

100 YEARS
And the Band Played On
Bryce O. Stenzel

It is a hot summer evening in late June or early July. There is a faint trace of humidity in the air, but a cool breeze begins to blow, ever so slightly, which tempers it, so as not to be overly oppressive. Although it rained earlier in the afternoon, the sky cleared, and the evening sunshine streams down. The leaves on the stately old oak trees of a city park provide shade and cast their shadows on the ground. Those shadows begin to lengthen, as the sun begins to set, below the river bluffs. The sweet scent of freshly mown grass is all about, and the cicadas in the trees above have just silenced their chatter.

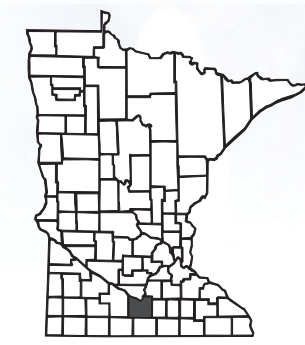
A crowd has gathered around a seated group of musicians with wind instruments in their hands. A conductor steps up on a raised platform in front of the musicians and motions for them and the audience to stop their conversations. A hush falls over the crowd, and the conductor raises his baton. For a split second or two, there is almost complete silence, broken only by the sounds of an American flag flapping in the gentle breeze, and the trickling water cascading down from a nearby fountain into its bottom catch-basin. Then the band strikes up a familiar chord and begins to play a patriotic air—perhaps the national anthem or a stirring march. The crowd members respond in kind by singing along, clapping their hands together, or tapping their toes in time with the music. And the Band Played On.



Photo credit: James Olson

The preceding scene could have taken place anywhere in America in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Such concerts as the one just described were commonplace in those days. Unfortunately, in most locations, they are at best, only a cherished memory of a bygone era. In reality, this slice of Americana still exists in south-central Minnesota, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Mankato Elks Band, Mankato Area Municipal Band, and Mankato Area Community Band. While the names of this single, venerable institution may have changed with the passage of 100 years, its original purpose remains the same, as when the band was organized in 1922—to provide quality musical entertainment and enjoyment to its members and audiences alike. In doing so, this band has preserved a timeless American musical tradition for generations of people to enjoy, acting as musical ambassadors for the city of Mankato, Minnesota. This is the story of that band as told through primary source accounts of those who performed in it, newspaper articles, and photographs.

\$23.99
ISBN: 9781733113977



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COMMUNITY
BAND
1922-2022

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Centennial History of the Mankato Area Community Band



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