

COMMUNITY

1830 To Today: The Beat Goes On In St. Johnsbury

BY PEGGY PEARL

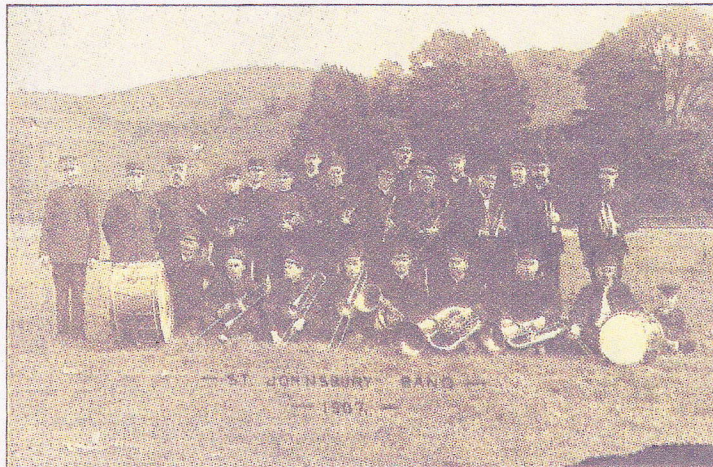
Welcome to this month's edition of the History & Heritage Center. Our purpose is to acquaint you with our mission to preserve the town's rich history, highlight the legacy of those who have gone before and show how our past has shaped our present. We are a non-profit with 501(c)(3) status.

We continue to wait on the progress of the armory in terms of mold and asbestos removal as we would like to have it as the Center's home. More will follow on this subject soon. Please be sure to check out our web site, stjhistory.org for past articles, upcoming events and other information about the Center. Our phone number is 424-1090 and our office is located in the Summer Street School building.

The St. Johnsbury Band

Resonating sounds of a band concert can be heard Monday nights in Courthouse Park during the summer in St. Johnsbury. Research tells us that we have a long history of such music as the Band

ST. JOHNSBURY HISTORY & HERITAGE CENTER



was founded in 1830. Think of all the 50 states and the thousands of towns in our nation and then realize that we have the third oldest band in continuous service! Only the West Point Military Band of 1827 and the Allentown, Pennsylvania Band of 1829 are older. The name St. Johnsbury Band goes back to 1926; in the beginning it was known as the Brass Band and then followed the Cornet Band, followed in 1885 by the Serenade Band and becoming the St. Johnsbury Consolidated Band in 1912.

The Consolidated Band was a result of the joining of two bands. Back in 1880 another band, known as the Harmony Band had formed, and the two bands had to borrow players from each other in order to continue, hence the merger.

Equally interesting as the names are the locations where the band has played. The first bandstand was in Arnold Park, another was in Railroad Street Park, another was in Courthouse Park and yet others in St. Johnsbury Center and East

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St. Johnsbury. The Railroad Street bandstand was torn down in 1951 and the one in Courthouse Park was torn down in 1952. According to an article in the Caledonian in July of 1957 regarding the history of the band, in February of 1956, band members Arthur Ayer, Orin Jones and Elmer Willey appeared at the Village budget meeting and told the meeting that they needed a home and if no home was forthcoming then there would be no St. Johnsbury Band! As you can guess, the request was placed in the warning and voted favorably at the March meeting. During the time that it lacked a bandstand, the band played one season at Brantview, two seasons on the trade school grounds (St. Johnsbury School now) and one season on the walk at Courthouse Park.

Until 1943, this was an all-male band but World War II took 22 of

its members. The director called on the St. Johnsbury Academy Band to fill those empty seats and 12 girls filled in. Since then, women have been an integral part of the band.

The band has played for one president and one former president. President Benjamin Harrison was escorted in a parade to Colonel Franklin Fairbanks's Undercllyffe home in 1891. In 1912, former president Theodore Roosevelt was in the audience of a concert at the courthouse.

Not nearly enough stories of the bands and their members can be found to fill my curiosity. I did find comments about a couple of fires that may have destroyed music, records and equipment, one of those being the Academy's North Hall and the other the Caldbeck block fire. As the country celebrates the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War, it is worth mentioning William Henry Herrick who was a

former director of the band. He enlisted as a private in the regimental band with the Third Vermont Regiment in June of 1861 and served until August of 1862 when the bands were disbanded by an act of Congress. He kept a diary of the band's duties throughout his time and then returned to St. Johnsbury to his work at the Fairbanks Scale Plant. He was an active member of the band and the North Church choir.

No living generation in St. Johnsbury has grown up without knowing, hearing, seeing or playing in the St. Johnsbury Band. They have played at fairs, troops going to war as well as coming home, events celebrating the town's history, parades, concerts, etc. Drawing on my earliest memories, I remember Arthur Ayer, Orin Jones (who I thought was ancient), Elmer Willey, Ron Reed and Ted French marching as well as playing in the bandstand. I remember horns honking after a piece had been played and people eating popcorn. The band is an institution and a foundation block of St. Johnsbury's history. Join them on Monday nights as they provide music and relaxation in Courthouse Park.