

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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(Following is a letter from Elsa (Marten) Stegenga. Elsa was a 1929 graduate of BHS and a 3rd grade teacher.

BRIGHTON SCHOOL BAND

The Brighton School Band was started back in April of 1934. I had received my teaching certificate in Music Education and was living in Brighton where I grew up.

Mr. Guy Pitkin, a respected citizen was very interested in forming a School Band, hoping it would be a feeder for a future Brighton Community Band.

Back in the early 1900s, there had been a Brighton Band made up of some of Brighton’s leading citizens. They played Sunday concerts and marched in holiday parades. (There were no radios or TVs and people made their own entertainment.)

Mr. Pitkin called me into his office one evening and talked with me about starting a band. I was teaching 3rd grade, my first year, and I was delighted with the idea.

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 Football team was absolutely negative to the idea of changing their Orange and Black school 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 football 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

Reckman, our six-foot drum major. The band kept growing and when I left, in 1938, it was a nice little organization. We marched in the holiday parades and played on Wednesday nights by the Mill Pond during the summer, but times were changing. Many of the kids had and needed jobs — the jobs came first and so the school band did not become a feeder for the Brighton Community Band. After high school, the young people left Brighton for college or other places where they could fulfill their dreams.

“My Kids” as I called them went to war — tears fill my eyes — Bob Morland, my drummer was the first to die — our Drum Major, Bill Reckman in the Philippines — Ray Carmack and Fred Singer some place in Europe — Ray Thomas — in the Navy some place in the Pacific and Garnet Rolison in the Marines of a nervous breakdown. Some of Brighton’s best gave their lives.

Then there was young David Leith who joined the Army Band 78 AGF based in Germany and played at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1945. He told me his slide trombone never sounded more beautiful then when he was flying 30,000 feet above the earth. He said the sound was incredible.

My life has taken many wonderful turns and lovely people have crossed my path; but some of my fondest recollections are of the little band I started in Brighton.

My congratulations to you all and my best wishes for continued success of the Band.

Most Sincerely, Elsa Stegenga

This and more stories and photos about Brighton’s love for music are currently on display at CoBACH Center. “Music in the Air” — See page one for hours.