

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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There’s Music In The Air

How does one break ground to plant, cultivate, then harvest on a farm all day, keep house, preserve food, raise a family and still have energy and desire, to attend a barn dance? (Perhaps a month prior, these pioneers had helped their neighbor raise this very barn.)

Late historian Bill Pless, noted that though the work of surviving was never finished, time was still found for reading, socials and church.

Local musicians would have provided the music. Fiddlers, banjo players, horn players, and drummers, helped satisfy the need for this vital and integral part of these settlers’ lives.

These gifted neighbors were ready and willing to provide music for square dances at schools, social halls, etc. Potluck was arranged by the distaff side of the families. “Passing the Hat” helped pay expenses. Here was the opportunity to make new friends, hear the news, jokes and stories.

Pless writes, “Everyone went to a square dance to have a rip-roaring time. The men and boys came in home spun clothing, their leather shoes ‘shined’ with mutton tallow, while the girls wore the only ‘good’ dress they had; their hair curled with a hot iron, or perhaps in braids tied with a bright colored ribbon. They had all worked hard that day, but now at the first sound of music they were rearing to go, anywhere and everywhere... they cut the ‘buck’ on the corners, as they whirled, swung, sashayed, or did a do-si-do. ...as the caller put them through ‘make a little cage and put the birdie in, now birdie fly out and hawkie fly in, now hawkie fly out and give birdie a swing.”

Pless notes that, if the pioneers hadn’t brought an accordion, concertina, fiddle, clarinet, recorder, or a drum with them, they bought an instrument with the first money they came by, usu-

ally earned by trapping fur bearing animals, or from the bounty on wolves.

Stirred to action by the nation’s upcoming centennial in 1876, many in the community determined that music would be important to a proper celebration. Brighton Village and its environs hosted a number of residents to whom it was logical to form the Brighton Peerless Band in 1875. Egbert Albright, Dick Clark, Frank Hacker, Albert Herbst, Dr. Hill, Harold Hilton, Frank Marshner, Guy Pitkin, Frank Robbin, Richard Roberts, Ivan Sawyer, Jim, Louis and Bill Seger, John Thompson, and Will Winklehaus are identified on an early photo as members.

Research implies a Brighton Cornet Band was formed about the same period. Several members were also a part of the Peerless Band. Including: Egbert Albright, William Bigham, S. Davis, John P. Donley, J.D. Ellenwood, R.M. Fillmore, S.J. King, C. Kuhner, R. J. Lyons, Will Stuhrburg, Nelson Thomas, G.W. Thompson.

Many of these men were in their 20s and 30s. They held positions of prominence in the area, were civic minded, promoted education and conducted various commercial, industrial and agricultural undertakings.

(To be continued)

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: writings of Bill Pless; 1880 History of Livingston County; “From Settlement to City,” by Carol McMacken; Historical Society archives. Additions/ corrections requested. 810-229-6402.)