

Blowing Since 1875

...And Acton's Bands Play On

MUSIC HAS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE LOCAL CITIZEN'S BANDS THROUGH THE YEARS HAVE ADDED THEIR SHARE TO THE RICH HISTORY OF THE PROGRESSIVE TOWN



AT ACTON FALL FAIR, local bands have presented musical programmes ever since they have been organized in Acton. Here one of the Citizens Bands had their picture taken on the afternoon of a fall event in the early 1920's.

Music has played an important part in the life and growth of this community. From the early files of the Free Press we find frequent accounts of concerts being given by musical groups of instrumentalists. On summer evenings, of course, was the ideal time for such an event and the citizens of Acton would gather around the band stand on Bower Avenue or on Willow Street and pass the time in promenade.

Apparently there were several locations for the band stands. At one time the concerts were played on a stand near the town hall, the location which is between the hall and Pines house on Willow Street. Concerts were also played from a stand on what is now the vacant lot beside the Stacey Glass factory or Bower Avenue.

Of course the whole town would be at the concert promenade and everyone would have friends and it was apparently quite a social event.

The bands were not in vogue without incentives and contests which included the bands of the county were held at the Annual County Fair at Milton. Of course these fairs were not without excitement and it seems that at the fair of that excitement was very high. From the Acton's Fair Days we glean the following paragraphs. Acton Band had a reputation in those days and was not afraid to enter the annual band competitions at the County Fair at Milton and at other places. Norval had a splendid brass band and the members were highly thought of. Oakville Band was a cracker jack. The thirty-six members thought to

themselves. They drove into Milton in a gaily decorated double team wagon. The members were in spick and span uniforms, their instruments were polished like looking glass and they strode up to the band-stand with all the airs of Here the competing heroes come. There was just a tiff of disdain in their greeting of the little back woods bands from Acton and Norval but of course they were less condescending to the Milton chaps. Well the contest was finally announced the leaders drew their positions. The three expert judges laid them to the little tent where they were supposed not to know which band was playing. The words proceeded but to mark the results of each as they passed the selection was gradual.

It was reported that each band as a picture band played an overture, a march, a waltz and the National Anthem. The first three bands in concluding their list of tunes played the same standard setting of "The Queen" but Acton had a special setting which had been arranged by Bandmaster Hill, which gave the overtones undertones and tune in a new and very taking form. This evidently pleased the judges more than a little. The contest being ended the judges emerged from their tent and after a neat speech by one of their number in which each of the bands was complimented for their good points. Mr. George

Lambert, one of the three, asked for the bandmaster of the band which had played the last time. John Hill stepped forward, somewhat timid and abashed and the wealthy old judge handed him the red ribbon and expressed his pleasure that Acton possessed such an excellent musical organization as Acton Council Band.

Needless to say the Oakville Bandmaster and his members were filled with consternation, not to say anger, at the presumption of the judges to pass them over and award them only second place. Immediately his order was given to "Pack up your instruments and equipment and get out of town." The next winter of the afternoon of Acton, Milton and Norval Bands were given a full program of music. To the delight of the band members the band of Acton

in 1914 the Acton Citizens Band captured first prize at a competition in Acton under the leadership of A. H. Bennett and in 1919 the Citizens Band under Mr. McEachern won a prize at Waterloo after several attempts at their coveted awards.

Indeed Acton has always had a good showing in the musical field and that little incident reminds us of the day not very long ago when the band of boys and girls under their leader, Charles Mason, went down to the stiffest competition they could find and at the Canadian National Exhibition they topped

all the other entries by a good margin and came home with a shield to prove it, also a sum of money that was added to a uniform fund.

That was the day everything seemed to go wrong. All the other bands had smart snappy uniforms and Acton had a home made affair. But in all the humility and forgetting all the showmanship Acton won the prize. There was no help for it on the ground then. Charles Mason, who had conducted the group from their scales to a prize winning band.

The same band topped their class at Waterloo Musical Festival in the same year. Having a first band, like Waterloo, they did not expect it with a large contingent that they were not counting on at all.

Concerts are still given in the late years and they have a reputation in the band-stand that was erected at the same time as the park gates. After celebrating the anniversary inauguration of Acton, the remaining bands had more work to do to erect the present substantial park gates, ticket office and band stand and many good concerts have been enjoyed in the beautiful Prospect Park.

Any members of the various Citizens Bands will remember the practices as memorable events. It was always difficult to count on having any practice hall very long and the travels were frequent. John Hill, the granddaddy of the

band, not only conducted them and paid all the expenses but also supplied the organization with a place to practice, which was in a store, the building now occupied by J. McMullen. The Town Hall also served as a practice room and the constant travel led the band to erect a hall of their own, which is the part of the Arena which they now occupy.

The Town Grant early given to Acton Band by the citizens, who also improved the lot of the band, and the leadership of Charles W. Mason, who was a band leader in Acton for many years, formed the nucleus of the band which has had an important part in the history of the town.

Remember When . . .

Back in 1881
July 1 there was a fire in the town. It was a very big fire and it burned for several days. The citizens were greatly annoyed at night with the clatter as they tried to get to bed. They had a public nuisance.

August 1 a travelling water struck Acton on Thursday and gave an exhibition of a fire eating propensities, at the corner of Mill and Main Street, which amused the juveniles. The collection he received was insufficient to pay his hotel bill, so he said.



PRIZE WINNING BAND of 1947. This group under Mr. Charles Mason captured top honors at the Waterloo Musical Festival and later at the Canadian National Exhibition. Organized in 1940 the group was conducted from scales to contest work by Charles W. Mason. It was the first and only band of Acton's to win at this Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto.



PRIZE WINNING conductor of the Acton Boys and Girls Band and a great contributor to the music of Acton. C. W. Mason, organizer and present conductor of the Band played a major part in ensuring music for Acton by working for a stable year's grant from the town.