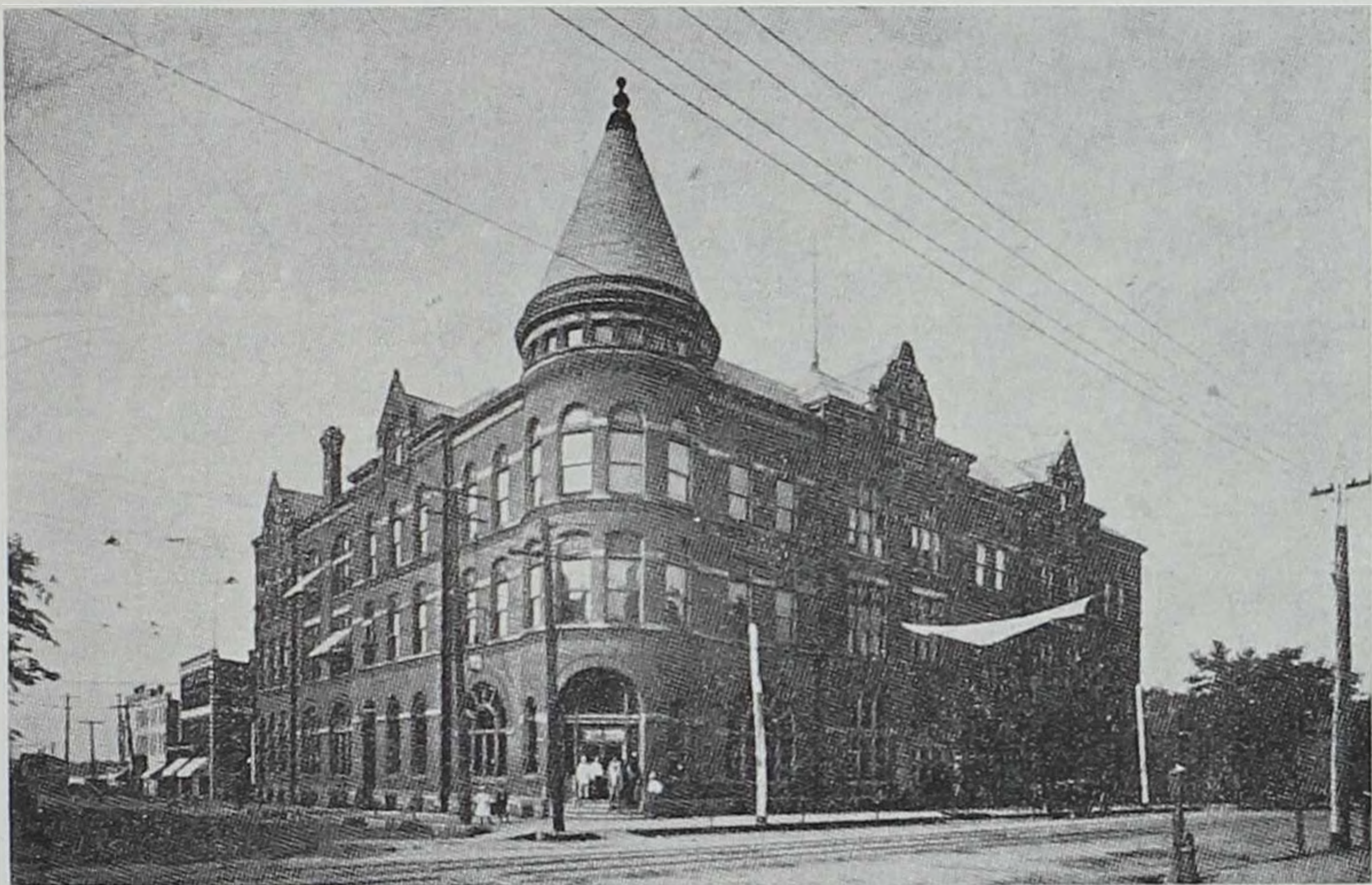
State Historical Society of Iowa Collection

Lahrmann's Germania Hall — still standing at S.E. corner 2nd and Ripley.



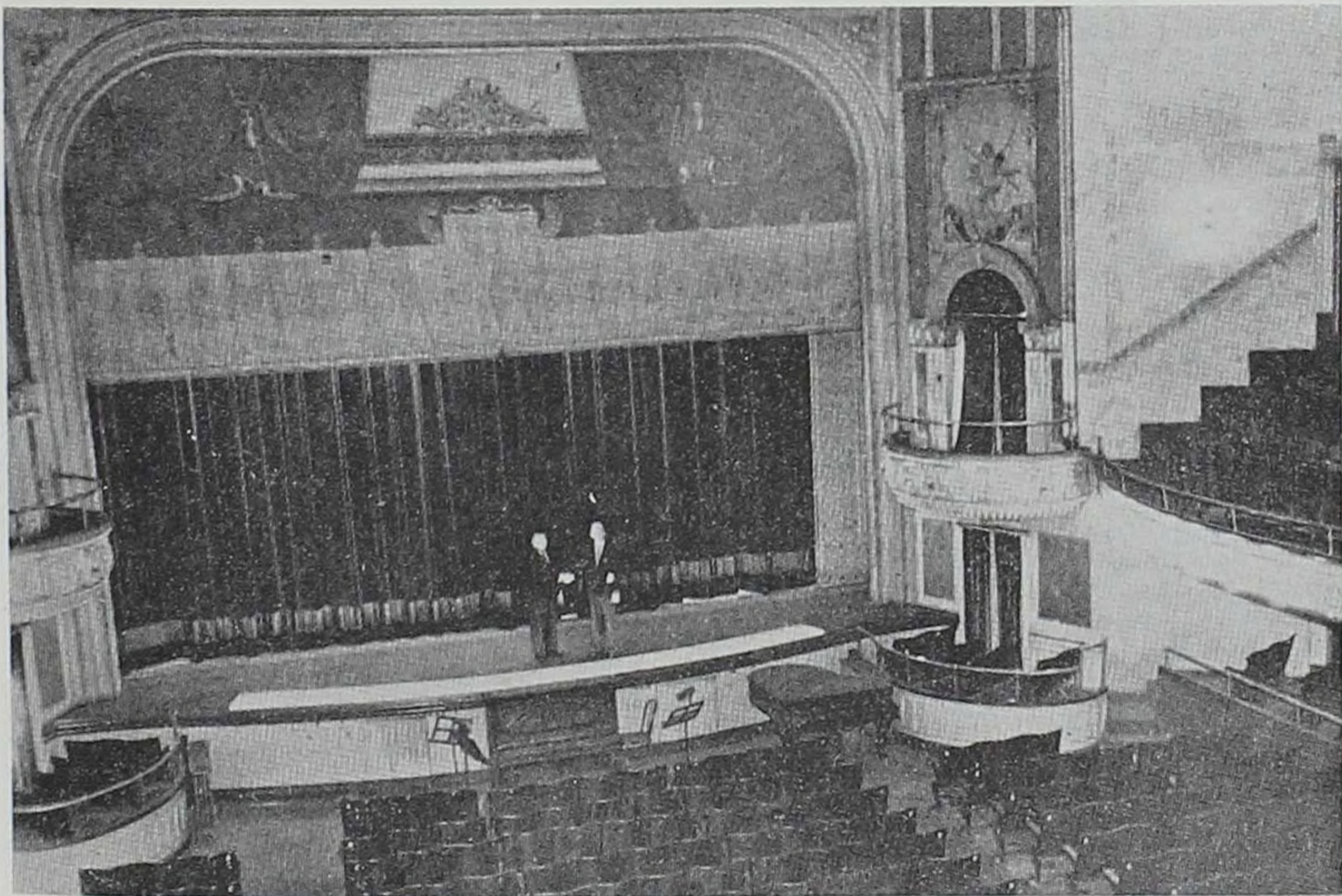
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First Davenport (Central) Turner Hall on S.W. corner 3rd and Scott.



