

# The History of the Hebron Military Band

By Ben B. Conant, Curator, Paris Cape Historical Society

The musical history of the town of Hebron was never of any great significance in the early years of the town. From time to time there were certain individuals who perhaps developed a talent either in singing or the playing of an instrument. In the early days instruments were hard to come by and were often expensive, so not many people were able to purchase them. After acquiring an instrument, the next step was to find someone to give instruction in how to play it. Most of the qualified teachers would be located in the cities, so distance was also another factor. However, many of the people had a love for music and whenever it was possible to have a “singing master” in the area, and there were several well known ones at various times, he would frequent the schools and seek to teach the scholars the rudiments of music. Often these classes were held in the evening.

One of the first mentions of a band playing in Hebron was at the Semicentennial Celebration of Hebron Academy on September 5, 1855. About ten o'clock in the morning a procession was formed under the marshalship of Major Albert W. Cushman of Hebron and under the escort of Snell's Cornet Band of Turner and they marched to the Baptist meeting house to commence the activities of the day. Over the years Turner has possessed some well known musicians, some having played in John Phillips Sousa's Band as well as other noted bands.

This part of western Maine has produced several who have made a name in the area of band history. One of the early bandsmen, Winfield Scott Ripley, (1839-1924) from the nearby town of Paris did much in composing music for the era during post Civil War days. He organized and trained over fifty bands in four New England states and wrote five sets of band books. One could go on and on in speaking of various ones who have contributed in one way or another to the growth of the bands in the middle to late 1800's. Hebron during this time was not fortunate to have a band of its own so had to rely on neighboring towns for their supply of music. Hebron Academy eventually offered a musical course in the latter part of the nineteenth century which helped to stir the musical interest in the area.

Much could be said about the Conant Brothers' Band and I interject a little history of it at this point. Although this family was not born in Hebron, at various times six of the eight brothers either lived or settled here. Hiram A. and Flora Adkins Conant, Turner natives, later residing in Buckfield, were the proud parents of fourteen children comprised of eight sons and six daughters. The only living member of the family at this time is Ida Conant Hammond, age ninetyfive, who resides with her niece and husband, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Perry of Brighton Hill, Hebron, Maine.

The eight sons composed the Conant Band which was well known in the State during the 1890's. Albert A., the oldest, played the snare drum; Hiram Wilson, the bass drum and cymbals; Edward Everett, the baritone horn Walter G., the bass horn John W., the valve trombone; George I., the alto horn Harry L., the cornet and Charles B., the youngest, played lead cornet. With the help of their father, who enjoyed music, and with

further supervision of the leader of the Buckfield Brass Band, of which most of them were members, this family band developed a good reputation. They were the one unique feature at Conant reunions for the early years of its beginning and doubtless its counterpart could not be produced in the country.

Two of the great high points in the life of their father, Hiram, were the times they made music at the Thirty-Second Regimental Reunions of the Grand Army of the Republic of which their father was a member. One of these occasions took place at Kennebunk, Maine around 1891 or 1892 when the youngest son, Charles, led the band. The old General S. J. Griffin took him in his arms and hugged him after the little fellow, only eight years old, played several solos to a crowded house. Prior to going to this gathering Mrs. Albert Conant (Nellie) made the short pants and jackets with the piping for the two youngest boys, Harry and Charles, so that their suits would match the suits of the older brothers who belonged to the Buckfield Band. The other similar regimental reunion was held at Waterville, Maine a few years later and the brothers performed in grand fashion.

Seven of these brothers played at some time in the Hebron Military Band, the only one that did not play was John Conant, who died in 1903. However, his life was much devoted to music as he played bass horn in Mr. Payne's Second Maine Regiment Band of Lewiston, Maine and at the time of his death was considered second to none in Maine as a bass player. Charles also played in other bands in Kingston and Exeter, New Hampshire as well as the Haverhill Band in Massachusetts during his lifetime. This nucleus was a great help and encouragement in forming what was to be known later as the Hebron Military Band.

