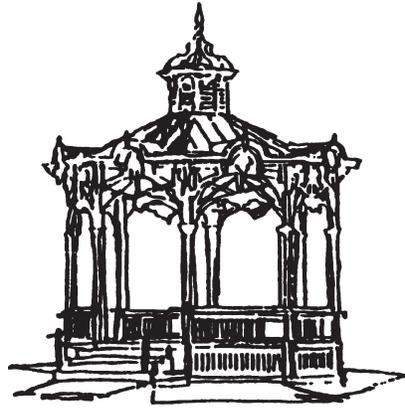


Community Bands of Medina, Ohio



**September 1859 to
August 2009**

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by

David M. Van Doren Jr.

To

Marcus Lawrence Neiman

On the 37th year (2009) of
his service as recruiter for,
organizer of, and conductor of
the Medina Community Band.

Thank you, Maestro!



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This has been somewhat of a family project. My wife, Janet, a euphonium player in the current Band, and our daughter, Mary, a former newspaper editor, were kind enough to edit most of this history. They and Conductor Neiman were most supportive in providing encouragement and advice. It's not their fault if I didn't always follow their suggestions. Our daughter, Lisa, an electronic designer, rendered all of the photographs into digital form, cleaned up many of the disfigurements that had accumulated therein, and "printed" the whole shebang in a much neater and more orderly fashion than she received it.

FOREWARD

It's Show Time!

Standing behind the Gazebo just prior to a Friday night concert has always, and will always be, an exciting experience for me. It's show business, plain and simple!

Yet, having conducted the Medina Community Band for almost a quarter century, I've come to realize that there is something much greater than show business involved in those Friday night concerts. Medina, that is the community, owns the band. The ownership is one of pride and joy! Reading the history of the band, or simply by talking to people on the square before or after summer band concerts, the pride of ownership is more than evident. When I'm walking through town (no matter what season), visiting the post office, shopping, or just walking through the square, people will stop and comment on how much they enjoyed the last concert, how much they are looking forward to the coming season, or just how much they appreciate our efforts.

Grandparents make note of the fact that *their* grandparents brought them to the concerts. Young people comment that their "first date" was spent walking through the square on a Friday night at the concert, or just driving by the concert. Yet to me the telling sign of ownership goes well beyond the large crowds and kind comments to one simple display of ownership. After the concert is completed and everyone has gone home, I usually have a few moments alone in front of the Gazebo. Still high with the excitement of the evening, I have the opportunity to look across the square and be thankful for another evening of friendship, music and community. To my amazement, there has yet to be a piece of litter, stray program, or any sign that the concert took place, save full trash containers. That's pride in community!

The band has evolved over the decades. The number of players has gone up and down, depending upon the director, times, and general interest, but the band has remained part of what we call community. I hope that the contributions I have made will allow the organization to continue into the future. I have always felt that the strength of the band was the simple fact that it is a true "town" band. Its members do not audition, pay no dues, and come because they want to make music. And they come from all over northeastern Ohio.

While there are similarities in conducting a fine high school band, as I had at Medina High School in the '70s, there are differences. The most striking is the wide difference in ability, occupation, and interest that exist within the ranks of the community band. I have found that playing a different concert every Friday during June and July can be more than a challenge at times. The pressure to perform has become a way of life. Yet that's why the band exists. Together, we have been through births, deaths, marriages, divorces, good times and bad. The weather has been so hot that we were fearful of heatstroke, and so cold and snowy that we missed two months of rehearsal—and everything in between. Yet when rehearsal was on, people came.

There have been so many kind comments made regarding what "I have done for the band". Thanks to all who continue to make those kind comments—you warm my heart and allow me to feel part of the community. Yet it is just as important for me to comment on what the band, and being its conductor, have done for me.

Initially, I must comment that I view myself as a conductor, not a director. A conductor makes music—a director waves a stick. While there are times that I do a great deal of stick-waving, being Medina Community Band's conductor has allowed me to grow as a conductor, to learn from my mistakes and grow as a professional. The ensemble truly does follow the stick and is capable of making great musical moments. That is the highest compliment a conductor can give—that he or she conducts a musical ensemble.

I have learned how very important the Medina Community Band is to so many people, musicians and listeners alike. That fact has humbled me to realize what a great honor it is to conduct the ensemble and to never ever make light of the importance of what I have done with the ensemble. Wednesday evenings must be spent with the ensemble, and Friday evenings in June and July must be spent in the Gazebo on the square.

Since we play so frequently in the summer, I have learned the importance of programming music that not only is acceptable to our audience, but also enjoyable to the ensemble. My colleagues often comment that we should "play music of today" or "widen the scope of their listening". Empty concert halls and bored audiences pay tribute to conductors who do not play music their audiences can appreciate. People come to the concerts to be entertained and stimulated. They want to forget about the trials of the day and simply whistle a happy tune on the way home. There's more than enough music to expand the envelope of listening, and I've attempted to provide our audiences with just a touch of what's out there. If they go to a symphony orchestra concert and hear something familiar, I've done my job.