State Historical Society of Iowa Collection

Central Turner Hall — built on site of first Turner Hall at 3rd and Scott in 1887. The site has now become a parking lot.



State Historical Society of Iowa Collection

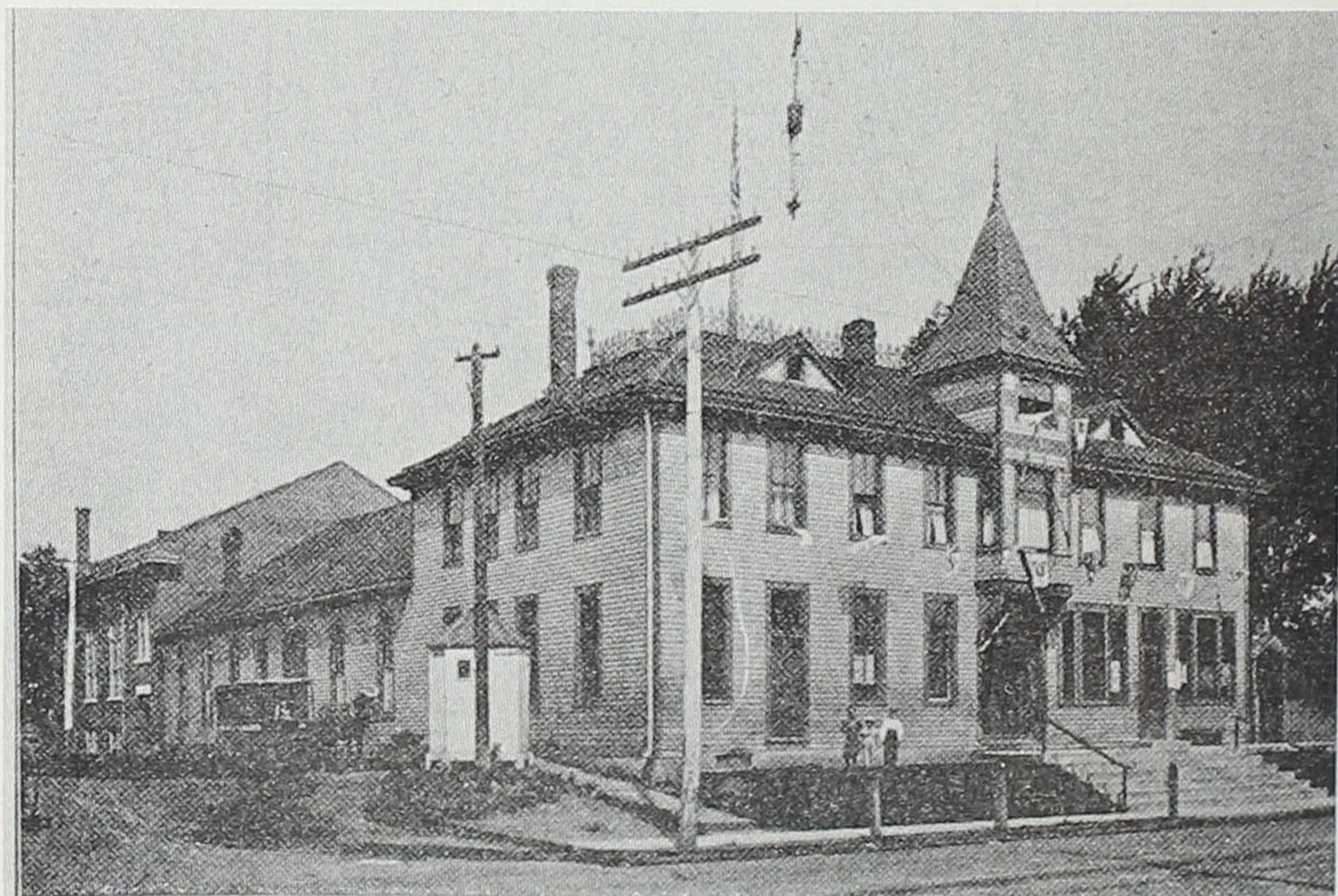
Interior of the Grand Opera House in Central Turner Hall. Scene of many concerts until converted into bowling alley in 1947.



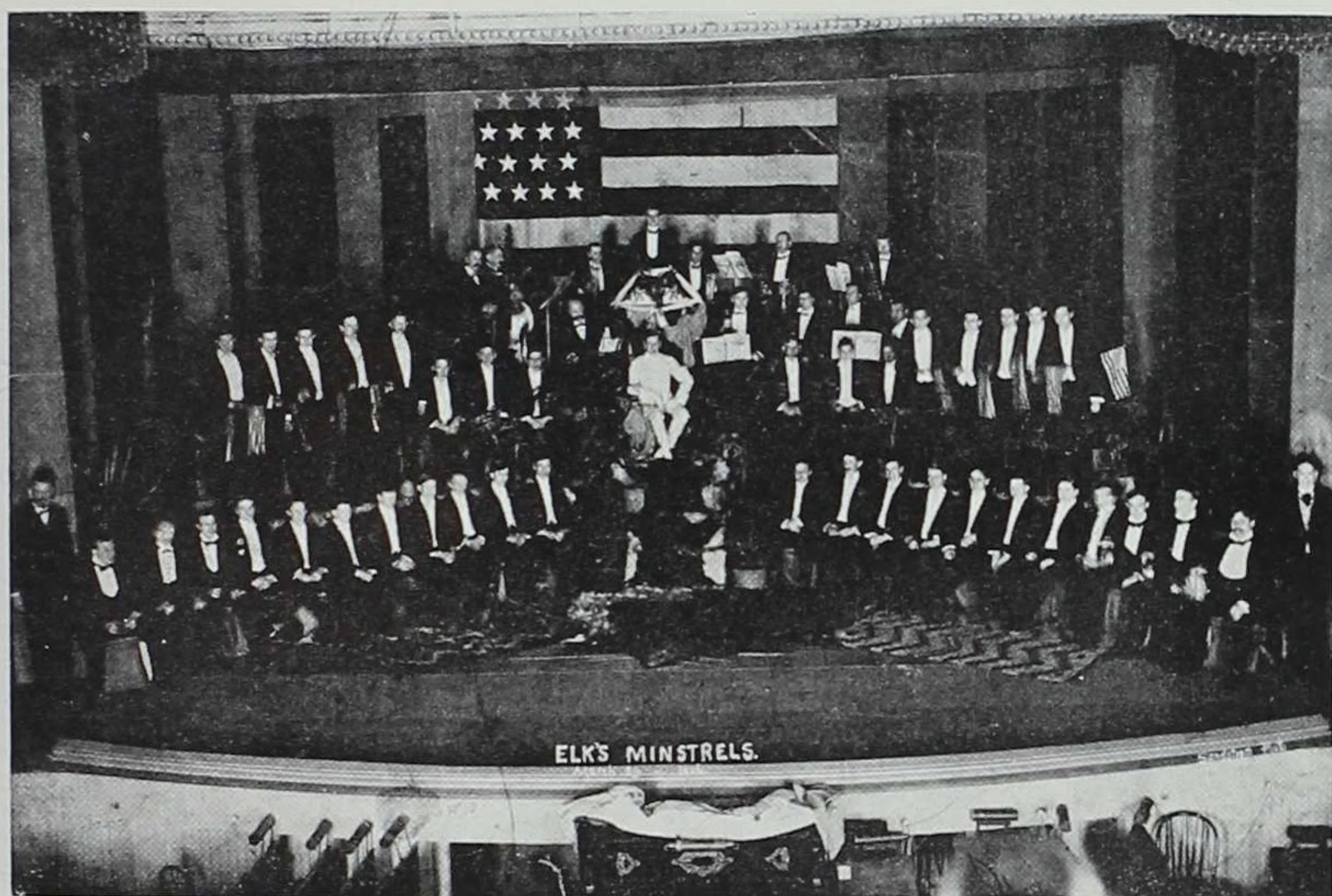
State Historical Society of Iowa Collection
Music Pavilion in Schuetzen Park.



