

Carroll Yesteryears
July 9, 2023
A Big, Brassy History
By Catherine Baty

Community bands were once commonplace throughout Carroll County. Until radio entered the mainstream during the 1920s, town bands were the most common form of local musical entertainment in the United States. The Manchester Military Band of Music, chartered by the State Legislature in 1838, was the earliest band in the new county. Their purpose was “extending the knowledge & improving the style of performance of martial music.” Carroll County’s incorporation records provide the names of 40 local bands from the Mount Pleasant Brass Band Society in 1857 to the Lineboro Band in 1952.

However, these were not all the bands in the County. Photographs in the Historical Society of Carroll County’s collection, and articles in local newspapers document bands that do not appear on the list of incorporated organizations.

In an image of the Union Mills Cornet Band, “Organized in 1907” is painted on the bass drum yet the group is not on the list. Neither is the Mount Airy Boys Band, which won first prize at the Carroll County centennial celebration in 1937. So far, 67 bands have been documented in Carroll County. Large towns like Westminster and Taneytown had bands but there were also bands in communities as small as Silver Run, Double Pipe Creek, Winfield, and Oakland.

Bands in the 19th century had a wide range of formats and instrumentation but all-brass ensembles were very common and were often known as “cornet bands.” Of the Carroll County bands, 25 had “cornet” in their name. Toward the end of the century, bands introduced a wider range of instruments including woodwinds and strings. These were often called “community” or “concert” bands.

The bands provided music for social events such as picnics, patriotic observances, and parades. The parade held in Westminster on April 11, 1887, to celebrate Carroll County’s “Semi-Centennial” (50th anniversary) featured 12 bands.

Often bands traveled to nearby communities to perform. Noah Arbaugh, a member of the Warfieldsburg Band, recalled a special performance at Frank Brown’s Springfield estate in 1888. “About 5 o’clock in the morning we left Warfieldsburg in our old band wagon and it took us nigh on to four hours to reach Springfield. There we got out and rode in Frank Brown’s coach behind eight gray horses. Well, I don’t know for sure whether you would call it a coach, because it was as big as one of our modern school buses – looked like one, too.” Four years later, Brown hired the band to perform at numerous rallies in the Sykesville area during his campaign for governor. He paid the band \$400 and they used half the money to buy new uniforms. At Brown’s request, the uniforms were gray with red epaulets.

Warfieldsburg’s bandwagon must have been in poor condition to take so long to get to Springfield. The Western Maryland Brass Band from Union Bridge, however, had the finest one in the county. Constructed in 1868, the custom-designed wagon had the band name on the front

in gold leaf, gold scrolls on the sides, and a portrait of George Washington entwined with U.S. flags on the rear. It was pulled by six horses bedecked with custom harnesses.

Today, most of the community bands are gone, replaced by high school and college bands. To learn more about Carroll County bands, stop by the Historical Society of Carroll County and visit our new exhibit “Strike Up the Bands.” The exhibit will open on Sunday, July 16, at the Society’s annual Sundae Scoop event. The event includes family games, a dunk tank, ice cream and Italian ice from The Cow for only \$1, and tours of the Shipley Memorial Gardens by Master Gardeners. Burgers and hand-cut fries will be available for purchase. For more information, go to <https://hsccmd.org/event/sundae-scoop/>.

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Image 1: The Warfieldsburg Band, 1890. Front row, from left: William Foutz, Edward Summers, Howard Bower, Vernon Barnes, John Buckingham and John Foutz. Second row: Harry Summers, Clayton Biggs, John W. Arbaugh, Prof. Bailey Morelock, Prof. Isaac Buckingham, Clarence Lantz, Noah Arbaugh, Charles Lantz. Historical Society of Carroll County photo.



Image 2: Bass drum from the Carroll County Reed Band. The band was established in 1887, reorganized in 1931, and was in operation until 1946. Collection of the Historical Society of Carroll County.



Caption: The Western Maryland Brass Band posed on their bandwagon at the Carroll County fair at Westminster in 1869. Courtesy photo.