Likewise, if I have programmed music that the ensemble has not played or experienced, I have done my job as a conductor. I'm still an educator, and every rehearsal must be educationally sound and not only teach music, but also integrate with life. I've attempted to make every rehearsal interesting for every member of the ensemble. Sometimes I've been successful, and other times, not so successful.

I've learned to work with people. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I've always been a loner. I enjoy what I do, but allow few into my world. There have been so many wonderful people in the ensemble who have helped draw me out and encourage me to do things with them. Our band executive council was an outgrowth of our efforts to become more of a team. I've also been encouraged to delegate. Oh, how hard it is, but oh, how rewarding it continues to be. The more people who gain ownership of the operation of the ensemble, the more time I gain to be a better conductor. And I really believe it makes our group a stronger organization.

I would be remiss not to comment on the Medina Community Band Association. They have been wonderful and have insured that the group will continue into the future. Of all those who insured it would happen, none more so than Ray Denson, current president of the Community Band Association. He took up the baton of leadership and insured that "we would work together." His guidance, encouragement, and constant energy have made it all happen.

I must thank Jan Van Doren for being my sound post and her husband Dave for being the writer of this opus. My wife Mary Ann has made my life worth living and given me the encouragement and confidence to go forward—she has all my love.

And I must thank the ensemble for not only putting up with me, but for learning with me. They have been wonderful and I will always be proud of what we have done together. Finally, I must thank you, the reader. Your interest in what we do encourages me to realize that it is important and worth doing for as long as I can. Thanks for the memories!

Marcus L. Neiman
January 4, 1997

Community Bands of Medina, Ohio

September 1859 to August 2009

by David M. Van Doren Jr.[†]

INTRODUCTION

Why a Town Band? What possessed people of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to pay for support of and to hear a group of relatively untutored, amateur fellow townsmen tooting away on a bunch of shiny horns? What possessed those fellow townsmen to try to learn, generally with little or no expert help, to play this array of shiny horns, and then to put up with weekly rehearsals and come out to play at a wide variety of town functions?

The answers in a few words are - pride, sociability, hunger for entertainment, and, later, habit. Townsmen compared themselves with their neighbors in all sorts of ways, including their “cultural” organizations. Some towns considered it a civic duty to have a band. Bandsmen (and later, women) enjoyed the social contact at rehearsals and at the functions for which they played, plus the satisfaction that comes with accomplishing whatever level of expertise they enjoyed as individuals and as a group. Before the days of radio and television all sorts of outside groups, plus local church and town musical groups, played to sizable crowds. A surprising number of music lovers (upwards of 50 or more) traveled to Akron or Cleveland to hear the professional bands and orchestras of the day, often in special railroad coaches put on just for them. And who else, for heaven’s sake, could provide music for a holiday or political parade but a BAND?

Nowadays we have an unbelievable proliferation of entertainment, much of which can be enjoyed at home. Why go out on a Friday evening in June or July to the town square, hoping it won’t rain, to hear the current group of amateurs play? Habit? Nostalgia? Marcus Neiman has given a marvelous answer to that question in the Foreward. Medinians have often been complimented on their appreciation of music, and so long as the Medina Community Band continues to appeal to them, they will continue to come. Readers will encounter examples of all this throughout the book.

This history of the above goings-on in Medina, Ohio is essentially an amplified version of one written by Carl Hlavaty¹ using much the same reference materials, with the significant addition of the Federal Census data from 1850 to 1920. It includes more detailed information on people, activities and music associated with the bands than did Hlavaty’s. Early records are sparse, depending greatly on newspaper reports, which of necessity incompletely cover details of band repertoire, personnel, finance, and organization. One must realize that connecting names from newspaper articles, many having only a surname and an initial or two, with names in the census poses some risk of error. Perhaps not too many such errors have been introduced in this process.

Items enclosed in double quotation marks are from the *Medina Gazette*. Items enclosed in single quotation marks are either from Medina Community Band archives or are of a generic nature, such as ‘the good old days’. Superscript numbers indicate items in the reference section. The appendices are rather voluminous, but where else to put much of the detail that might otherwise clutter up the narrative? The index does not contain names of persons included in any alphabetized appendix unless they also appear in the text. Hopefully this history will prove to be entertaining and informative.

[†]The author is a Professor Emeritus at the Ohio State University, lives in Lodi, Ohio, has played clarinet and oboe, and currently plays contra bass clarinet in the Medina Community Band.



Era of the all male, all brass and percussion Medina Bands

CHAPTER 1

FIRST BAND - MEDINA CORNET/BRASS BAND [1859-1863]

The Village of Medina, sometime in 1859 prior to a “serenade” by the Seville and Medina bands on 15 September², joined the growing number of communities in America that supported a town band³. The band, variously known as the “Medina Brass Band,” the “Medina Cornet Band,” or the “Medina Cornet Brass Band,” was very busy in its first year.