State Historical Society of Iowa Collection
German Free School — Davenport Institute



State Historical Society of Iowa Collection
Northwest Davenport Turner Hall — 1602 Washington Street.



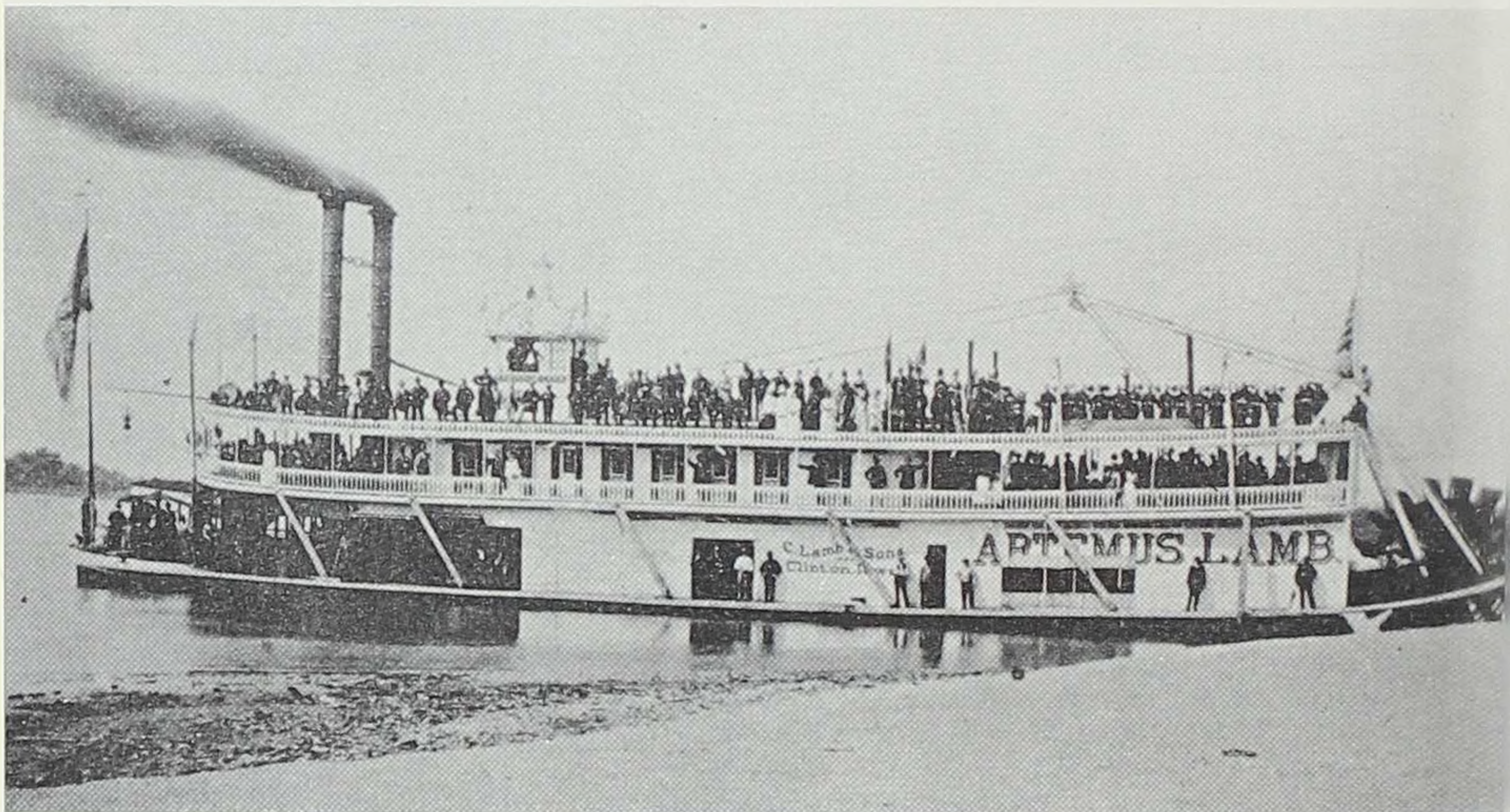
William Paarmann Photo Collection

The Elks Minstrels and band entertaining in the Opera House on March 5, 1906.



William Paarmann Photo Collection

Strasser's Band and Orchestra in the Band Shell at Schuetzen Park on July 4, 1900



William J. Petersen Collection

The raftboat *Artemus Lamb* with band lined up on the stern of the hurricane deck.



William J. Petersen Collection

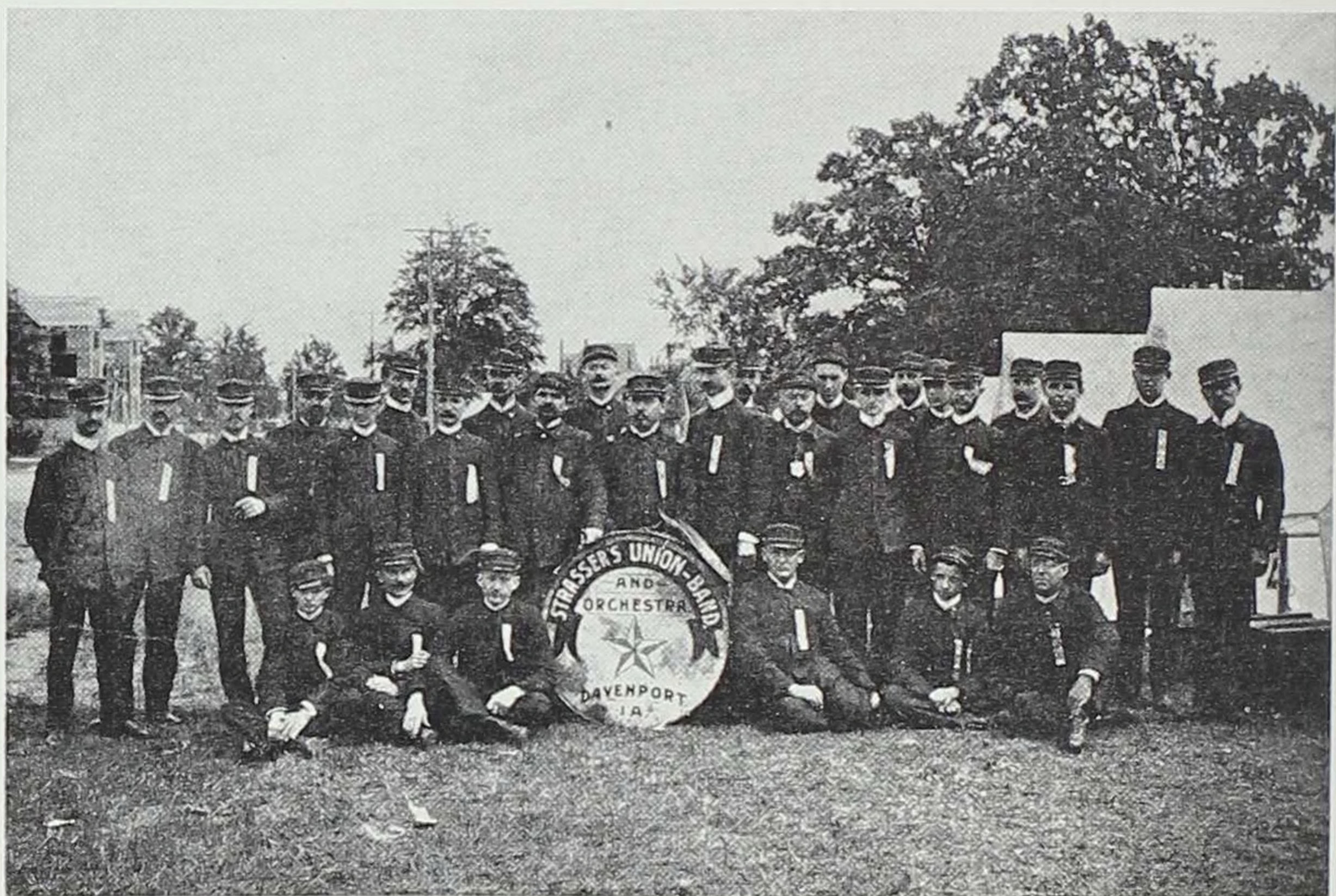
The raftboat *Musser* with band lined up on the bow of her hurricane deck entertaining crowd on shore before departure.



