

Marshall City Band

By Ruth Medsker and Ryan Tyhurst



The Marshall City Band was organized in 1875. Professor L. A. Wallace organized the group. Professor Wallace was a professor at the college where the North Elementary School now stands. The band originally had 15 to 20 members.

During this era, any band was generally a brass band. Brass bands consist of cornets, alto horns, trombones, baritones, tubas, snare and bass drums. Woodwind instruments did not become popular until the early 1900s.

The bands generally played songs of their own eras. John Phillip Sousa and Carl King marches were popular pieces. Along with marches, overtures, such as the William Tell Overture, Peak Daub, White Cavalry, Point and Pheasant, were played. A couple of "pop" songs of that era were "Marching along Together" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game".



The bandstand we have today was built in 1929. Most of the materials were donated, and all the labor was volunteer labor to build the bandstand. Since then the roof has been redone and new support posts have been installed. The bandstand has not been changed dramatically.

Harold Ellshoff, director of the Marshall City Band, is the sixth director of the band since its formation in 1875. The first director was founder L. A. Wallace. After L. A. Wallace, came William Rector, Harold Bright, Herman Diekoff, Drew Casteel, and Vaughn Arney. When Harold Bright retired to teach at Indiana State University, Vaughn Arney took his place. At that time Mr. Arney was a teacher at Marshall High School. Mr. Arney retired in 1964. When Arney retired, Harold Ellshoff took his place as director and still holds that position today.

No one knows why Marshall decided to have a city band. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, small brass bands were forming in many communities throughout the United States. Some bands folded, but others kept going. Some credit has to be given to schools and teachers for continuing to keep music as part of students' curriculum.

Originally one had to be out of high school to play in the city band. However, as the decades passed, things have changed. Now, you must be at least a freshman in high school and have

played for several years. Harold Ellshoff made the statement, "And it's so funny that when a lot of the high school kids started to come, a lot of the older fellows started to drop out."

The band is still all-volunteer, but members receive payments for their efforts. Years ago when the band was first started, players used to pass a hat to try to raise funds for music and new instruments. Sometime later, composer Carl King formed the "Iowa Band Law". The Iowa Band Law makes it possible for towns to set up a fund for a city band. Each town has individual funds for different organizations. Funds such as a Library Fund, School Fund and other such funds help with city programs. This band law made it possible for a certain amount of every tax dollar to be paid into the City Band Fund. Even with the help of tax dollars, the Marshall City Band was still not receiving enough money. So the band approached the city council to ask for some money. The council decided to match any amount that was made from collections. This enabled the band to buy more music and to pay the members.

The band generally starts rehearsals the first part of May. The first performance is on Memorial Day. Concerts can be heard every Friday night in the months of June, July and August. The concerts end about the time school starts.

To be a member of the Marshall City Band one no longer has to reside in Marshall. Though it would be helpful, it is not required. Any person in the area that has the time and energy to practice and perform every week is welcome. Sometimes the band has to ask people to come from out of state to fill vacancies in a section.

The city band mainly performs only in Marshall. In the past few years, however, they have gone to Greenup and West Union (two small towns in the area) to put on a performance. In 1976, the Marshall City Band was lucky enough to travel to Washington D.C. to play for the United States' 200th Birthday. The city band was even fortunate enough to be mentioned with a picture in the March 1998 issue of the "National Geographic". This picture was used to illustrate one of the many sites on the National Road.

The band has a special fund to help promote itself. This fund is used to send perspective members to a band camp of their choice offered through Eastern Illinois University. The scholarship is offered to freshman students here at Marshall. This fund has been in existence for the past four years.

Director Harold Ellshoff sees the band continuing into the year 2000. He says "As long as I'm here, and as long as somebody will take over, it will always be here." Ellshoff says that Marshall is so used to having the city band as a part of its functions that if it is ever dropped, the home-style feeling will be lost forever.

Besides the hometown city band we have today, there have been several other bands in the past. One was the Rector Juvenile Band. This band was a band for high school age boys. Not much has been recorded about this band. A few other forerunners of the band were the Citizens Coronet Band and the Rector Band. The Citizens Coronet Band was an all brass band with only one snare and bass drum. The Rector Band was the same, only later did it become known as the city band. The later bands started to perform with woodwinds and more percussion instruments.

Today's city band has changed in many ways, but yet it is still the same. Different horns have been used, different pieces of music have been played, and different generations of people have performed. Yet the band is still a group of people that gathers to play for the enjoyment of others. This is what makes the city band so special to the community of Marshall. This band will be around for many years to come as long as people continue to express feeling and emotion through music.