Members of the Band (see Appendix A1) purchased their own instruments and hired Professor Dustin Marble of Akron as an instructor and part-time director. At least some of Marble’s pay came from proceeds of the Band’s indoor concerts, or “grand Musical Entertainments”. The first such concert (see Appendix A2) consisted of a few pieces that were probably short so as to not tax the newly taught band members. After all, this collection of clerks, students, bankers, painters, wagon and shoemakers, and physicians, had started learning how to play their instruments and read music from scratch less than a year before. Amazing!

The careful reader of Appendix A2 might cringe at one selection which would not pass a current political correctness test, but was part of the culture of 1860. Marble’s “Gems of Niggerdom” is the culprit. A piece by Grafulla (Claudio S. Grafulla (1810-1880)) was probably a watered down version of one of the many pieces he composed after coming to the USA in 1838. The MCB played several of his compositions in the 1970s.

At their second such concert, this on March 1, 1860 , also at Phoenix Hall (aka Blake’s Hall), the Band was presented a white and blue silk banner purchased in New York City at a cost of \$49 with “Medina Cornet Band” upon one side and “Presented Feb 1860” on the reverse, with gold trim, tassels hanging from each corner, and the form of a harp on top of the staff. The presentation was by a number of young ladies of the village in appreciation for the efforts that the Band was making “to entertain and please this community”. With admission of 25 cents and total receipts of \$75, the affair drew a respectable crowd of 300 persons.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that all Band members were male, with most of them in their early 20s (see Appendix A1), and many as yet unmarried. All except the director were from Medina Village. Their occupations included medical and law students, a banker, a shoemaker, a teacher, a mechanic (workman), and clerks. Those not listed with an occupation were sons of a farmer, a hatter, owner of an



iron foundry and a physician. Such an ensemble deserved the title of “Community Band,” even though that was not what they were called. The group differed somewhat from the average brass band of the times, which was composed primarily of “hard-working mechanics³.”

Unfortunately, only one record has been found listing the musical selections the Band played. They performed three evening serenades outside the homes of prominent local men, including H. G. Blake, a member of Congress who lived in the Village, six concerts or practices open free or otherwise to the public, and marched in the 4th of July parade, presumably preceded by their fancy new banner. Their performances were held in such places as Phoenix Hall (third floor of the building that then occupied the site of the present FirstMerit Bank building), the public square park, the Medina County Fairgrounds, and the “Brick Church” (an 1833 Congregational church building, rebuilt in 1881 as a new Congregational church⁴, which is now the United Church of Christ Congregational on the northeast corner of the Medina Town Square⁵). As further evidence of the Band’s community involvement, three of their indoor concerts were benefits for ailing area physician Dr. A. C. Smith.

The 1860 4th of July celebration was a more extended community activity than now. The procession formed up outside the courthouse at 10 a.m., marched around the square and thence to Witter’s Grove, a short distance by sidewalk east of the village. There were prayers, singing by a choir, music by the Band, and orations in the grove, after which the procession reformed and marched to dinner (in the same grove). Toasts and more speeches followed dinner. In the evening at 8 p.m. there was a balloon ascension, “after which a grand display of Fireworks, and concert by the Medina Cornet Band.”

In addition, they participated in the second annual Ohio State Band Convention held in Wooster. This was not unlike modern high school band contests in that each of 23 bands played two numbers which were rated by a panel of three judges. The Medina and Chatham bands were not in the top three places in the grouping of bands that had been organized for less than one year,⁶ despite the expectation by the *Medina Gazette* editor that the former would “take prize 1.” After the 4th of July, the Band participated in an excursion on Lake Superior.

The Civil War probably contributed to the apparent decline in Band activities after that great start. Only two concerts were listed in 1861. One was in Litchfield and the other in Lafayette. No 1862 newspapers are available in the microfilm collection at the Medina library, so their activities that year, if any, are unknown. The last of this incarnation of the Community Band was in March 1863, when they performed several times. One such was at the west side of the Square on a Tuesday morning in a snowstorm. Nothing more was reported about a Medina Band for the next 27 months. This is not surprising since 9 of the original 13 players served at one time or another in Union forces in the War of the Rebellion.



CHAPTER 2

THE CIVIL WAR WAS OVER - A NEW START FOR THE BAND [1865-1867]

In July 1865, “a number of energetic citizens united and organized a Cornet Band.” The Band was furnished with a full set of new instruments at a cost to the organizers of \$725. The cornets, at least, were silver colored, which led to the name “Medina Silver Cornet Band” (MSCB). There were many such in America at the time. At a Soldier’s Reunion in Seville in September 1866 there were Silver Cornet Bands from Wooster, Medina and Seville, along with just plain bands from Ashland and Chatham.

The second concert for the new Band was a “grand entertainment” on Thanksgiving day, 1865, after which, about 9 p.m., “the whole party repaired to the dining room of the American House (a hotel at the northwest corner of the square which was razed in the 1950s⁷—the present location of the Society Bank drive-in), where they partook of a sumptuous feast.” They had at least 15 engagements in 1866, several of which were associated with the Medina Thespian Society, and several where admission was charged in order to finance the purchase of uniforms. In Medina they played again at the “Brick Church,” this time under the joint direction of Worden Babcock of Medina and Professor Marble, both active in the prior Band; at Ainsworth’s Hall (on the west side of the square near the middle of the block⁴); and at the Medina public square. They also travelled to Lodi, West Salem, Seville, and twice to Wadsworth, including in response to an invitation to lead the latter’s 4th of July parade.