Courtesy Arthur Petersen
The Light Guard Band of Moline, Illinois . . . October 19, 1890.



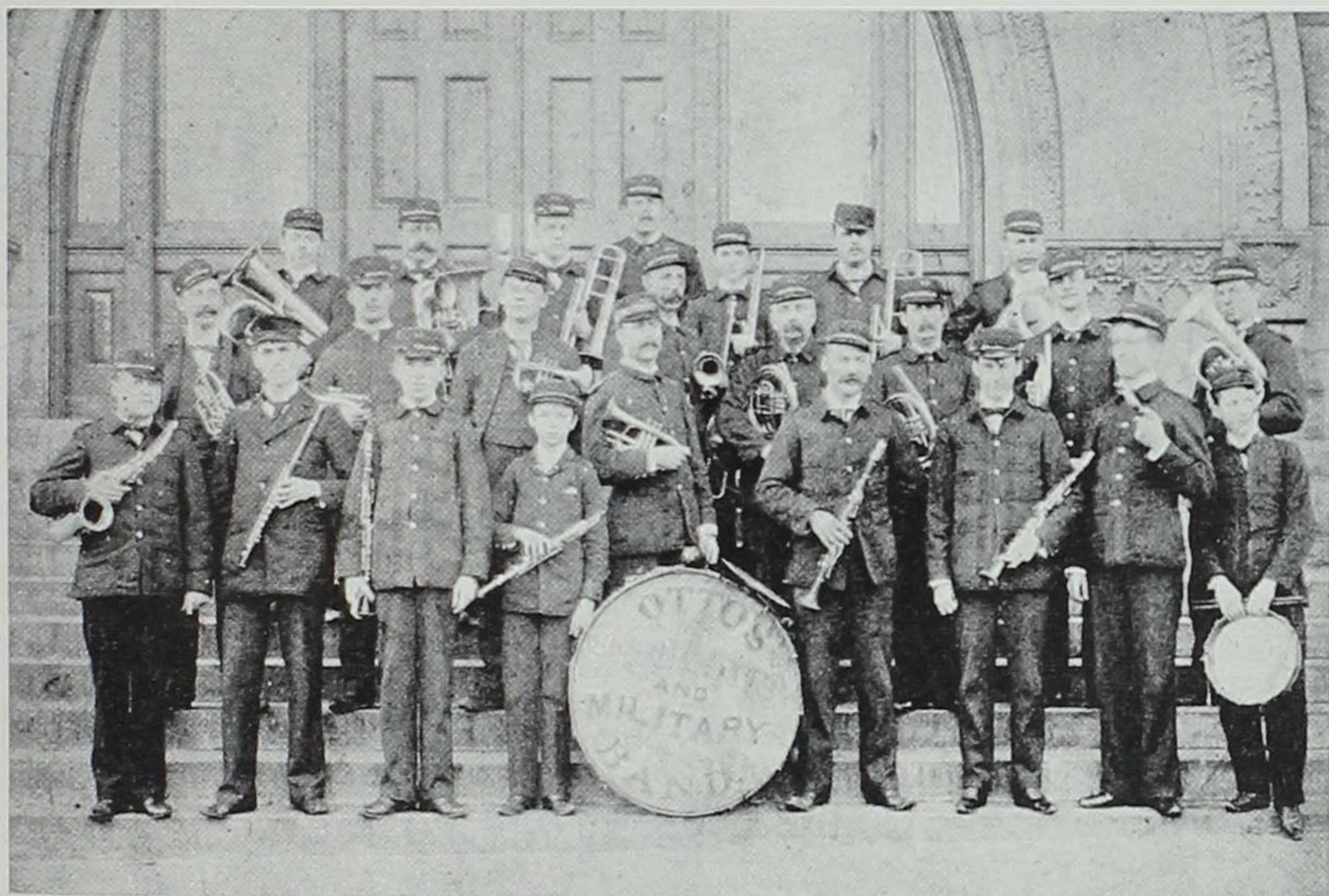
Courtesy Arthur Petersen
The Columbia Band of Davenport, Iowa . . . October, 1895.



William Paarmann Photo Collection
 Strasser's Union-Band and Orchestra of Davenport.



Courtesy Arthur Petersen
 Petersen Band and Orchestra of Davenport.



William Paarmann Photo Collection
Ernst Otto's Orchestra and Military Band.