At the turn of the century it was very common for each town to have a band of its own. Many of the towns surrounding Hebron had well-known bands, some of which had been playing for many years. A few of their names are: the already mentioned Buckfield Brass Band, Norway Brass Band, South Paris Brass Band, Turner Band and the larger city bands of Lewiston and Auburn. The Lewiston Brigade Band and Payne's Second Maine Regiment Band were organized by Frederick George Payne, a keen musician and father of ex-governor Frederick Payne, and were well known bands in the twin city area.

A group of local musicians from Hebron and the nearby towns of West Minot, Mechanic Falls, Turner and Buckfield met December 1, 1908 for the purpose of organizing a band. However, nothing was officially organized until the following May 21, 1909, when officers were chosen as follows: First Leader—Harry M. Barrows; Second Leader—James (better known as "Phil") Campbell; Secretary and Treasurer—Albert A. Conant; Executive Committee: Walter G. Conant, Harry M. Barrows and Ernest Farris. At that meeting a brief set of bylaws was recorded:

1<sup>st</sup> This band is to be known as the Hebron Military Band.

2<sup>nd</sup> This band shall consist of First and Second Leaders, Executive Committee of three, and all other officers that the band may seem fit to elect.

3<sup>rd</sup> The officers of this band shall be elected by a two-thirds vote of the band.

4<sup>th</sup> Any officer may be removed when it is deemed for the best interest of the band by a two-thirds vote of the band.

5<sup>th</sup> The officers shall be elected annually on the first meeting in January.

6<sup>th</sup> The band books and music and all property bought by the band including uniforms shall be owned by the band.

7<sup>th</sup> When a member shall sever his membership, or is voted out of the band, he shall deliver up all band property to the executive committee.

8<sup>th</sup> The band dues shall be paid once a month to the treasurer, the amount to be 250 per month.

9<sup>th</sup> The Treasurer shall report once every quarter.

Those gathered at the meeting voted to purchase twenty-two uniforms at \$12.50 each, making a total cost of \$275.00. Funds were needed to secure these uniforms as there was no money to start with. Henry K. Stearns agreed to hold a note for \$210. 00 which was to be due the following December 1, 1909 and Clifton Young paid the remaining \$75.00, making a total of \$285.00, \$10.00 of which was to be reckoned for interest. Ten days later the Hebron Military Band played at Mechanic Falls on Memorial Day and received \$50.00 for services rendered, to be applied to the amount due Clifton Young.

The names of those who played at that first big event on May 31,1909 were: Harry M. Barrows, Arthur E. George, Herm E. George, Sam Whitman, Bracy Bean (who played slide alto horn), Charles Merrill, Ernest Farris, Cliff Young, Phil Campbell, Aaron Thurston, Carroll Sawyer, James Lewis, Lewis Barrows, Lester Johnson, Charles Rowe, Colby Turner, Ernest Sampson, Albert A. Conant, E. Everett Conant, H. Wilson Conant (Drum Major), Walter G. Conant, Harry L. Conant, George I. Conant, Charles B. Conant, Forest B. Conant, Al Chase, Seward Sturtevant and Frank Price. Some of the younger members were students at Hebron Academy and enjoyed the opportunity to serve the community in this way. One of the above mentioned students, Lewis Barrows, was later known as Governor of the State of Maine. He came to the Academy from Newport, Maine. A few of the boys from towns along the coast or from the islands were gifted musicians and they played in the band while getting their studies at the Academy.

When the band met on June 8,1909, the members voted to set aside Monday night as the regular meeting for each week. The records of this organization testify to the devotion of these members by their faithful attendance each week. Four days later a concert was given in the square at Hebron. During the month of July a concert was given at West Minot. The usual place of meeting for rehearsal each. week was at the Hebron Baptist Church.

