

**BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**There’s Music In The Air (part 3)**

The Rialto Theater, built by Cliff Roberts, one of the members of the Brighton Peerless Band and the Concert Band, opened in March, 1919, bringing movies to Brighton. The Concert Band entertained movie goers with a concert at its opening. The Rialto was located c. 307 W. Main Street.

The Eastern House, northeast corner of Main and Grand River, had a dance floor on the second level; dancing also took place at the Opera House at c. 125 E. Grand River. Many of the musicians were area residents. Nationally known bands of that era performed regularly at the Blue Lantern on Island Lake.

During the difficult times of the 1930s’ Great Depression, the hunger for music was not diminished. In rural schools a visiting music teacher, from the Livingston County School District, usually came once a week to conduct a class in singing. A piano or pump organ was found in some schools which was used by the music teacher, students, etc. Almost every pupil could play ‘ChopSticks’; often some could play by ‘ear’.

Brighton native and third grade teacher in district 5, Brighton City, Elsa Marten Stegenga recorded her experience in the organizing of a school band in 1934. She was contacted by Guy Pitkin, local business man and mayor, requesting her help in the organization of this band. Pitkin had long been a member of the Brighton Band, which performed Sunday concerts and marched in holiday parades. He hoped a school band would serve as a ‘feeder to the Brighton Band.

Elsa writes, “A Conn Instrument salesman was contacted, the PTA had a meeting and a small segment of interested children from grades 6-9 started to receive lessons at the school. The School bought the drums, French horns, and the base horn.

Mr. Pitkin also decided we needed uniforms. So, capes and hats were ordered. They were Blue and Gold but the High School Foot Ball Team was absolutely negative to the idea of changing their Orange and Black colors. They had no use for the band.

The little band flourished. The kids did a good job and were proud. Mom and Dad were proud, too. We marched at the foot ball games. By 1937 we were giving a concert a month for which we charged a dollar, the money was used for music and band needs. We also had fun with parties and picnics. At one I received a beautiful black eye when in a race I collided with Bill Beckman, our six foot drum major. The band kept growing, and when I left, in 1938, it was a nice organization. We marched in the holiday parades and played on Wednesday nights by the Mill Pond during the summer. But times were changing.” Society archives include a c. 1934-35 photo of 23 school band members.

Pitkin’s hope for this group as a feeder did not materialize. As the players graduated they either left town for college or jobs. Not long after, WW II resulted in more changes. Stegenga notes a number of the band students who were lost in the war. After the war several members returned to their music becoming teachers, directors and members of their own music groups

**To be continued...**

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from Carol McMacken’s; “From Settlement to City” and Society archives. Additions/corrections requested. 810-229-6402.)