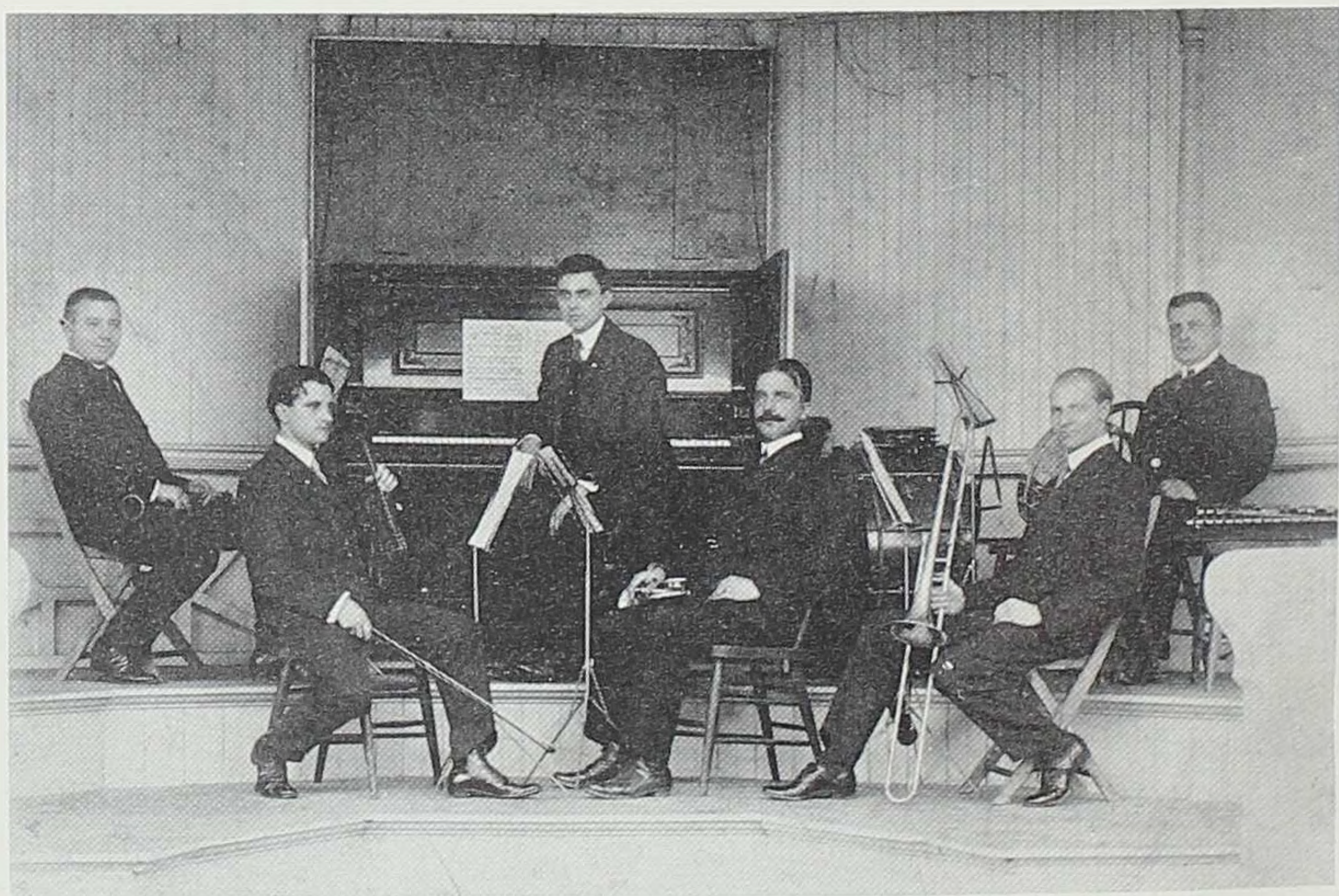


William Paarmann Photo Collection
Davenport Military Band and Orchestra.



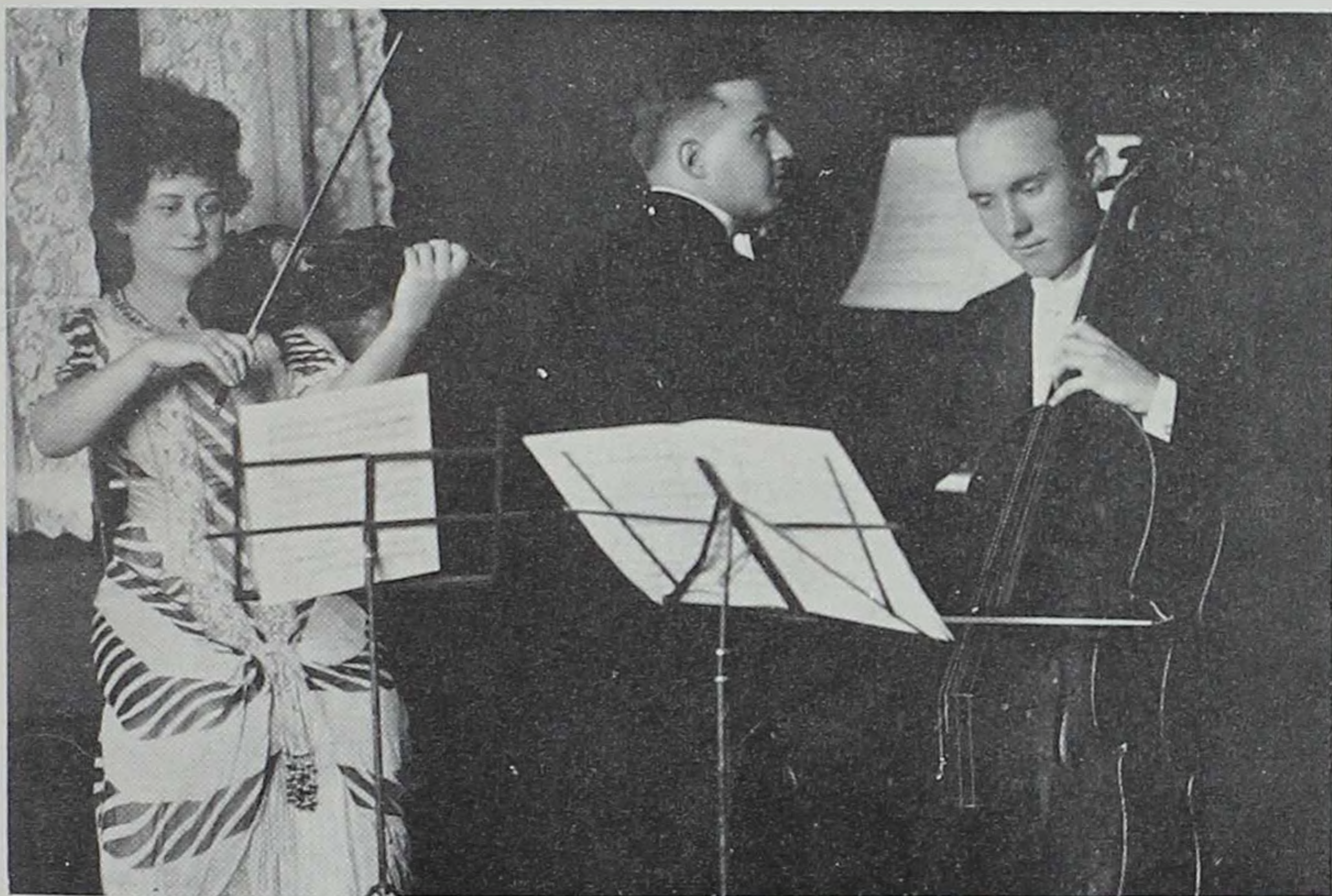
William Paarmann Photo Collection

The Criterion Orchestra directed by Will A. Paarmann.



William Paarmann Photo Collection

The Ogden Orchestra at the Blackhawk Watch Tower — Will A. Paarmann — violinist, and Charles Paarmann — drums.



Courtesy Arthur Petersen

The Gazella Webber Trio — Popular in Iowa and Illinois. Gazella Webber, violin; Ceno Petersen, piano; Arthur Petersen, cello.



William Paarmann Photo Collection



The Davenport Little Symphony.

William Paarmann Photo Collection



Courtesy Walter K. Voss

Davenport Kiwanis Quartet — National Kiwanis Champions in 1923.

The Paarmann Family Sextette.