It is interesting to note that while Harry M. Barrows was the First Leader of the Hebron Military Band the records reveal that another person took over the leadership within a couple of months. Mr. Barrows was very capable as a director as he had taught singing in the grammar schools and had a good knowledge of music, both in theory and technique. However, a bandsman and a teacher of brass instruments from Turner came over to help in giving direction to the newly formed band. His name was Jesse Percival Hobbs, better known as "Perce" Hobbs, a man with more band experience than what Mr. Barrows might have had. Mr. Hobbs had played baritone horn in the Lewiston Brigade Band and had played cornet in his own Hobbs' Orchestra. He had been a former member of Hobbs' A. M. Band of Lewiston and R. B. Hall's Band at Waterville, Maine. I remember Father telling that Mr. Hobbs could play two cornets at the same time, which

was an art in itself, but he was afraid that it would spoil his lip for playing the baritone, so he never practiced the trick too often. Whenever Mr. Hobbs was not able to direct, then Mr. Barrows would be the leader.

At the regular weekly meetings along with the band practice, the members would discuss proposals for contacts for future concerts as well as other pertinent business. In August 1909 a committee was elected to make contacts regarding the purchase of a snare drum. The band also had planned to go to Togus but this did not materialize. From time to time the place of meeting was changed from the Hebron Church to the West Minot Grange Hall. This was done to make it more convenient for the members who lived in Minot. The attendance at the Monday gatherings usually ranged from fifteen to twenty-three and sometimes more. Concerts were held frequently at West Minot.

On September 6, 1909, the band held a concert at the Sanatorium and received \$25.00 for such, a goodly amount of money for those days. This was a common occurrence, usually taking place three or more times a year there on Greenwood Hill.

In the treasurer's book the credit and debit columns are interesting to read. At each meeting dues would be collected. Also the director was paid a fee. No set figure is given as to the weekly amount he was to have received, but from time to time an allotment of money was paid out for such purposes. A prominent musician, John D. McCarthy, who lived in the city was very helpful in finding instruments and ordering music for the band. One entry relates that he sold the band a snare drum for \$8.25 and Express Band Music Books for 400, some difference in price today. Forest Conant took drum lessons from this Mr. McCarthy. One entry states, "Band chipped one dollar to pay Decoster for washing dishes." Cordwood was another expense during the colder months and the price varied from two to three dollars a half cord. Occasionally outside musicians were hired to add depth to the band for special concerts. At the close of the year the treasurer recorded that \$55.55 was received from band dues; \$50.11 was paid for hired players, music and rent (lights, etc.); \$227.68 was received from playing and subscription; \$81.15 was paid to J. P. Hobbs and \$135.00 was paid on the note held on the band suits. For the year 1909 the records show that they did quite well that first year.

The year 1910 started out with a big New Year's Ball at West Minot at which some of the band members played. On January 3, the annual election of officers was held. They are as follows: First Leader, Harry M. Barrows; Second Leader, "Phil" Campbell; Secretary, Albert A. Conant; Treasurer, Arthur E. George; Executive Committee, Walter G. Conant, Harry M. Barrows, and Ernest Ferris; Entertainment Committee, Sam Whitman, Bracy B. Bean, and "Phil" Campbell. The last committee was elected to serve a three month period. The band voted that two leaders should direct the band once a month. Also it was voted to extend a vote of thanks to the West Minot Band boys for the money they received from the New Year's dance at West Minot that was turned over to the band. The treasurer's report was read and accepted.

With a new year before them the Hebron Military Band found itself with the task of learning new music and making contacts for future engagements throughout the year. On March 7<sup>th</sup> they made a bid to play at the Oxford County Fair Grounds on June 28<sup>th</sup> at the Odd Fellows' Field Day for \$50.00 and expenses for twenty-two men or more. However,

this never materialized as records give no account of such. At this March 7<sup>th</sup> meeting “Phil” Campbell directed the band.

“Phil” Campbell, a West Minot native, was an excellent euphonium player. He had played for three years (1904-1907) in the Second Army Band at Fort Williams, Portland, Maine, a band of forty-five men or so. The euphonium was not a common instrument in these parts at that time. He had purchased his silver horn. from the factory at Elkhart, Indiana for \$114.00 case and all. At one time he sold it and later bought it back again from a pawn shop. It was interesting to hear him relate the different ones that had owned the horn over the years.

