

# Coleman's Band- A Small Town Pennsylvania Band Makes Big Music



by Kathy Warnes

It all began one warm August evening back in 1882. Pat Coleman and the boys were sitting around in Coleman's Hotel, in Union City, Pennsylvania, talking politics and making bets on the coming election. The boys said that the country was going to the dogs in 1,500 ways. Then somehow the talk switched to music and all of the musical talent abounding in Union City.

"We ought to start a band! We should organize our talent!" someone cried.

But someone else put a damper on the whole idea by asking, "What are we going to do for money?"

Patrick Coleman, the genial proprietor of the Coleman House lifted his chair back and said, "Speaking of music, I sure would like to hear "Marching Through Georgia."

"We don't have a band to play "Marching Through Georgia," for you," the boys told Pat Coleman.

Pat Coleman sat his chair down with a thump. "By thunder boys, I'll back your band!" he said. I'll put money into it! In fact, I'll give you \$50 if you name the band after me. You go ahead and

get the prices on the instruments and we'll organize right now. You can hold your practices right here in the hotel."

### **Coleman's Band Develops Its Own Personality and Becomes Famous**

The boys took Pat Coleman at his word and by June of 1883, the band had been organized and named Coleman's Band in Pat Coleman's honor. The charter members of the band were: Charles Bartholme, cornet and leader; E.B. Landsrath, cornet; Adolph J. Bartholme, cornet; Fred J. Kamerer, cornet; J.C. Caflisch, alto; E.L. Caflisch, alto; A.L. Caflisch, tenor; Fred Bartholme, baritone and treasurer; William Mendonsa, bass; Wick D. Camp, snare drummer; and Frank Caflisch, cymbals. Fred Lucas and Frank Phillips were the first teachers of the group.

In the early part of the century, Coleman's Band was known as the best band in Northwestern Pennsylvania. *The Music World*, a magazine for band and orchestra members published in Philadelphia, ran a feature story about Coleman's Band. Boroughs and cities throughout Pennsylvania and from such other states as New York, Maryland, and Illinois commissioned the band to play at social and civic functions. Coleman's Band also gave concerts in Central Park and at the Cooper Opera House in Union City.

Murn Danner who played bass was the oldest living member of Coleman's Band in the 1960s. He said in a 1969 interview, "Memories of Coleman's Band? I remember at least a thousand things about Coleman's Band. We used to practice every Thursday night for two hours in the building on the corner of North Main Street where the model of the boat is now. There was a jail below us and every once in awhile we could hear the prisoners pounding on the walls and telling us to stop that infernal racket."

Coleman's Band members always liked their liquid refreshment and this liking once got a tall cornet player into trouble. It seemed that the tall cornet player had stopped at a saloon to get a drink shortly before the band was scheduled to play a concert. After he had finished drinking, he left the saloon and rejoined the band to add his cornet to the melody. But the cornet wasn't there. Had he left it back in the saloon? Back he dashed, grabbed his cornet and luckily managed to rejoin the band just before the first note.

Another band member once walked into a rehearsal with his E flat alto horn full of beer! He lifted the horn and WHOOSHH went the beer onto the floor, leaving a pungent reminder of his practical joke for weeks.

### **The Dorsey Brothers and Others Magical Musicians Play with Coleman's Band**

The band also had some very famous collaborators. According to Murn Danner, during the coal strike of the 1920s, the Coleman Band members got acquainted with two band members from the coal country in Pennsylvania. A little later, these two players stopped off in Union City for a few days and played with the band. Their names were Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey.

Then there were the Barthomes who contributed so much to making Coleman's Band what it

was. One time when the band was playing at the Corry Fair, someone asked if they knew “When the Moon Comes over the Mountain.” While the rest of the band ate lunch, Charles Bartholme went off by himself and wrote all of the band parts for the song. When the band members came back from lunch, there was “When the Moon Comes over the Mountain,” all ready for them to play.

J.J. Bartholme was one of the most noted members of Coleman’s Band and his musical arrangements, marches and more classical compositions were popular in England, China, Canada, and Mexico as well as the United States. Some of his better known marches were *Standard Bearers March*, *Steelton March*, and *Brantford March and Two Step*.