William Paarmann Photo Collection

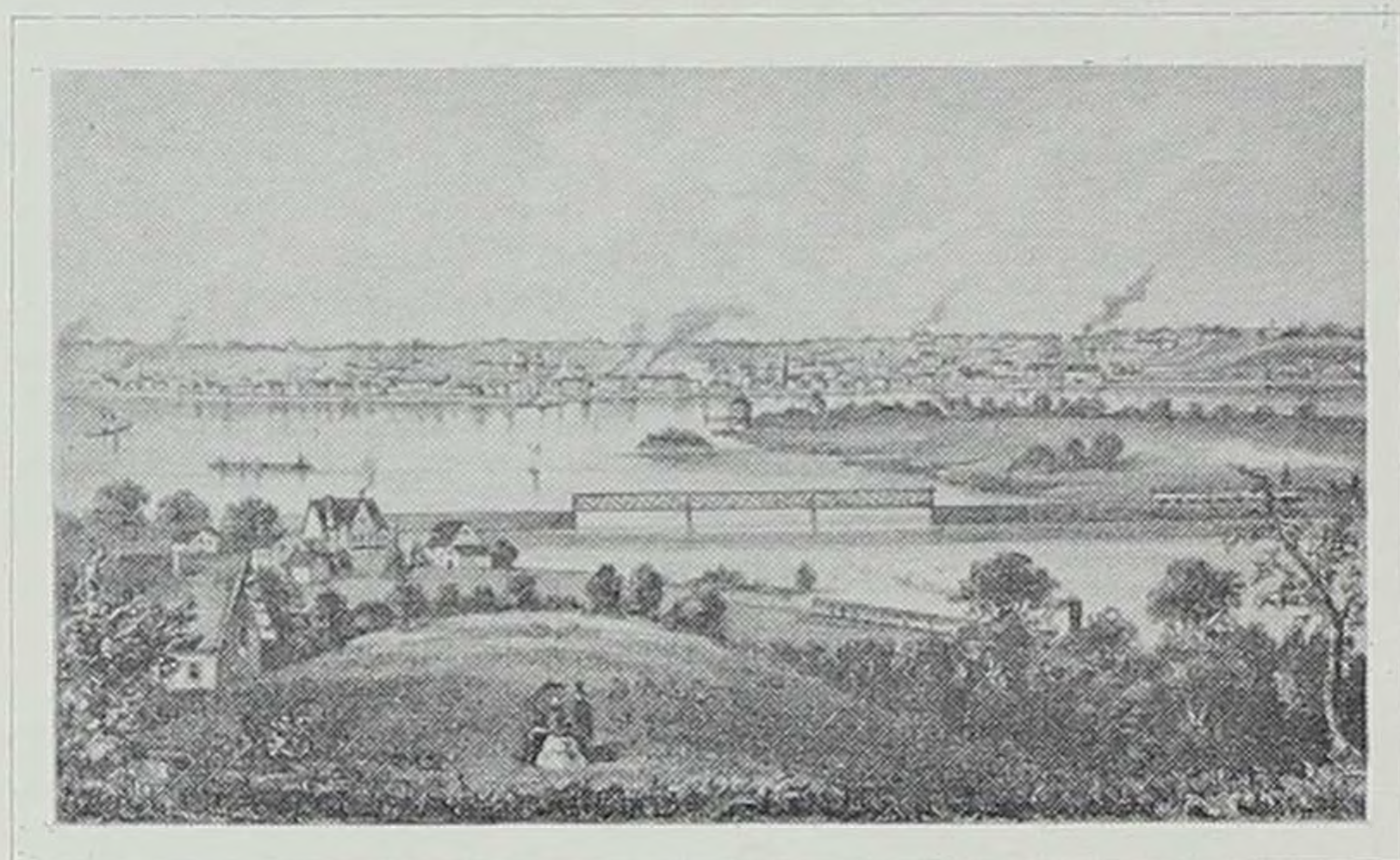


Davenport Music Teachers

1898-99

Ames Grace M Miss, (Vocal) 325 E 12th
 Anderson Caroline E Mrs, 1416 Farnam
 Atwill Alice Dutton Mrs, Library Bldg
 Biehl Anthony, (string) 211½ W 2d
 Branigar Gertrude Miss, 414 E Pleasant
 Braunlich Hugo G, 732 W 5th
 Bruning Ludovica Miss, 508 Scott
 Bruning Selma Miss, 508 Scott
 Burch Florence L Miss, 1632 Brady
 Chapman Kathryn M Miss, room 45 Whitaker Bldg
 Davis John W, es Hickory Grove rd nr limits
 Dittman Pauline O Miss, 1922 Brown
 Eagal Anna K Miss, 119 E Locust
 Eldridge Cora M Miss, 1340 Third av
 Fahrner Albert K, 632½ W 3d
 Finley Cecil Miss, Atlantic Hotel
 Finley Maud M Miss, Atlantic Hotel
 Forrest Lulu N Mrs, Wolfe Hall 1120 Main
 Friedrichsen Conrad, 403½ W 2d
 Gabbert Etta Miss, 1202 Tremont av
GRABBE LEE B, 113 W 2d
 Hapke Elsie Miss, 129 W Locust
 Hasson Flora A Miss, 1319 Ripley
 Jordan Florence A Miss, 2114 Brady
 Jordan Hattie L Miss, 2114 Brady
 Ketelsen Peter, 310½ Gaines
 Lesser Flora Miss, 516 W 3d
 Mitchell Charlotte E Mrs, 1309 Perry
 Nichols Eugenia Miss, 1013 Tremont av
OTTO ERNST, rooms 55-56 McCullough Bldg
 Paddock Mary E Miss, 428½ Brady
 Reese Rudolph T, 826 W 5th
 Schmidt Minnie M Miss, 220 E 3d
 Schmidt Olga Miss, flat C Cora Lee Roy Bldg
 Seemann Julius C, 1934 Ripley
 Sievert Clara E Miss, 2109 W 3d
 Smith Bertha Mrs, 512½ W 3d
SONNTAG BERTHA H MISS, room 53 McCullough Bldg
 Stolle Johanna E Miss, 222 W 16th
 Toenniges C Frederick, 704 Main
 Toll Hugo, 318½ W 2d
 Toll Rudolph, 1607 W 4th
 Tuey Margaret Miss, 623 Fillmore

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BROBSON,
PHILADELPHIA.



VIEW OF DAVENPORT, IOWA.

The Davenport Schottisch, composed by Charles P. Burr, was copyrighted in 1858. The *Davenport City Directory* for 1866 listed Charles P. Burr as a grocer.

DAVENPORT SCHOTTISCH

Composed by

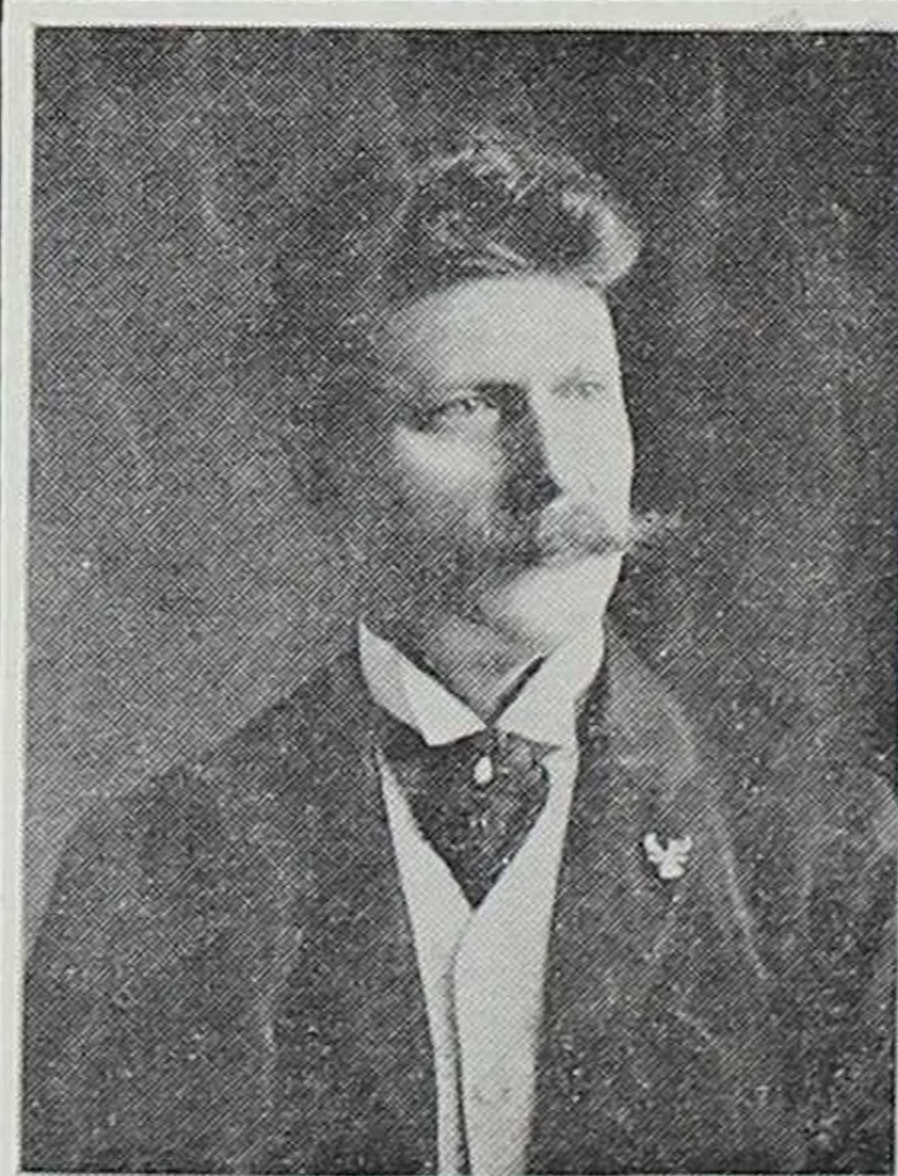
CHARLES P. BURR.