The first bandstand (see Figure I) was a rickety-looking affair with no roof in 1867. There was a white board fence that had been erected two decades previously to keep out passing herds of cattle.⁹ A bandwagon (see Figure IIA) was a very satisfactory platform when the Band numbered about a dozen musicians. Figure III shows the style of the formal wear of the times. Band members were in full uniform, which indicates that the Band’s money-raising activities were successful.

Financial support came not only from admission to indoor concerts, but also from donations by individuals. For example, in January 1866, two young men got up a “subscription” of \$102.50 for the Band from their own pockets and from other citizens. This was not much different from modern patrons, who provide a goodly portion of late 20th century Band income. The Band had some sort of internal organization back then. If nothing else, County Auditor J. R. Stebbins, Esq. served as treasurer in 1866, and the bandwagon was owned by some “stockholders.”

For some reason this Band didn’t last as long as its predecessor. They led the 4th of July parade in Medina, which was their only reported

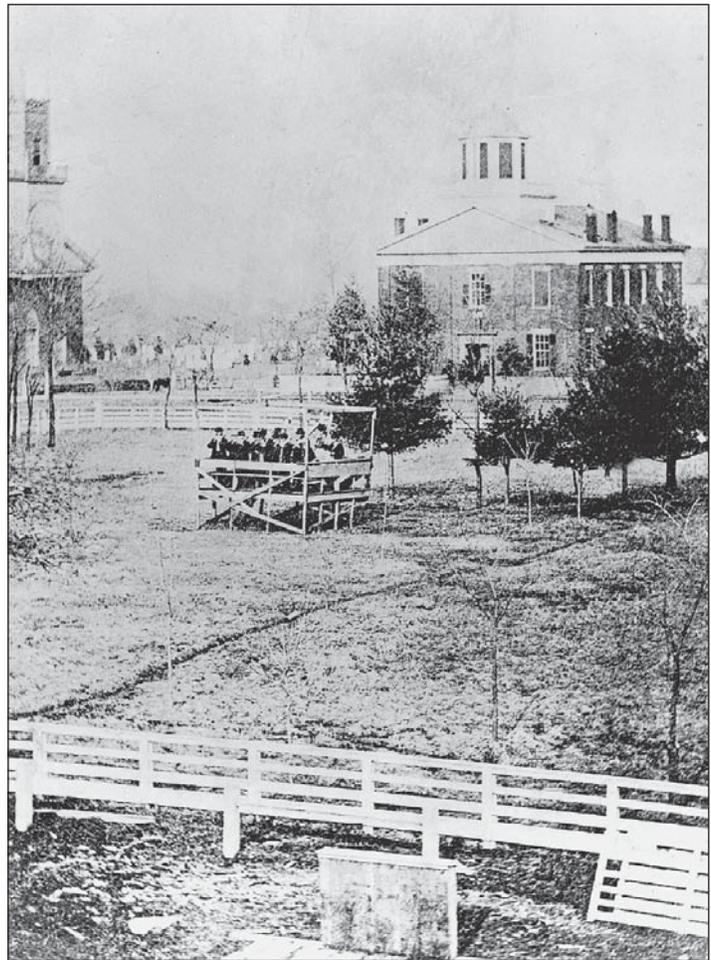


Figure I: The Medina public square and bandstand in 1867. Looking Northeast across Broadway left to right are the Brick Church, Old Town Burying Ground, and the county Courthouse. Courtesy of the Medina Community Design Committee.⁷



activity in 1867. In 1868 and 1869 there was no mention of a Medina Band. Such activities where a band usually played were few. There was no mention of Decoration Day (now called Memorial Day) in 1868, and only a small balloon ascent celebrated Independence Day that year. The Lodi Cornet Band led Medina's 1869 Decoration Day parade. There was no organized Independence Day celebration of any kind reported in 1869.



Figure IIA: This photograph is of the Medina Cornet Band on the Medina square in their bandwagon (circa 1870). The Medina courthouse is at the upper left. Photo courtesy of the Medina Community Design Committee.⁷



Figure IIB: Joe Yeager, a Medina artist, used the photo in Figure IIA as inspiration to create this painting depicting a temperance rally. Painting courtesy of the FirstMerit Bank of Medina.





Figure III: "From an old album" series, No. 94, May 5, 1939²: "These nattily dressed gentlemen were all members of the Medina band in the latter part of the 1870's. Each member of the organization posed for a picture in his new uniform, all of which had just been purchased. I. N. Sackett of Medina was the photographer. In those days, many of the instruments had a much different appearance than band instruments of today, the bass drum being the only one of the six shown here which has not undergone a change.... In the upper row are, reading from left to right: W(illiam) F. Sipher, bass; Ed(ward) Welling, cornet; and H(enry) G. Sipher, tenor. In the bottom row are: J. B. Tiffany, bass; Ruben Clark, drum; and Word(en) Babcock, cornet. Welling, Babcock and W. F. Sipher were all leaders of the band at one time or another... The only living descendants of any of these six men are Will Sipher, son of W. F. Sipher, Mrs. Orva Edwards, daughter of Ed Welling, and Florence Sipher, daughter of Will Sipher." Florence loaned the photos to the newspaper.