Adolph Bartholme directed the band for over forty years until poor health forced him to turn over the leader’s baton to Orval C. Hatch, Sr. Albert Cerutti directed the band in the 1950s and David Wellmon was its last director in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Coleman’s Band had a membership of about 35 members and Coleman members kept a sharp lookout for young horn players so there would be new blood constantly coming into the band. In the 1950s, the clubs, business places and individuals of Union City donated \$3,500 to buy new uniforms for the band. They made the band a snappy looking outfit and it won several prizes in out of town parades for having the best uniforms.

The 1950s band officers were: President, John W. Gates; vice-president, Paul McInerney; Secretary and Treasurer, L.D. Ottaway; and Manager, M.E. Danner.

Murn Danner had an endless supply of Coleman’s Band memories.

“Yes, we played at the Wattsburg Fair for 40 years. We rode over there on Caflisch’s log truck every morning and back on it every night. One time when we were playing at the fair we even had to play through a snowstorm.”



Once an opera singer became stranded in Union City and went with Coleman's Band to perform at the Wattsburg Fair. Bill Gillett, a band member, accompanied her on his xylophone.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Coleman's Band played many engagements in Titusville, Corry, Meadville, Conneaut Lake Park, Hotel Riverside at Cambridge Springs, and Waldamer, in Northwestern Pennsylvania and in Jamestown, New York. The band appeared in a large number of parades and won many prizes, competing with some of the best bands.

### **Pioneer Band Member Bill Gillett Recalls Coleman's Band History**

In 1972, Bill Gillett talked about his happy days in Coleman's Band. He also gave some history about the band as he recalled it. Bill said that Coleman's Band started with the Coleman Hose Company in 1882, and was known as Coleman Band and Fire Company. Then in 1884, the name of the Band was changed to Coleman Hose Band because the band used the Coleman Hose Company meeting rooms for meetings and rehearsals. In 1886, Hose was dropped from the band's name and once again it was Coleman's Band.

Bill recalled that his grandfather, Abraham Gillett and Fritz, Charles, Ed, Adolph, and Jacques Bartholme told him about how the band got started. Patrick Coleman sat in his hotel on Mile and Concord Streets, talking to the boys. The boys were Abraham Gillett, Frank Tipton, Charlie Hunter, Frank Camp, and Fritz Bartholme who had a cigar factory across the street from the Coleman Hotel on Miles Street.

Pat told the boys that he would sponsor a band and hose company if the band would always play "Marching Through Georgia" and "Hail, Hail, the Gangs All Here," for him. Bill recalled a few more original band members. He said that Jacques (Jake) Bartholme, Fred Maurer, Anthony Malay, Fred Cooper, Jim Sherwood, and his father William H. Gillett as drum major, were also among the first members of the band.

Coleman's Band used to go to firemen's conventions at Warren, Meadville, Jamestown, North East, New York, and Erie. On Memorial Day in 1905, when Bill was nine years old, he marched to Evergreen Cemetery with John Steves who took his father's place as drum major. The Band played for the ceremonies. According to Bill, Coleman's Band always played a concert in the Opera House and one time. Tom Gardner, who had a beautiful voice, sang a solo "The Shade of the Old Apple Tree." Bill played a drum solo on Burnet Sherwood's drum, although he was then only nine years old.

The summer of 1906, Coleman's Band went to a firemen's convention for a week at Jamestown, New York. Bill and George Franz carried the Coleman banner ahead of the band in the parades. The band stayed at the new Samuels Hotel and the men stacked their instruments in a big front room in the hotel on the second floor. Bill was alone in the room waiting for the band to return and get their instruments for the big parade. In came Harry Goss who told Bill not to tell what he was going to do. Harry had some soft limburger cheese and he put it on all of the mouth pieces, even clarinets and Eddy Crowe's fife. When the men came to get their instruments, there was chaos. George Warden was going to throw his bass horn out of a window!

