

LEBANON HAS HAD A BAND FOR
MANY YEARS FIRST IN 1890

Henry F. Seeger
Was Pioneer in
Musical Circles

BY CARL & HELEN ESKE

History tells us that as people from other countries emigrated to America, they brought with them very few material possessions but brought all of their traditions and love of things beautiful. These things took up little or no space in a trunk or suitcase.

We also become aware of the fact that these immigrants settled in areas similar to their homeland where they could continue the trades they knew. Since Wisconsin had much rich farmland, many German farming people settled here.

In compiling a history of the Lebanon Band, it is necessary for us to keep in mind that, among other things, our German forefathers brought with them a great love for music. It was that love for music in the heart and soul of one man who planted the seed, which, after over more than a half century of loving and, sometimes perhaps, anxious care, grew into an organization which is close to many of us and is known as the Lebanon Band.

In 1885 a German-born parochial school teacher came to serve Immanuel Lutheran Congregation in Lebanon. Henry F. Seeger was one of those German immigrants who brought with him not only a love for music but a wealth of knowledge on the subject as well. He served not only as the teacher of Immanuel congregation but was also the organist for the church services and choir director. In addition to the organ, Mr. Seeger also was a master of the violin and piano.

Through his education in music, he acquired knowledge of band instruments, enabling him to give instruction on a wide variety of musical instruments. He taught adults as well as children how to play instruments, giving an hour lesson for the astounding fee of 10 cents.

First Band in 1890

After a five-year period, some of this musical instruction had, undoubtedly, developed to the point where it could be used for ensemble experience, for in 1890 Mr. Seeger organized his first band at the Pankow Church. On its membership roster were included such names as Moldenhouer, Pankow, Dornfelt, Setzkorn, Sitz, Woltman and Piritz.

Mr. Seeger organized another group in 1898. This group was a flute band, had a membership of 22 and operated as a musician group for five years. Its members were boys of school age -- 10 to 13 years.

In 1903 Mr. Seeger organized the Immanuel Lutheran Church Band in Lebanon. Its first membership included the following people: John Christian, Louis Christian, Charles Marlow, Herman Grube, Leonard Eska, Fred Baumann, Ed. Turke, Otto Arndt, Emil Dobbratz, Emil Schuett, John Woltman, and Gust Bliese. In several years the membership grew and averaged 20 members.

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Self-Supporting Group

This band supported itself by playing for church picnics, mission festivals, Fourth of July celebrations, etc. The band received \$25 to \$30 for an endeavor of this nature. Members paid a 25-cent fine for absence from rehearsals.

Mr. Seeger, as director of this band, received a salary of 10-cents per member present at each rehearsal. He died in 1929 after 45 years of service to his community.

After the death of Mr. Seeger, Otto H. Blase, who was the solo clarinetist in the band, became its director. He directed the band

for a period of five years. After his resignation, the band rehearsed without a director for a year.

The community of Lebanon included two village areas where the surrounding farming people could obtain the services of a blacksmith, grocery and hardware stores, churches as well as "places of gemuet-lechkeit". The village to the north was known as "The Trechel" until 1910 when the Chicago Northwestern Railroad made its way through the village. With the addition of this new service it became known as New Lebanon. The village to the south was dubbed Old Lebanon. It was in Old Lebanon that the Immanuel Congregation was located.

Also Had Band

New Lebanon also had a Lutheran church -- a congregation which called itself St. Peter's. This congregation had also organized a band. Its first director was William Tietz who was succeeded by the pastor of that church, the Rev. Theodore Eggers who now resides in Watertown.

The following names appeared on the roster of St. Peter's Band: Frank Schwefel -- bass drum, Albert Tessman -- snare drum, William Braasch -- bass, Theodore Schlieve -- baritone, Frank Maas -- trombone, Edward Werth -- alto horn, Edwin Neitzel, Carl Maas and Otto Braunschweig -- cornet, and Max Uttech -- tenor.

On Nov. 28, 1939, St. Peter's Band and Immanuel Band merged to form the Lebanon Band. This group hired as its director, Floyd Bordsen, who was then directing the Watertown High School Band.

Mr. Bordsen served as director from Dec. 11, 1939 to Jan. 22, 1940 when he resigned to accept the responsibility of directing the old Watertown Cavalry Band.

Mr. Bordsen introduced the Lebanon Band to E. J. Woelfer who had directed the Watertown Cavalry Band for a number of years. He accepted the responsibility of directing the Lebanon Band and did so from Jan. 30, 1940 to the year 1943 when he became ill and died. It was during Mr. Woelfer's years with the Lebanon Band that this group reached its highest membership. Records tell us that the band numbered 57 during this time.

Other Directors

After Mr. Woelfer's death, John Woelfer directed the group until Mr. Bordsen was rehired. Mr. Bordsen again directed the group until 1947 when a new vocational position made it necessary for him to move to Chicago where he died on Feb. 4 of this year.

Ray Frederick, Arthur Rupnow and Bill Kehl, all of Watertown, shared the responsibility of directing the Lebanon Band until 1956. At that time another director of the Watertown High School Band was hired. His name -- Walter Stamstad. Mr. Stamstad has been with the band since 1956 and is still its director.

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Three Generation Members

It is interesting to note that this Band included several three generation families. Three generations of the Braasch family are presently members. They all play the bass horn. Three generations of the Schlieve family add their talents. Theodore played baritone, Edwin plays saxophone and Wayne the clarinet. The Eskes have contributed one generation of bass drum via Carl, another generation of trombone via Wilbur and still another generation of clarinet via Cheryl Lee.

There are numerous other two-generation families who have contributed and still are contributing. The band also has two members that played in the group for 50 years, namely the late John Christian and Albert Kuester, who is still an active member. There are 45 band members at this time.

One can hardly find a better example of the German people's love for music than right in our own beloved Lebanon Band. How fortunate for us that it did not require several trunks or even one suitcase for our forefathers to bring with them a love for music-- a marvelous heritage which gave them much joy, is giving us joy, and will continue to give generations yet to come that same joy!