CHAPTER 3 ANOTHER BAND REVIVAL [1870-1877]

By early January 1870, efforts were under way to revive the Medina Band by way of raising money for the instruments. A set of same for 14 musicians was purchased from E. G. Wright & Co of Boston, Massachusetts for about \$500, and all but the drums had arrived by December. A Band Association had been organized in November. A constitution was adopted and officers of the Association elected. The Association owned the instruments, and possibly the bandwagon from the previous Band. The musicians (see Appendix B) commenced twice-a-week practices in “their” room in the Empire Block (directly northwest from the square⁷). The drums having arrived in January, 1871 the MSCB began this reincarnation at a donation party with “half a dozen pieces” at Empire Hall on February 1.

Next came a “grand ball” at the same place on 22 February for the benefit of the Band. Evidently the Band members had purchased some furniture for their practice room, paid rent for use of the room, and probably paid the “accomplished” or “competent” teachers who helped them learn their instruments, thus needing assistance in meeting these expenses. It was helpful that the *Medina Gazette*’s publisher was one of the Band’s directors. The newspaper exhorted its readers to “buy tickets (to the ball)/ go yourself/ take your wife/ or your sister/ or some other person’s sister.” The Band played for a half hour before dancing commenced and a half hour at intermission.

Thereafter, the Band performed the functions of a ‘community band’ at irregular intervals and in a variety of venues. Members of this version of the MSCB had only one holdover from the first Band, their leader William F. Sipher. Musicians ranged in age from a 13 year-old cymbal player to a 60 year-old baritone player, with most in their teens or 20’s as in that first Band. Unlike that previous Band, this group were mostly the ‘hard-working mechanics’ which typified town bands. The group was treated one Monday evening in January 1873, at their regular practice when they found considerable wedding cake and the note, “To the MSCB, Compliments of 2nd Bb alto,” which by this time was “brother Boulton,” who obviously had just gotten married. The report doesn’t say whether or not Boulton attended practice that night.

The Band’s most consistent activity was to lead the May 30 Decoration Day parade. Typically the Band played at the square while the crowd collected, and then led a procession to the cemetery (a half block east of the Brick Church⁷), perhaps playing a dirge as they went, with military companies marching to the beat. They provided some of the music for the services there, including another dirge while ladies of the village covered soldiers’ graves with flowers (homegrown or wild as the weather dictated), and often led the procession back to the square where they may have played some more. Since May 30 could fall on any day of the week and it was not an official paid holiday at the time, the organizers generally requested that “all places of business in the Village be closed during the ceremonies at the graveyard,” and the requests were generally honored.

Independence Day was infrequently celebrated in Medina Village prior to the centennial in 1876. The Band’s part in that celebration began at 6 a.m. after 100 cannon had been fired at 4 a.m.¹¹ and, understandably, “all Medina was awake.” They had “a parade excursion through town, discoursing national and patriotic strains. The bandwagon was gaily decorated with flags and streamers.” The regular morning exercises began at 10:00 a.m. with a parade from Phoenix Hall led by the MCB. After marching around the square, the procession entered the park, and settled down for the morning’s ceremonies. Everybody quickly unsettled down as a heavy shower scattered the crowd back to Phoenix Hall. Following lunch the Band once again led a procession around the square, after which the “immense crowd” prepared to listen to the afternoon ceremonies. More rain came, and all who could get there reconvened inside the Hall. The Band finished the day by hosting a dance in Phoenix Hall. The MCB had gone to play at the Fourth festivities at other towns, including Seville in 1873, Black River in 1874, and “Lake Chippewa” in 1875, all of which produced better weather than did Medina.

The MSCB played for political rallies or “Mass Meetings,” as they were called, mostly Republican ones, and for victory celebrations following an election, complete with an occasional bonfire somewhere on the square. The *Gazette* editor, a staunch Republican, once wrote, “The Medina Band plays just as well for a Democratic as a Republican meeting, like the gentle rain from heaven that falls upon the unjust as well as the just.”



The Band also played at reunions of various regiments of Ohio Volunteer Infantry from the Civil War. Included were the 42nd, 103rd, 124th and 166th regiments, both in Medina Village and elsewhere. The Band might have played one or more times for an occasion. In Medina, a common practice was to lead a group of local regiment members on a march from the square to the railroad depot to meet out-of-towners, or at least to meet the train at the depot, and then to march back to the square where the Band might play immediately or later in the day. The Band even played from the balcony of Phoenix Hall as a means of announcing the imminent beginning of a part of the proceedings.

