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"Sound Your A": Saga Of Band Tradition

The Inimitable "Davvy" Tells The Story Of The Young Men's Orchestra And That Peerless Chillicothe 20th Century Band

By GILBERT A. CHANDLER

"STRIKE up the band," is an old story to Mr. Charles A. Davenport, Ross county's representative to the General Assembly. But "Sound your A," or whatever it is that orchestras do when they get ready to swing out, albeit 1936 style, is an even older tale.

For as boy and man, Mr. Davenport, to historians, is not certain which, has been identified with Chillicothe's orchestra and band life since 1886. And as he looks back over the years, he finds that this tale's passed with future assurance as the happiest of all.

This started out to be a story about the old 20th Century Band, which Davenport organized and outfitted back in the horse-and-wagon days. But before that band came into existence, there was the Young Men's Orchestra, from which the band sprang.

What Sinclair's flaring band was to an earlier generation, the Young Men's Orchestra had for decades been Chillicothe's music-making parade. It played everywhere and for everything, from a show opening to high school commencements and church gatherings. It was formed in 1886 or 87, Mr. Davenport recalls, when Wilbur Hemmerle, lead tuba; first violin; Howard Cryder, second violin; Lee Fiehs, trombone; Alf Ireland, drums; Jay Throckmorton, piano; and Mr. Davenport, cornet. Mr. Cryder, a contractor who built the West Broad street bridge over the Scioto river in Columbus, now is located in St. Louis, Mo., and Miss Elizabeth Callahan also of Columbus, succeeded Mr. Throckmorton as pianist, and continued as accompanist until her marriage to Mr. E. S. Wenck, editor-operator of The Gazette. After her marriage, the orchestra underwent changes, but the considerable expanding leader added other instruments were concerned. Among its new members of the Masonic Opera House orchestra, Ad. Throckmorton, Frank Burkam, Charles Snyder, Frank Davis and Edward Kellhofer, the latter to have being succeeded by Ernest Kellhofer, his brother.

Others who belonged to the orchestra at one time or another, Davenport recalls, were Walter Townsend, Walter Ireland, who succeeded his brother Alf as drummer; and Thomas M. Armstrong, who died only a few days ago. Tom Armstrong played for John McCardle, who later drank at the Keith Theater orchestra in Columbus.

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WE PLAYED many of the big dances at Portsmouth and once went as far as Celina, Davenport recalls. Jackson, Wilmington, Washington C. H. and Circleville were also added with the music of the Chillicothe troupe, to which, Mr. Davenport relates, fell the honor of opening Jackson's Casbola, the first dance hall to open in that part of the state. Al Jolson, his movie idol, was the favorite dance step, as it had been in the days of the famed Hunters' band. This is now used by the Jolson boys in their movie roles.

It was about 1898 that the 20th Century Band was organized. It made a hit instantly and within two weeks the band was able to purchase uniforms from Rubenstein's, Cincinnati. The band was located in rooms now occupied by Katz's store and Lazar barber shop on North Paint street.

First leader was Miles Townsend, now an attorney in Cleveland, and the first engagement was at a Red Men's celebration in Circleville. That fall, the 20th Century Band was the band which accompanied the Knights Templar to Cleveland for their conclave.

Those were unsophisticated days, Davenport says, when to "attend the boys"—for a social—was considered a big treat, and Chillicothe's band filled perfectly into the picture. Sunday nights, the band would march to the park to concerts in the City Park. These were first promoted by the late J. C. Goltz, president of the First National Bank; upon his death, the Sunday night concerts were assumed by the late Captain H. B. McKee, an officer of the same bank. At his death, the allotting was done by individual subscription.

Members of the original band in addition to Mr. Townsend, were: C. F. Meier and C. A. Davenport, cornet; Albert Tritschler and Miles Townsend, alto; John McCardle, baritone; Louis Parks and Andrew Eberhard, trombone; James R. Jackson and Charles Eberhard, clarinet. The bass drum was played by either Oliver Van Cleaf or Thomas M. Armstrong, the latter also playing the snare drum stunt between Carl H. Rinkwitz and Walter Ireland. A later base drummer was Charles Rockhold.

In 1900, the band was reorganized Mr. Townsend as director after several years, and under his baton, the band was expanded until it included musicians from Ashville to Waverly. When Co. went to Columbus, on its way over there, the 20th Century band went along. But that was one of its last trips for several years, for Townsend soon left Chillicothe to live and it was not until after the Armistice that it was reorganized and assumed the name of I. O. O. F. band. Will Graf was leader and Adam H. Ulrich the manager.

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Mr. Davenport, who blames the director soprano, depends upon the band's music during all of them, for one having the name of 20th Century, or the newer I. O. O. F. does.

Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Springfield are the cities Major Davenport had the Chillicothe band down their streets in days gone by. But Mr. Davenport, from his vantage point in front, feels the craze for band music is dying away.

"Why, the last time we went to Cleveland, we had to hire a bus to take the band to the hotel. Nobody would have dreamed of such a thing in the old days."

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THERE'S somewhere for him, too, in the fact that the old necklace are still active, and that some had the talent to advance in the musical world—Wallace Woodward, who is now with the Sousa band; Fred Weaver, who played with the famed Souza; Harry Dahlen, now with Goldman's band in New York City; and Fred and Lloyd Hoffman, who, with a name change, went on into dance band work.

To them all, Mr. Davenport, now the only active local musician among that original group, extends a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and the wish they could all be together once again, and "Strike up the band."

DIES IN COOPERSTOWN

COOPERSTOWN, N. Y., Dec. 23.—(AP)—Death came last night to Spotswood D. Brown, 62, New York attorney and a native of Cooperstown, after a long illness. Brown served as counsel for the Chemical Bank of New York. His widow, six sons and a daughter survive. Funeral services will be held Monday.

ART DIRTY WORK

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP)—The Samuel J. Wurtzel syndicated to Hollywood to produce motion pictures, learned in succession starving cast. A late delivery in neighbors they figured. Next morning, they discovered a live iceberg from their own lots.

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THIS DAY, of all days, is one for universal happiness — let's all be happy, friendly and joyous, and forget for today all the discords, sorrows and disappointments that may exist at other times of the year — it's CHRISTMAS, let's make it merry!

SHOUT a friendly greeting to neighbors and friends as you pass them by — let the kindness and joy you felt inside add to others' happiness! So in this spirit, our entire organization sends heartfelt greetings to you — to everyone — to the entire world! A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

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Merry Christmas
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