William J. Petersen Collection

Samentation

Valse Lento

COMPOSED
BY



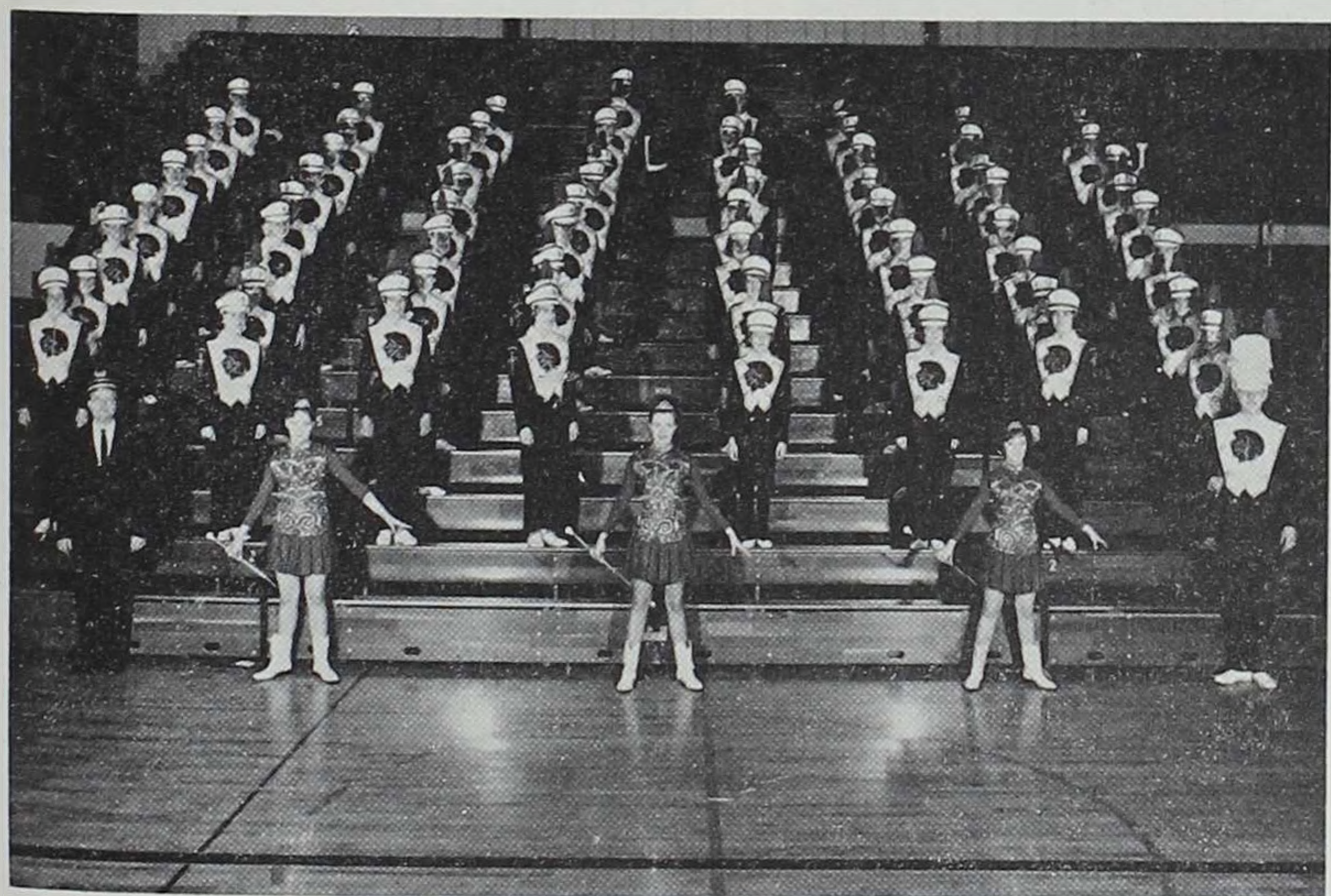
ERNST OTTO.

William Paarmann Photo Collection

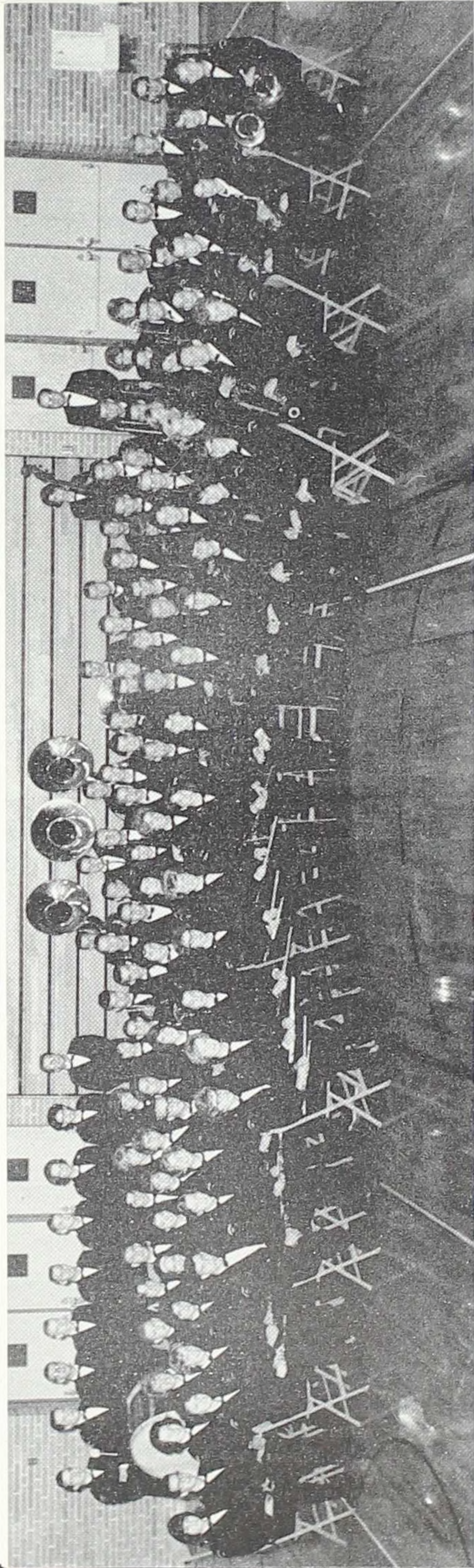
Ernst Otto was a talented composer, a distinguished band and orchestra leader, and a music teacher in Davenport schools.