The MSCB was not the only band in or around Medina after the Civil War. "Martial" bands, consisting of a bass drum, several snare drums and several piccolos or fifes, marched in many Decoration Day parades with the MSCB. They also participated in other outdoor affairs in the village. Many neighboring communities also had brass or cornet bands. At a soldier's reunion at Lake Chippewa in 1877 there were bands from Medina, Ashland, Wooster, Doylestown, Seville, and even Congress and West Salem, from which few people today would guess a band could have been supported.

Expenses other than those mentioned previously necessitated the Band giving "Grand Balls" or indoor concerts, usually at Phoenix Hall, as benefits for themselves. In August, 1872, the wagon was to be "repainted and slicked up." In due course the Band decided that they wanted uniforms, "something neat but not gaudy." No mention was made about the fate of the previous set of uniforms. By March 1873, they had "succeeded in raising funds sufficient to purchase the uniform which they have been hankering for for ever so long." It consisted of a black coat with white buttons and silver epaulettes, black pants with white cord, and caps trimmed with white. A gaudy uniform must have been a sight to behold! (see Figure III)

The uniforms were purchased after March, 1873, so the photos were presumably taken later that year. See above for a description of the uniforms. Information about some of these men may be found using a search routine. W. F. and H. G. Sipher may have been related, as both emigrated from Wurtemberg, Germany. The horns were called 'over the shoulder saxhorns', as they faced opposite the direction the musicians faced (see Figure IIA).

Perhaps one of the more enjoyable activities of the MSCB was to accompany groups on "excursions" to a variety of places in Ohio. These included a one-day round trip by railroad to Black River, leaving Medina at 6 a.m., plus a steamer trip to Put-in-Bay Island for \$2.25 in 1872; and to Cleveland by rail, plus a boat ride on the lake, all for \$1 in 1874. The Band had previously played at Seville in November 1871, along with Babcock's Band of Akron and the Seville Cornet Band, celebrating the first Lake Shore & Tuscarawas Valley railroad train to arrive there. The MCB sponsored an excursion by train to Cleveland, leaving Medina at 5:25 a.m. in June 1877, and taking a side-wheel steamer to the Put-in-Bay islands. The total fare was \$2, and there must have been some left for the Band, as it was billed as a Band benefit.

The Band was more or less expected to play at the Medina County Fair when not engaged elsewhere, which they did in 1871, 1874 and 1877. They won a band competition at Seville's Fair in 1873, defeating bands from Wadsworth and Marshallville and collecting the \$75 prize. Two days were spent playing at the Richfield Union Fair in 1877. While the *Medina Gazette* editor was usually very sympathetic to the MSCB, he was not always so. After the 1875 Medina County Fair had come and gone, he chided them for not appearing at any time. The Litchfield Band did play, and since it was the only one there, received the \$50 premium (prize) as the best band in the county. "It is a good thing that *one* of the many bands in the county has enterprise and confidence enough to represent itself at our County Fair," fumed the editor.

We of the modern day Medina Community Band perhaps don't appreciate how well the grounds of the Medina square are maintained by the city. In the 1870s the editor of the *Medina Gazette* repeatedly suggested to the Committee on Public Works of the village council that it would be a good idea to cut the grass therein. "One or two cuttings early in the spring, at least, will improve it for the whole summer." This would not have been much maintenance, but better than the nothing that apparently prevailed. Also suggested were "rustic benches placed here and there under the trees." Sound familiar?

The Medina Band played irregularly in the park in those days. Examples were New Year's day in 1872; Christmas day in 1874 (in uniform, yet) and in 1875; an evening in May 1875; for the Medina County Pioneer Society basket picnic in August 1874, for which "ample seating and ice water will be provided;" and at a July, 1875 Lawn Fete by the ladies of the M.E. church. Ladies who sold food were dressed in "costumes of their grandmothers." Wonder if the grass had been mowed for these summer



affairs? Perhaps to avoid the long grass, the MCB inaugurated “street concerts” in 1877, which though never defined by the *Gazette*, probably were concerts they played while standing on the street somewhere in the Village. Seating for spectators on the hitching posts were on a first-come, first-served basis.

A harbinger of things to come (at least in large cities) occurred in the village on Thanksgiving afternoon, 1877. The MCB in uniform, the fire department, and the military company (national guard) had a parade around the square. The main reason was to show off the new firefighting equipment, finally purchased after three large downtown fires over the past 24 years. Perhaps that qualified as the country’s first Thanksgiving day parade.

A custom that has since died out, but which the Band continued from prior times, was to provide “serenades” about town. By inference it is probable that they rode about Medina Village in their bandwagon as they played. The Sharon Band visited Medina in June 1871, and after supper at the American House as guests of the MSCB, they and their hosts played for an hour in the square. Two months later the Sharon Band played the host. The MSCB arrived home after midnight and gave “an early morning serenade,” most likely from the wagon they had used for the trip.

As noted above, the MCB travelled to places outside the village. They apparently did so in their bandwagon to those places close by, and otherwise by train. If by wagon, they usually led their fellow townsfolk in a string of other wagons and buggies. In addition to those trips previously mentioned, they went to Litchfield in 1872, and to an Odd Fellows picnic at Lake Chippewa in 1875. Whether or not they played as they went was not recorded by the newspaper.

