

IMAGES

... then and now

From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

The Indian Hill Orchestra



During the 1920's and 30's, Indian Hill was a rural, mostly agricultural community in transition. Families who had lived in the village for generations maintained traditions, and their lives focused on hard work and simple pleasures. At many local celebrations and community events, the hometown Indian Hill Orchestra performed.

The Orchestra was composed mostly of Stevens, Woods, and DeMar families. The Stevenses played the trumpet, trombone; and saxophone. The Woods family played clarinet, drums, piano, and violin; and the DeMars joined in with the bass and fiddle. Ruth Lytle played cello, and Virginia Waites added the cornet. All these families were infused with music; it was part of their daily lives.

The Stevens family had a music room in their Drake Road home, provided piano lessons for their sons, and then started them at an early age on other instruments. All three of the Waites children took piano lessons, and Mr. Waites led the hymn singing at Armstrong Chapel each week. The family was known for its vocal talent – and Mrs. Waites spontaneously sang songs around the house. The younger members of the Orchestra learned to play instruments while still at Jefferson Elementary School and later continued through high school, college, and adulthood. Some of the older members had been members of the Indian Hill Silver Cornet Band – the predecessor to the Indian Hill Orchestra.

Rehearsals were held every Wednesday night at the Stevens' home, and besides practicing, the musicians enjoyed playing baseball on the nearby field. In summer they cranked homemade ice cream or shared a watermelon and had contests to see who could spit the seeds farthest. Their repertoire of over 200 songs included patriotic favorites, ballads, western and country western, waltzes, and sentimental/romantic numbers. The unstructured rehearsals, which lasted about 1½ hours, bonded the talented group together and served as practice for upcoming events. As the former cornet player said, "Once the music is in your head, it just sort of bubbles out."

The Orchestra played at community gatherings, school plays, commencements, and on Decoration Day (Memorial Day) at Armstrong Cemetery. At the annual Jefferson School Homecoming on Labor Day weekend, the alumni gathered to hear the Orchestra and participate in a sing-a-long. They were the pit orchestra for plays and minstrel shows at the Grange Hall. As one former member laughingly said, "We played anytime they would let us!" At square dances they supplied the music with piano, fiddle, and harmonica. The grand finale was the Virginia Reel, followed by refreshments: homemade ham sandwiches with locally grown horseradish.

There was no uniform for the Orchestra. The group usually sat while they played, with soloists standing up. Every year four members of the Orchestra developed a unique act for the minstrel show, using everyday items like tin cans, soda pop bottles, and water filled jars to produce tunes.

The Indian Hill Orchestra provided entertainment from about 1930 to 1940, disbanding at the onset of World War II. This two-generation orchestra brought neighbors together for good times and fellowship. A quote from a 1933 program summarizes their impact: "Music furnished by the Indian Hill Orchestra – composed entirely of local talent giving unstintingly of their time and talent for the pleasure of the community".

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