Bill remembered another story about Harry Goss. The band used to play for the July Fourth celebrations at Lake Pleasant. One time, Harry Goss was doing a high dive into the lake. He climbed a 40 foot ladder to dive when somebody pulled on the wires steadying the ladder. He had to jump quickly near shore into about five feet of water. The jump almost killed him.

In 1912, Bill Gillett became drum major of the band and in 1913, the band went to Erie for the Perry Centennial. The flagship Niagara was raised during the Centennial and there were parades every day for a week. The band also went to the Wattsburg Fair every year and played yearly for the Union City Catholic Fair. Bill said that the Fair was always on a Thursday night and Father Cantlin started it about the time he had the new church built. The wooden school was still there and they had a dance in the hall with concessions all over the grounds. Pete Connel and Nick McInerney always would raffle off ducks and chickens. "Politicians were all over the place," said Bill.

In Bill's memory, the weirdest job Coleman's Band ever played was a Ku Klux Klan convention in Cooperstown, New York. The band demanded big money to go and when it arrived, the men and women were all wearing in sheets. The convention took place in a big field with a great platform and featured speakers and politicking. The sheeted women fed the band members chicken and all of the trimmings.

### **Coleman's Band Celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

On Thursday, August 18, 1932, Coleman's Band and Hose Company celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a reunion and parade which began in Union City and ended at Canadohta Lake. The parade started at 9:30 a.m. and the boys in the band marched through the streets of Union City. Charley McLean drummed the "Danville and Mayflower Quick Step just as he had done 50 years before. The Bartholme boys played as well as they ever had for the past fifty years. Tom Haney from Montclair, New Jersey, directed the band and Mrs. Ben Hess explained how much her father, Pat Coleman, sponsor of the Band, would have appreciated the tribute to his band.

The entire band of 95 members, old and new, played with foot stomping spirit. The hose company members followed along with the water wagon, one of the first modern fire trucks, and the new hook and ladder truck. The over 1,000 onlookers in Union City enjoyed the parade. After the parade, the celebration moved on to Canadohta Lake, where the band played the first of its three concerts and the old members of the band and hose company met and reminisced.

The nine living charter members of Coleman's Band and Hose Company led the parade. The Hose Company founders were Everett Beans, Walter O. Jones, Harvey Anderson, and A.N. Tabor. Band members were Charles Bartholme Adolph Bartholme, F. J. Kamerer, Albert Caflisch and Fred Hackett. Mr. Rosenkrans was an arranger and composer and former member of Coleman's Band. He called is song "Coleman's Semi-Centennial march." The audience and band members enthusiastically agreed that it was a selection of universal quality and importance.

Between the program numbers, various band members discussed the history of the band and hose company and paid tribute to both organizations. Mrs. Ben Hess, Mrs. Mineola Caflisch, and John G. Jenkins, superintendent of Union City Schools, talked about the band and hose company.

Mr. Jenkins talked about Patrick Coleman who was “one of the best known, congenial, benevolent businessmen Union City has ever known. He also talked about Charles Bartholme who practiced the hard blowing E-flat cornet in the barn while other boys threw stones at the barn. After a time, Charley’s practicing paid off, and he made the band what it became. Superintendent Jenkins pointed out the outstanding work of the band while it served as the 16<sup>th</sup> Regimental Band in World War I. It played in other places around the country and turned out such noted musicians as Thomas Haney, Martin Falion, Will Brakeman, Fred Camp and Donald Foster.

Mrs. Ben Hess commended the band and said that her father would have enjoyed the day, and Will Brakeman and Mrs. Mineola Caflisch told a few experiences of the band years. Horace Bell and Fred Hackett entertained the crowd during intermissions with humorous anecdotes and monologues.

The day ended with sporting events, a picnic supper and another concert. The Coleman Hose Company with Henry Crittender in charge, arranged the program and Murn Danner acted as master of ceremonies for the entire day. The ladies of the Lincolnville Baptist Church served the dinner, which was free to past and present band members. Arthur Crowe supervised the transportation.

