

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF CONCERT BANDS
IN NEVADA COUNTY

In the early mining days of the Community the Concert Band was a driving Social force. It has been said that the present band had its origins among the Cornish miners who possessed some musical talent.

Concerts from the awning porch of the National Hotel in Nevada City, the old Jeffrey's Hall at Mill and Neal, the old Wisconsin Hotel's second story porch at Auburn and Main, and, of course, the porch of the Holbrooke Hotel in Grass Valley, filled the air with marches, overtures, waltzes, and reels.

The "Thomas Silver Cornet Band", "Star and Crescent Band", "Grass Valley Brass and Reed Band", and "John Blamey's Band", were some of the groups that played the Socials, County Fairs, patriotic celebrations, and Sunday afternoon concerts.

After the turn of the century a splendid development in the field of local music was spearheaded by the spark and drive of Harold J. George, a cornet player of renown and leader of the "Star and Crescent" band. At the same time musical consolidations were taking place which eventually resulted in the formation of the "Grass Valley Concert Band" under the direction of Harry Green.

In the early 1920's, following the death of Harry Green, Harold George became Conductor of this band. George, conducting with one hand while playing the cornet with the other, was a sight to behold. "Beheld" it was for almost forty years, as he continued as leader of the band.

Concerts were given for Miners' Union picnics at Lake Olympia, Sunday School Union picnics at Shelby's Pond near the Nevada County Narrow Gauge R.R. Line at Colfax, Fourth of July celebrations, and "Donation Day" Parades.

In 1929 George opened a music store on Mill street, "The Harmony Shop", and started a Boys' Band.

The next year elementary and high schools, both in Nevada City and Grass Valley, initiated the public school band, orchestra, and choral music programs.

For the following 18 years George provided leadership as he nurtured these groups to mature performance levels.

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Concurrently with directing weekly rehearsals of the Grass Valley Concert Band, George was directing the Grass Valley Carol Choir during the Christmas Season.

On his retirement in 1948, his Son, Harold George, Jr., took over the school music responsibilities, but George, Sr. continued as Director of both the Grass Valley Concert Band and the Carol Choir.

The school music programs have prospered under the leadership of several talented Directors, but the then Concert Band gave its last performance in 1958; the Carol Choir followed some years later.

By 1971 a new chapter was about to unfold. Ernie Harries, a Nevada City bank manager and professional musician, along with several other musical friends, felt a need still existed for a local performing band.

With Ernie leading the way, musicians gathered, and with the help of Nevada City and Grass Valley Soroptimists, and Nevada City Lions, rehearsals began under the baton of George Peavy. The band was given the name, "Nevada County Concert Band"; later, by resolution of the Nevada County Board of Supervisors, it was designated as the Official Band of Nevada County.

The band played its first formal concert in December, 1972. In January, 1973, the band appeared in full strength in a Memorial Tribute to the late Harold George, Sr.

Since then the band has participated in many local parades, homecomings, dedications, benefits, Cornish Christmas', and County fairs. Its Conductors have included George Peavy, Harlyn Abel, Keith Cantrill, Bill Barnhart, Bill Mitchell, Lorre Falconi, Hal West, Harold George, Jr., Robert Tobis, Anita Sleeman, Richard Anshutz, Bill MacSems, and, currently, Eugenio "Gene" Gaddini.

Greatly missed is one of our oldest and most faithful members, the late Dr. Emil Stern. We are most thankful for Mrs. Hulda Stern's establishment of the "Emil Stern Youth Scholarship Endowment Fund."

The Nevada County Concert Band has appreciated and enjoyed fine relationships and support by Sierra College and the Sierra Musical arts Association. The continuing support of these two Organizations, and the general public, will make it possible for the Band to bring hours of pleasure to both audiences and participants alike.