

Marching through town's musical past

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Band concerts in the park are as traditionally American as apple pie and ice cream.

Chelmsford has been a part of this tradition during the past century and, if the current movement to erect a permanent bandstand on the Center Common is successful, we can expect increased interest in these pleasant summer evening diversions.

Band music is nothing new to our town. It is not clear when the first bandstand was built locally or what it looked like but the second one was erected in 1881.

The Lowell Weekly Journal of Aug. 25, 1891, reporting on the recent concert, commented, "The band occupied for the first time their new stand, which is much more capacious and substantial than the old one."

It was a raised platform surrounded by a fence-like railing and was located on the Westford Street side of the Common. The band, that evening, was under the baton of "Mr. Hubert Bearce of the North Village" so it was probably the North Chelmsford Brass Band of which Bearce was founder and director.

This bandstand was removed about the time of World War I.

A few years later, the band gave concerts

The way it was

By George A.
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from a temporary stand that was disassembled and moved to the various villages for concerts.

Between 1920 and 1931 money was appropriated at Town Meeting for the band concerts. Starting with \$175, the appropriation was gradually increased to \$400.

In connection with Chelmsford's 300th Anniversary (1955), Sgt. Basil Larkin of the Police Department organized and directed the Auxiliary Police Band and for several years gave concerts on the Common from a portable bandstand built.

The Chelmsford Jaycees received permission from the 1961 Town Meeting to erect a permanent bandstand on the Common in memory of Bernard Larkin (High School band instructor 1943-1951). Plans were prepared but the structure was never built.

In addition to the North Chelmsford Brass

Band and the Chelmsford Band (known in the early days as the Chelmsford Cornet Band), the Middlesex Training School at North Chelmsford had a band directed first by James P. Larkin and later by his son, Basil Larkin.

Rev. Wilson Waters mentions, in his *History of Chelmsford*, the Chelmsford Appolonian Temperance Brass Band but I have not uncovered any information about it.

We are, of course, all familiar with our excellent High School Band and the Chelmsford Community band that has been giving summer concerts for the past few years.

My father, who played in the Chelmsford Band at one time, used to reminisce about one of the more amusing (or "tragic") experiences of the band.

While giving a concert in South Chelmsford many years ago, the bandstand collapsed. Adding insult to the indignities suffered by the band members, a large container of lemonade that had been resting on the stand tipped over, showering the musicians with the savory beverage.

Musically speaking, that's the way it was.

George A. Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.