Bill Gillett remembered the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. He said that he had made a large triangle of about 18 feet that Ed Eskine and Fred Barabough got him to play in concerts. It had a beautiful tone. Dr. Drew Sherwood spotted it and wanted it to hang in his log cabin cottage so he could ring it loud enough to get his boys, Dick and Norman off the lake when he wanted them. He teased and teased until finally Bill told him to take the triangle as a gift.

According to Bill, the anniversary celebration lasted for a week, with former band members coming from all over the United States. He remembered that on the way to the celebration on the train, Bob Toner chased Harry Peard through the train with a turtle. Cliff Morrice lost his trumpet while hitting every bar on the parade route, Bill said. After he lost it, Murn Danner, LaRue Ottaway, John Gates, George LeFevre, Frank Metzger, Orville Hatch, Cally Davis and Bill went looking for it. Murn found it in a tavern about three blocks away. The parade route was two miles long and the boys in the band were glad to get on the train and go home that night.

During World War II, Bill Gillett directed a band in Corry called Aero Supply, and Coleman’s Band came over from Union City to help out. Members included Harold Smith, John Caflisch, LaRue Ottaway, Frank Metzger, Floyd Metzger, Murn Danner, George LeFevre, Carlisle LeFevre, Rudy Coveleski, John Gates, Earl Bliley, and Ray Cooper. Bill was drum major and his oldest daughter, Anabel, head majorette.



Murn Danner and F. Merrill Little "bass" it up for the band. Mr. Danner is the oldest living member left in the band. He has played with it for 60 years.

The combined bands went to Jamestown to march in several Fourth of July parades. Most of them were big parades, miles long and during one particular parade, it rained sheets. Anabel was the only majorette who had enough nerve to throw her baton in the air and catch it as the band passed the reviewing stand. "I sure was proud of her with that slippery baton throw. The judges gave her \$25 for being the best majorette," Bill recalled.

Other parades Bill remembered were the ones at Spartensburg Fair and the Holy Name parades at Erie. These started at Villa Maria College and continued for a five mile route. He remembered a big parade at Meadville when Jake Caflisch Hall was dedicated. In the middle of the parade, Harry Shipiro stuck his arm through the bass drum and Paul Cooper had to do double duty on snare drum for the rest of the parade.

Bill said that his old friends George Cooper, Jacques (Jake) Bartholme, Adam Boyd, Ed Erskine, Red Dorpich, and Don Foster made the best trombone section ever. Trumpets were Charles Bartholme, John Downs, Ray Cooper, Joseph McNery, Bill Wellman, Adolph Bartholme and George LeFevre. Bases were Murn Danner, professor Woodring of Saegertown, Tom Cooper and Orvil Hatch, Jr. Clarinet players were Ed Bartholme, Frederick Bartholme, Frank Metzger, Harold Mook of Saegertown, Don Damerer, Tom Haney, Hugh Olds, and M. Johnson. Baritones were LaRue Ottaway, John Caflisch and Jim Watts. Alto horn players were Fred Damerer, Carroll Merrill, Claude Parker, Ivan (Stub) Reynolds, Melvin Blanden, and Raymond Campbell.

Saxophone players were Orvil Hatch, Sr., John Gates, Jack Hyland and Cally Davis. Drummers were Harry Shipiro and Harold Smith. Bass drummers were Paul Cooper, Burnett Sherwood and Clyde Evans. Paul Cooper and Bill Gillett played snare drums and concert bells and Bill Gillett was the drum major.

### **Coleman's Band Leaves a Lasting Legacy**

Coleman's Band continued to play for parades and graduations into the 1950s and 1960s. Then as its older members died off, the complexity of modern day life and the changing music styles caused it to die too. The days of the band concert in the park have almost passed from the modern scene and Coleman's Band no longer plays in Central Park on First Avenue in Union City. But for more than 80 years, Coleman's Band provided music and fun for generations of Union City residents. It has left a musical tradition that is a challenge for modern musicians and a grace note of nostalgia from the past.

#### References

Various issues of the Union City Pennsylvania Times and Times Leader

Personal Interviews

For more information:

[Coleman's Band - Union City Historical Museum](#)