The repertoire of the Medina Band concerts in those days comes to us in only two newspaper items (see Appendix E). They played six numbers for a concert in the park in 1877 and a different six for a concert in 1880. By today’s standards, that does not seem like much. But we must remember that the musicians did not have the extensive training in school that is available today, and learning to play the instruments must have taken a great percentage of their practice time. All were not without some skills, however. William F. Sipher (see Figure III), an 1848 immigrant from Wurtemberg, Germany, had been drum major¹² of the 166th regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry in 1864. He was the 1st *E♭* cornet player in the MCB for a number of years, and also played violin for dances.

Another Medina Village resident commanded enough respect for some aspect of his musical abilities to actually get paid for directing bands. Worden Babcock, a member of the first Medina Band, moved to Akron in 1867 where three years later he developed an excellent 16-member Cornet Band. This group played often in Medina for a variety of functions, either with or without the MSCB. In August 1874 Babcock was rumored to be making arrangements to return to Medina Village and to “take our Cornet Band under his supervision, proposing to make it the best Band in the State.” But by August 1875, Babcock had “decided to accept the very favorable offer of the leadership of a band at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and will go there at once.” His family, which had not yet moved to Medina, was to remain in Akron “for some time yet.” One infers that leadership of some town bands in those days might have paid enough to at least have partly supported a man and his family. By June of 1877 he was back leading the MCB. Three years later the Band gave a “complimentary benefit ... to Mr. Babcock’s family” as “compensation for his services in the musical line.” Returning to Akron, he reorganized his band there, which was good enough “to head the funeral procession of President Garfield at Cleveland in 1881,” and which played there a dirge Babcock had written for the occasion.



CHAPTER 4

THE NEXT THREE REORGANIZATIONS [1878-1885]

The term “reorganization” was never well defined by the newspapers of the day. It could have meant just an election of new officers under the Band charter, a nearly complete replacement of musicians, leader, charter and all, or something in between. The author has used the term as it appeared in the newspaper with an attempt to describe how severe the reorganization was, insofar as it is known.

The reorganization of 1878 was probably the result of an exhausting 1877 season in which the Band was “out on the streets 72 times from April through December.” Without rancor all but four or five of the 1877 Band quietly retired. The new Band (see Appendix C) contained only two members of the 1870 Band as well. After the reorganization and some time to practice, they advertised in August that “anyone needing a good band of music will do well to call around.”

Dedication of the nearly finished new town hall and (fire) engine house came at Thanksgiving that year. The procession, led by the MCB, was to have marched from the old engine house to the new one (the red-painted, brick building on the south side of the square), presumably accompanied by the steamer and trucks. However, it was so muddy that the equipment could not be brought out, and the procession marched on the sidewalks. Hopefully the village roads were not too muddy for the equipment to have made it to a fire, had one occurred.

One of the few Fourth of July celebrations in the village from 1876 to the turn of the century was held in 1879. The MCB led a procession of the Medina Light Guards, city officials in carriages, and fire engine equipment around the square and neighboring streets. After “waltzing one more time around the square the procession halted and dispersed.” The mayor alighted from his carriage to find out that no one had made any arrangements for a “programme”, for which the “vast assemblage” was undoubtedly eagerly waiting. After a couple of speeches and a reading of the Declaration of Independence, “vain efforts were made to induce some one to give themselves away in a short speech, but no one was found for the sacrifice; and at the conclusion of the Declaration, the audience was dismissed, with the injunction to go where they pleased, and enjoy themselves as much as they could, and be as long about it as possible.” Perhaps the mayor wished that it had rained like it had in 1876.

A new enterprise by the Band (not new to the Village) was to give “ice cream festivals” in the park on some Saturday nights. This implies that the MCB played in the square on a more or less regular basis, though this supposition was not verified by newspaper accounts. A difference between then and now is that it appears the Band was the recipient of any net profit, whereas today the group doing the work at the social gets the profits. The July 4, 1879 festival was to have included a 10¢ charge to hear the Band play. There must have been considerable flak from the villagers, and the scheme was essentially dropped, despite the guilt trip Worden Babcock tried to lay on by stating that “admission to the park in Akron is 25¢, and I never heard one word of complaint.” At any rate the ice cream festival turned into a full-blown dinner of “chicken pie, pork and beans, etc” and the receipts exceeded \$80. This was no doubt the most successful part of the activities that day.

Also, in 1879, the Band was more into fund raising than normal because of their desire for new uniforms to replace the “old, rusty, soiled, and worn out ones.” Rusty? Perhaps that referred to the buttons. The uniforms were apparently not too rusty to be worn by the Spencer Band, which bought them in October. The night before the fall election the Medina Band gave an oyster supper in Grunninger’s block (west of the new engine house), which was managed by “the ladies of Medina” and for which the Band played. The *Gazette* editor, never one to pass up the opportunity for a verbal jab, wondered why the coffee at the Band supper was like the *Medina Democrat* (newspaper), “muddy and thin.”

