

## BANDS FROM POST-RECONSTRUCTION ERA TO WORLD WAR I

Local community bands flourished in a rather narrow slot of time, roughly from the end of Reconstruction (1877) until our entry into World War I (1917).

The Rock Hill Cornet Band's beginnings were directly connected to Wade Hampton's visit to the town during campaign for governor. The 12-member band was made up mostly of Main Street merchants with John Gary Anderson of later Anderson Car fame playing the bass drum.

The Rock Hill Cornet Band had its own band wagon painted in gold and yellow much like a circus cart. Band members rode on top the wagon which was pulled by either 2 or 4 horses.

In 1883 the Blairsville Cornet Band was formed to represent the western part of York County under the direction of T. B. Herndon. The band had 11 members, 6 of them bearing Plexico as a surname, 4 Robinsons and William Lucas. They were frankly political, stating that their music was necessary to ensure a Democratic Party success in York County. They paraded the principal streets of Yorkville prior to elections.

In December of the same year, 1883, western York saw another band formed—the Hoodtown Silver Cornet Band under Capt. S. S. Plexico. The band had 10 members, two of them just boys. Robert Lee Hood, 6, played the drum and Henry Hood, 12, played first E flat cornet.

The Hoodtown's first concert involved a parade from Black's Station to the top of Whitaker's Mountain where a newly-built observatory was unveiled. This was before the Blacksburg area was cut away (1897) from York county to become a part of newly-created Cherokee county.

But of all the bands that sprung up in this time period there was probably none better than the Bethel Band with its "Buttons and Braid and Bugles." It was organized in 1890 by Lacy K. Armstrong at Glenn & Riddle's General Store. They practiced in a one-room gingerbread house lent them by S. S. Glenn.

One evidence of their fame was their being chosen as the official band for the laying of the Winthrop College cornerstone on May 12, 1894. Gov. Ben Tillman was present along with more than 10,000 witnesses to this historic occasion.

The Bethel Band, like most others, was always present at political speakings. In those days the "speakings," often were two-day affairs. Many were like reunions of families and friends but it was not at all unusual for fights to break out (sometimes there were fist fights by candidates of opposing parties). Typically, when fisticuffs broke out, the

bands would strike up with music calculated to distract the crowds from joining the fighting.

Since the bands were not paid for their appearances they had to find ways to support themselves. The Bethel Band got their funds largely from operating lemonade and ice cream stands at special events. The lemonade was made in shiny new washtubs and the ice cream in wooden churns. Folks brought their own tumblers, saucers, spoons, etc.

Not only did the cornerstone exercise at Winthrop give fame to the Bethel Band but so did their play at a Confederate reunion in Ebenezer. Their spirited playing earned an invitation to play at a to-do at Ball Alley Mountain near Marion, N. C. The Bethel Band accompanied 300 Winthrop students for the excursion which began at the train station behind the Winthrop campus.

D. B. Johnson, Winthrop president was a great believer in the educational value of excursions, especially because most students had never seen both the mountains and the ocean.

Around 1900 and later a number of bands were formed by mill owners for their employees. Especially good was the Highland Park Mill Band of Rock Hill. They played many public concerts as well as taking part in parades.