

## Lenoir High School Band – A Brief History

North Carolina Bandmasters

November 12, 2017

Bill Witcher, Presiding

1. Origins
  - a. How did a small furniture town like Lenoir with a student population never over 500 have of the premier band programs in the country?
  - b. Simple answer – Captain Harper
  - c. Town band origins to 1897 and evolved into the American Legion Band after WW I **(pictures)**
  - d. 24 instruments donated in 1924 to the new LHS built in 1922
  
2. Captain James Cunningham Harper – born Feb. 17, 1893 **(pictures)**
  - a. Family history
  - b. Land for town given by his great-grandfather, a civil war veteran
  - c. Family in furniture and banking business
  - d. Graduated from Davidson College in 1915 with a degree in economics
  - e. Played violin in the DC Orchestra and served as its conductor his senior year
  - f. Graduate school at UNC in finance and banking – 1916, played in Univ. Orchestra
  - g. WW I as an officer in 1917, hence the Captain rank and title that endured his entire life
  - h. No degree in music
  - i. Worked in banking in NYC and WS
  - j. Met his future wife, Charlotte Critz, in WS – her mother was a sister to R.J. Reynolds
  - k. As wealthy as Captain Harper was through his family's banking and furniture interests, this paled in comparison to his wife's wealth
  - l. Served as principal and band director 1924-29, and then as the band director only
  - m. Elected to ABA in 1934, and only the second HS band director in ABA at the time; elected President and served in 1956; first HS director to ever serve as ABA president
  - n. Passed away on Feb. 16, 1986 at 92 years young, 1 day before his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday
  
3. Facilities and Equipment
  - a. Band Building built in 1937 and doubled in size in 1962 due to 9<sup>th</sup> grade being sent to HS **(pictures)**
  - b. 3 stories – 1<sup>st</sup> floor had office, boys locker room, and music library; 2<sup>nd</sup> floor had all practice rooms and girls locker room; 3<sup>rd</sup> floor was the rehearsal room and a storage room
  - c. Owned their buses and equipment truck (pictures)
  - d. All practice rooms had an intercom system to check on practicing
  - e. Uniforms included in Lenoir Band logo on everything – buttons, belt buckles, and the emblem on the marching cap

4. Personnel
  - a. Only 3 head directors in its 53 year history! And all in our Hall Of Fame and Past Presidents of NCBA
  - b. Captain Harper, 1924-58 Bernie Hirsh, 1958-69 John Miller, 1969-77 **(picture)**
  - c. Captain Harper was smart enough to hire the best personnel as specialist
  - d. Every student at LHS had a study hall period, so band students were assigned to the band building and a practice room during their study hall
  - e. Noted personnel included:
    - Leonard Meretta – went on to Univ. of Michigan and Director of Bands at Western Michigan
    - Robert Klepfer – went on to Mooresville HS and Past NCBA President for 2 different terms and Hall of Fame, 1940's
    - George Kirsten – NCBA Past President, Hall of Fame, and one of my predecessors at HHS, 1939-56 **(pictures)**
    - Robert Clark – Hall of Fame, late 1940's
    - Ralph Ostrum – Former solo cornet with the Sousa Band in 1928 and wrote the LHS and HHS fight songs, 1940's and returned in 1954 for 3 years
    - Camilla Graeber – Hall of Fame and one of predecessors at HHS
    - Beaver Robinette
  
5. Noted performers that came to perform with the band
  - a. Walter Vassar – Met. Opera (1947)
  - b. Dorothy Kirsten – Met. Opera soprano star and sister to George Kirsten (1948) **(pictures)**
  - c. Elwood Gary – Met. Opera tenor star (1950)
  - d. Percy Grainger (1951), played solo piano, with band, and conducted **(pictures)**
  - e. Merle Evans – long time Ringling Bros. band director – 2 occasions **(pictures)**
  - f. LHS Band played at ABA Convention in Charlotte with guest conductors, Karl King and William Revelli
  
6. Notable Alumni
  - a. Bob Love – Hall of Fame – HHS and South Caldwell **(picture)**
  - b. Ed Whitener – Hall of Fame – William Lenoir MS
  - c. Wilfred Roberts – Dallas Symphony for over 30 years, bassoon
  - d. Lynn Bernhardt – Met. Opera Orchestra for 35 years, percussion
  - e. Joe Robinson – NY Phil. For 27 years
  - f. Bob Palmer – Composer, Past President, Hall of Fame – Brevard HS
  - g. Claude Baker – Composition Professor at IU for 35 years, Euphonium
  - h. Ross Tolbert – Principal Tuba with Minn. Symphony for 35 years
  - i. I join James Stokes as a former student teacher who have been elected into the Hall of Fame
  
7. Typical Day for a LHS Band student (Wednesday in the fall)
  - a. Marching practice at 7:29
  - b. School start at 8:30 with a practice period

- c. A Band period
  - d. And, 3:30-4:30, a full rehearsal after school
8. In 1929, the depression hit and the state cut taxes for schools in the domestic arts, music, art, and agriculture. Localities had the option to vote these taxes back in to be paid locally. Lenoir voted to continue the tax so their band could be maintained, the only locality in the state to do so! Therefore, the LHS Band had the distinction of being the oldest, continuous band until its closing in 1977.
9. Encourage everyone to read the history of NCBA on our website, particularly focusing on the work that Captain Harper and Herb Hazelman did to make our organization what it is today. It is quite an interesting read, especially our contest system. This evolved from a true contest, to a contest-festival arrangement, to our present MPA with sight reading! Here is a typical list of judges from the late 1940's through the early 1960's

Edwin Franko Goldman

A.A. Harding

Ernest Williams

Frank Simon

Herbert L. Clarke

Glen Cliff Bainum

A.R. McAlister

William Revelli

Mark Hindsley

Alfred Reed

A very young Fred Fennell in 1955!

Interesting facts: -Sight reading ended in 1949 and 4 required selections were to be prepared!

-In 1948, graded music was introduced for the first time instead on being classed by school size

-In 1970, required selections were lowered to 3

-In 1972, required selections were lowered to 2, with the march being judged

-Sight reading reappeared in 1993?