

The Castine Town Band A History

by Jean Miller

Castine has always had musical moments. During the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the Argyle Highlanders played their bagpipes. These concerts were held on Sunday afternoons in a private home overlooking Oakum Bay.

The records of the first Town Band date back to 1893 with the formation of the Lawrence Coronet Band. Funds were solicited for the purchase of instruments and the suggested donation was 25¢. Note that the band members were all male and dressed in dark uniforms.



1896

Lawrence Band

Courtesy Castine Historical Society

A band stand stood on the Town Common between the Church and the Library; a best estimate of the location is that of the commemorative rock now in that location. By 1896, Willis Ricker who played coronet in the Lawrence Band organized another Town Band. Willis was a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music and he owned a store on Main Street. The instruments included trombones, coronets, clarinet, French horns, and a snare drum. Their uniforms of white pants, dark jackets and caps were a welcome sight on Sunday afternoon concerts held in the band stand of the Acadian Hotel overlooking the harbor. The hotel was on the corner of Perkins Street and Pleasant Street.

Willis Ricker composed several songs for the band; the most notable being “The Salute to Castine “ march in 1896. This song celebrated the steamship “Castine” which travelled frequently from Boston to Castine. The band continued through 1938 when women were allowed to play. The band members dressed in all white; old family names include: Dunbar, Eaton, Day and Perkins. Willis died at age 84 in 1957. It is not know when the band was dissolved.



1912

Ricker

Band Courtesy Castine Historical

Fast forward to 1997 when Richard Starke organized a “new” town band. The first meeting was in a small room at Maine Maritime Academy, and Dick advertised in the paper to find musicians. You did not have to know how to play well, but you needed an instrument. Some of those first band members included Justin Cooper, Tom Miller, Barbara Thomas, Dave Unger, Bill Mulquin, and Don Crist. The band was not very good, but the audience didn’t seem to care. They were just delighted to hear music once again played on the Town Common at sunset. The tradition continues to this day: every two weeks in July and August, the band can be heard at 6:00 PM. One of these concerts is held on the campus of the Wilson Museum, a gorgeous location overlooking the harbor.

Members of the band range from rank amateur to accomplished professional and in age from 10 to 85. Dick Starke retired as Conductor in 2004 and the town was fortunate to have Silas Yates take over the same year. Si moved to Castine in 2000. He is a graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy, Stanford University with a history degree and the University of Miami with a degree in Studio Music and Jazz and a Masters in Music Theory/Composition. He is also an ex-Marine having served in Viet Nam, a registered nurse, and a fine trombone player. He has organized several bands throughout the Penobscot area including Sentimental Journey and the Prevailing Winds.



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Courtesy Castine Historical