

Brass Bands and Parades

In my boyhood brass bands and parades were indispensable to American life. Political rallies, lodge events, conventions, civic affairs, and picnics called for marching through the streets. My home in the heart of town may have had something to do with the spell parades cast upon me. My ears rang with band music; I knew all the marches and discussed them knowingly with other fans when new compositions appeared.

The first performance of a new march was a great occasion, for these were the days of John Philip Sousa, Patrick Gilmore, and Arthur Pryor. I recall a Sunday morning when I was standing at the corner of Third and Scott streets with a group of youngsters waiting for a streetcar to take us to a picnic at Schuetzen Park. Petersen's Band, speeding our departure, played a brisk new march, and I asked Henry Sontag what it was. "It's Sousa's *King Cotton*," he said, "and it's a dandy."

Bands did a lot of marching during political campaigns. The intensity with which party members yelled for their candidates at rallies week after week remains vividly in my memory. In the evening the streets of Davenport were bright with torchlight parades.

These had become popular in the days of Martin Van Buren and survived until the 20th century. Men carrying torches with a large reservoir of kerosene could send up a big flare at the command: "Now then, Sambo, blow your flambeau!" I find it hard to believe that any political battle can be as bitter as that waged to defeat William Jennings Bryan in 1896. The Republicans lined up all factory employees. Democratic friends of ours who worked in a planing mill in Rock Island were ordered to carry torches in Republican parades or quit their jobs.

Conspicuous among marchers on patriotic days were members of the G. A. R., the Civil War veterans. They had adopted a civilian uniform of blue cloth, usually double-breasted, and wore wide-brimmed hats of blue felt with a gold cord and the letters GAR in a gold wreath at the front. Some wore their blue suits every day, but they did not always wear the insignia on the hat. The veterans were present at all patriotic celebrations and invariably spoke in public on the Fourth of July and similar holidays.

A popular method of orators was to call out the names of famous battles and ask those who had fought in them to raise their hands. "How many here marched with Sherman to the sea?" It was an effective method of what is now called audience-participation. But when these veterans addressed a schoolroom, which they usually did

before Decoration Day, they rambled on about military matters that were quite confusing to children. The first general I ever saw was Addison H. Sanders of Davenport, known to his cronies as Add, and he was a great surprise. He was a runt of a man, with a long white beard, and looked like one of the seven dwarfs.

Jacob Strasser was the principal band leader in Davenport in my father's day, and his name still clung to the organization directed by Professor C. Frederick Toenniges. Albert Petersen and Ernst Otto organized bands, and in my high school years I sometimes accompanied Petersen's Band to Black Hawk's Watch Tower and helped in the box office. Later on, Ellery's Band brought unwelcome competition to Davenport. Channing Ellery was a business man who recruited a band among Italian musicians and employed the fiery Guiseppe Creatore as conductor. Creatore would work himself into an acrobatic frenzy in the finale of selections from *Carmen* and *Il Trovatore*. The Davenport bandleaders, who conducted with dignity, were contemptuous of Creatore's exhibitionism and resented Ellery's intrusion into a field so poorly paid that many musicians had to pursue a secondary occupation, such as cigar-making. Ellery's Band was never a financial success, but Creatore rounded out a career in Chicago and New York.

My parents enjoyed attending dances when I

was a little boy and invariably took me with them. Dances were called balls. There were also masked balls, or masquerades, which we attended as spectators. The best were given by the Thalia Society and the *Turngemeinde*. I was never bored at dances, for the moment we arrived I seated myself behind the violinists and remained there entranced the rest of the evening. My favorite violinist was Henry Sindt, who became my first violin instructor. Always a part of the orchestra at these affairs was a broad-shouldered, friendly man named Thiess Herzog, who played the bass fiddle. When Harry W. Phillips became mayor of Davenport about ten years later he astonished everybody, and especially the musicians, by naming Herzog chief of police.

Until the First World War a dance orchestra relied chiefly on strings to carry a clear melody. It comprised first and second violins, bass fiddle, cornet, and woodwinds. Such a group did not use a piano. Drums and traps came into use later, as did the saxophone. Waltzes, strongly influenced by Waldteufel and Johann Strauss, made much use of thirds. My parents danced the polka, rhinelaender, and schottische, all of which were displaced by the two-step. *El Capitan* and *Georgia Camp Meeting* were the most popular two-steps of my boyhood; the latter belonged to the cake-walk series that brought in syncopation, and ragtime dominated popular tunes for two dec-

ades. Among dances that were played endlessly were *Creole Belles*, *Grasshoppers' Parade*, the *Zenda* waltzes, *Loin du Bal*, and *After the Ball*.

My father, who allowed himself to be drafted for all sorts of tasks that entailed work and little credit, was treasurer of the Columbus Day celebration of October 11, 1892. This brought close to home the significance of the occasion. It is difficult to convey the earnestness with which all America observed the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival on San Salvador; in a way it was evidence of the pride Americans felt in the growth of their country. I recall my distress when my father reported that Columbus' ship would not carry a full set of sails in the parade because their height would interfere with trolley wires. When completed the ship bore no resemblance to the *Santa Maria* of our schoolbooks; it was like a long fishing schooner with three dwarfed masts. The school children paraded through the streets in honor of Columbus and massed on the Court House grounds singing patriotic songs, of which *America* was then considered our national anthem.

Although the anniversary was observed nationally in 1892, other celebrations took place in 1893 and were spurred by the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which lasted over six months. For this event school children prepared exercises in penmanship, all of which were carefully bound up and sent to the Fair for exhibition.

We worked diligently to turn out clean pages of script. If this effort was a device to spread news of the Fair, it also served to give children a part in this national enterprise. I used to wonder in what nook of that fairyland, the White City, our exercises were being displayed. My father, who, like most Davenport adults, took in the Fair, reported that he had been unable to find them, but he returned with so many souvenirs that I was easily comforted.

Practically all the men who came to our house wore some kind of emblem in their coat lapels or on their large gold watch chains. They were, I learned, members of the Knights of Pythias, Odd Fellows, Woodmen, and other fraternal orders. Now and then I heard about picturesque rituals in which a man who performed humdrum duties by day, such as selling groceries, was able to put on the fantastic robes of a mythical potentate at night. Most of the organizations were insurance devices, with dues acting as premiums. The Masons had no insurance scheme.

My father was a Mason and also treasurer of a lodge of the Ancient Order of United Workmen. As such he was often consulted by men who arrived carrying books and letter boxes. Soon I became aware, by their earnest tones, that a crisis was impending. It seemed that when the lodge was young, members were easily acquired and benefits were promptly paid. But as the lodge

grew older, it began to lose a disproportionate number of members by death, and benefits could not be paid without special assessments. The recruiting plan was faulty, and before it was remedied some of the older organizations failed. My father eventually resigned, glad to have been of help to his associates and thankful that he had protected his family in its growing years.

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