William Paarmann Photo Collection
St. Ambrose College Orchestra in 1920's — Will Paarmann, Director.

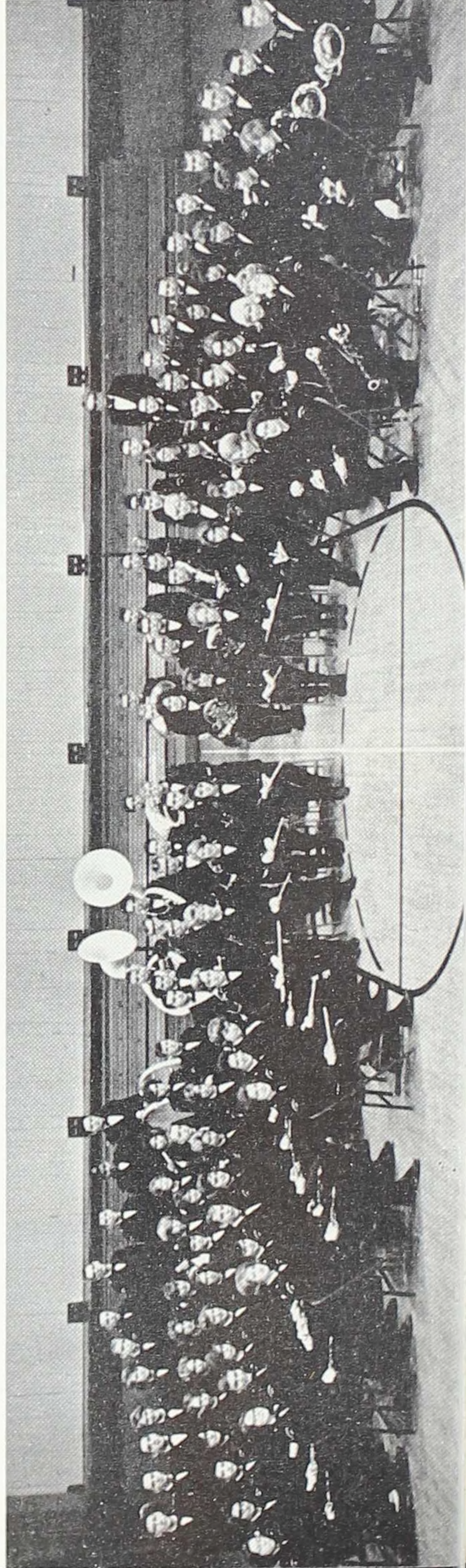


William Paarmann Photo Collection
The Assumption High School Band — Carl Paarmann, Director.



Davenport West High School Band — Ralph Paarman, Director.

William Paarman Photo Collection



Davenport Central High School Band — Ernest Moorhead, Director.

fessor J. F. Fargo of the Normal Academy at Bloomington, Illinois. At the close of this convention, a public rehearsal consisting of choruses and small vocal ensembles was held at Le Claire Hall by the Society, which then had approximately one hundred members. As a result of the success of this first convention, the Mendelssohn Society was instrumental in securing Professor Fargo's Normal Music Academy for Davenport. The Academy offered daily classes in vocal music for a six to eight weeks' period during the summer months, at a fee to pupils of fifteen dollars a term. The plans were that the Academy would continue for five years, and complete scholarships would be sold for seventy-five dollars.

The regular concert series of the Mendelssohn Society consisted of four concerts for which subscriptions were sold in advance. A limit of one hundred subscriptions was sold. Each ticket admitted two persons to each of the four concerts, the first of which was given in May, 1866. The Society developed the practice of presenting publicly their last rehearsal prior to a concert, and fifty cents admission was charged.

Occasionally, concerts were also given in Rock Island, and these too were generally well attended by Davenport people. When the Society performed choruses from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at Babcock Hall in Rock Island, it was reported that of the four hundred persons attending the per-

formance over half were from Davenport. The last mention of the Mendelssohn Society concerned a concert presented in 1878 with Strasser's Orchestra.

A male chorus was organized on October 17, 1896, at the office of Dr. J. R. Kulp, a local dentist. C. F. Toenniges was chosen as director of the Schubert Glee Club which originally consisted of four tenors and eleven basses. Rehearsals were held at the Unitarian Church on Wednesday evenings.

This chorus presented its first concert on January 12, 1897, at the Turner Grand Opera House. The group, which had by then grown to thirty members, was assisted by Strasser's Orchestra and Mrs. Lillie Stibolt Hanssen, a soprano from Davenport. Another concert was given on April 27 with Strasser's Orchestra and a Davenport vocal group, the Ladies' Harmonie Society. Louis Knocke, an active Davenport vocalist, had this to say about the glee club in *The Weekly Outlook*:

Unquestionably the Schubert is far in advance of the average male chorus, and gives ample evidence of careful training on some of the most essential features of chorus singing, namely, precision, attack and rhythm. The voices are melodious, harmonize well, and the parts are well blended. If anything, the bass is a trifle heavy. But this can hardly be counted as a fault, for a strong bass makes a good formation upon which to build rich harmony, and is also great support to other voices. The work of the chorus in unison passages is particularly fine. This is another evi-

dence of good training, for it requires as much practice, if not more, to render a unison passage well than to produce good harmony. The general verdict is, that the Schubert Glee Club is a credit to the city, and deserves the hearty support and encouragement of our citizens.

Many other choral organizations existed in Davenport from time to time, and only the most prominent ones have been discussed here. Others which should be mentioned are: The Harmonie Society (formed in 1876), Concordia Society (1859), The Apollo Club (1877), Davenport Glee Club (1885), Davenport Musical Society (1886), North Davenport Musical Association (1866), Arion Club (1887), Davenport Madrigal Club, Lend-a-Hand Chorus (1886), Colored Ladies' Chorus, and Lotus Glee Club.

Many other German singing societies, which received much less publicity than, for example, the popular *Männerchor*, existed in Davenport. These include, among others, the *Germania Sängerkhor*, the *Gesang Verein Teutonia*, the Northwest Davenport *Liedertafel*, the *Eintracht* Glee Club, the German *Liedertafel*, the *Harmonia Damen* Choir, the Claus Groth Singing Society, the Turner Singing Section, the *Thalia Verein*, the *Vorwaertz* Singing Society, the *Harugaria Männerchor*, and the Davenport *Sängerbund*.

More than a dozen small vocal ensembles contributed to musical entertainment in Davenport. The most popular among this group was the T. K.

Quartet. The letters T. K. meant *Truen Kameraden*, but "Tom Kats" came to be the more playful expansion of the term. In 1886, the year of their formation, the T. K.'s sang for benefit concerts, but their primary engagements involved serving as the choir in many of the local churches. Quartet choirs were popular at this time, and once this group journeyed to Minneapolis to serve as the choir in a church there. Many of the vocal quartets of Davenport served as the nucleus for the future development of church choirs in the city.

In this account of the choral groups of Davenport, it has been noted that the Davenport *Männerchor* was the organization of greatest stability among the vocal ensembles of the city. The development of such larger singing societies as the Philharmonic Society, the Mendelssohn Society, and the Schubert Glee Club, indicates the persistent presence of a desire for vocal activity in the community. Davenport was never without a large choral ensemble for any great length of time.

WILLIAM F. BETTERTON