The MCB showed off the new uniforms by giving street serenades New Year’s Day of 1880 and by playing the grand march at the young ladies’ dance that evening. Obtained from a Philadelphia dealer in military clothing for \$500, the uniforms consisted of “coat and pants of dark blue cloth, trimmed in buff and gilt, with belt and epaulettes, and dress and fatigue hats with long, rich feather plumes.” We sometimes wonder at the excessive verbiage of modern newspaper accounts, but that’s not new. The *Gazette* editor gushed, “In their new suits the boys are caparisoned like an army with banners, and with their new instruments they make music such as would have delighted the luxurious old gods and goddesses of Mt. Olympus.” Whew!



In addition to the items reported above, the Band continued to serve and entertain the village pretty much as before the 1878 reorganization. The year 1879 was the busiest, followed by a general decline in activity until the prolonged disorganization in the 1890s. The problem was probably a combination of changing leadership and disinterest among the players. Lansing B. Smith was designated leader at the 1878 reorganization, but Worden Babcock returned to Medina and the Band by May of 1879, and started a marble and granite works to earn a living. The Band was again reorganized in 1880 (see Appendix D) with Babcock, Lansing B. Smith and Alexander Gaberdiel designated as the leaders.

Smith directed the Band at a victory demonstration in Medina after the election of James A. Garfield as U.S. President in November 1880. Smith, “who although a Hancock man (loser to Garfield), showed powers of endurance and a desire to do justice to the occasion equal to any Garfielder.” High praise, indeed. After that there was no more Band practice or activity until Memorial Day, 1881. “The Medina Band is out of practice and without an organization, but the old members will turn out and play on Decoration Day,” wrote the *Gazette*. They then were totally inactive until mid-1882, when the next reorganization occurred. The Lodi and Remson Corners Cornet Bands played for Medina Village’s 1882 Memorial Day observance.

Medina Village was by no means unique in the inability to field a band in those days. The *Gazette* noted in September of 1881 that “prospects for music (at a soldiers’ reunion) had been rather slim, owing to the disorganized state of most of the bands in the county.” The town band fever that followed the Civil War³ was temporarily at low ebb in Medina county.

After the reorganization in 1882 (see Appendix F) Edward Welling was designated the new leader. He had moved to Medina Village from Brunswick township in or after 1880, and played a leading part in Medina Village music for over 10 years thereafter. Holdover of players was not great, with six of 10 of the 1880 Band from the 1878 Band, and only four of 10 of the 1882 Band from the 1880 Band. Members were almost entirely the “hard-working mechanics” mentioned previously.

As happens now and again, a fad takes a community by storm, and then peters out with hardly a whimper. Such was the village’s exposure to the rollerskating craze of 1882-86. A rink was set up in Phoenix Hall, and the MCB took advantage of the situation to play there about once a week for the entire season (October 21, 1882 to April 28, 1883), including twice on Thanksgiving Day. The rink opened the following Thanksgiving Day, and in January of 1885, with no other reporting of activity there. Later in 1885 the “Owego Skating Parlor” was built and opened for business in mid-April, with the Medina Band furnishing the music at the inaugural. The new rink, 50’ by 145’, featured races, costume parties, demonstrations by professional skaters, and polo in addition to regular skating by villagers. The Band played off and on at this rink, but not for long. In April of 1886 it “went the way of all the other rinks in the country,” having been sold for \$400 after a cost of \$1,500 to build it. It was torn down and the lumber used for other purposes later in the year.

Meanwhile, the Band resumed its accustomed place at the head of the village’s Memorial Day parade in 1883, which it did annually through 1889 under their new name of the “Grand Army of the Republic Band of Medina.” Several years previously a Grand Army of the Republic organization of veterans of the Union Army in the Civil War had been established, with one of the duties of each local post to see that Memorial Day was properly observed in their community. Medina Village had such a post, but no connection was found between it and the Band. There were many other G.A.R. bands in Medina and surrounding counties, so perhaps this renaming of bands was just another fad. There was even a July Fourth celebration in Medina Village in 1883 for which the Band played (a new mayor had been elected in May of 1880).

As the pendulum swings, so went the fortunes of the band movement. No less than 13 different cornet bands plus the Medina G.A.R. Band played in the Village in 1883-1884, a substantial improvement over 1881. These included bands from Berea, Canton, Chatham, Elyria, Hinckley, Liverpool, Lodi, Remson Corners, Richfield, Seville, Sharon, Spencer, and Wadsworth. An impetus for some of this activity in the village was a “Grand Bicycle and Band Tournament” held at the Medina fairgrounds in August 1883. That seems like a rather strange combination, doesn’t it? Of the seven competing bands that year, Elyria took the \$50 first prize, Lodi the \$25 second prize, and Spencer was judged to have the best bass player. Political doings in 1884 brought the rest of the bands to town. In 1885 the “immense” 25-member G.A.R. Band of Canton was hired to play at the Medina Fair.