Other bids were made to play at Mechanic Falls for Memorial Day, but this, too, was canceled. The band played at Hebron for the forenoon on Memorial Day of 1910 and up to the Sanatorium for the afternoon. Harry M. Barrows seemed to do most of the directing throughout the spring and summer with occasional help from J. P. Hobbs and “Phil” Campbell. Concerts were given during the summer at the Hebron Church yard, West Minot, and up to the Sanatorium. On August 25, 1910 the band played for the Grange Field Day at the Oxford County Fairgrounds, an annual event that continued for the next few years. Another event of the year was playing at the Democratic Rally at West Minot on September 2, 1910. Outside help was called in for some of these performances and the hired players usually received \$2.00 a day for playing. Another of the members joined the rank as a director and that was Charles L. Bray.

In January of 1911 the annual meeting and election of officers was held at West Minot. The following were elected: First Leader, Harry M. Barrows; Second Leader, Charles L. Bray; Secretary, Albert A. Conant; Treasurer, Arthur E. George; Executive Committee, Walter G. Conant, Harry M. Barrows, and Ernest Farris; Entertainment Committee, Albert A. Conant, Cliff Young and Harry M. Barrows. Some of the high points for 1911 included giving a concert at the Hebron Church in January, receiving a \$50.00 gift from Moses Verrill in April and a big time in preparing for Memorial Day engagements. The Turner Band agreed to join with the Hebron Band for the May 30<sup>th</sup> exercises and rehearsals for that event which took place at East Hebron, a point somewhat central for both groups. When the day arrived this united band played at Hebron from 9 A.M. until 11 A.M. and received \$10.75 for services; then they went to Mechanic Falls and played from 2 P.M. to 7 P.M. and received \$50.00 and still one more concert at the Sanatorium in the evening at which they received \$25.00. That was a full day for thirty bandsmen! Later in June of that year both bands met at Everett Conant’s in Buckfield for a rehearsal. In August a concert was given at West Minot for the Ladies’ Circle. Forest Conant directed in October for one meeting and the year wound up with a band concert and dance at West Minot in December.

On the first day of January 1912, fourteen members of the Hebron Military Band assembled at the Hebron Church for the annual meeting and election of officers. The officers were as follows: First Leader, Harry M. Barrows; Second Leader, Charles L. Bray; Treasurer, Arthur E. George; Secretary, Albert A. Conant. A list of the committees was not recorded. On the last Monday night in January at the weekly meeting the secretary made a report of the records of the previous year (1911). This report stated that fifty-two rehearsals were held with an average attendance of fourteen for the year and the balance amount of money totaled \$10.09.

For the month of January the directors were J. P. Hobbs, H. M. Barrows and F. B. Conant and the places of meeting were in Hebron or West Minot. On March 4, 1912 the band gave a dance at West Minot and they cleared \$6.65. Also a month later they played for the Prize Ball at West Minot and received \$15.00 for this night which helped defray some of the back bills. Regular weekly meetings were held for the next couple of months with the high point of May being an afternoon concert at 2 P.M. at the Sanatorium. On June 7<sup>th</sup> a concert and dance were held at West Minot and \$3.60 was taken in. The glorious Fourth was celebrated in the evening with a band concert at the Sanatorium along with fireworks. The amount received was \$20.00. At the weekly meeting of the fifteenth of July the records state that enough money was in the treasury to pay in full a note held by H. R. Dimmock, which they voted to do. A few days later a concert was given in the churchyard at West Minot with a collection amounting to \$4.40 of which \$3.00 was used to pay hired musicians. On August 5, 1912 it is interesting to note that Cliff Hobbs, a brother to "Perce" and a capable musician, attended the band meeting with a demonstration of various instruments that he had for sale. Four days later the band received \$25.00 for playing at the Norway Fair Grounds for the county Grange Day.

September was a slower month with only the Democratic Rally at West Minot which brought in \$15.00, otherwise just the regular meetings were held. One entry states that 830 was donated to go toward an E-flat bass horn. In October Mr. Rafnell came up from the city to demonstrate and sell instruments. Money at this time must have been tight as it was voted to send statements to all members who were behind in their dues with the hope that some would pay on them. It brought a good result with some twenty-odd dollars having been sent in within a couple of weeks. The band voted to buy the bass horn, before mentioned, priced at \$125.00. A trombone and another instrument were turned in toward the bass horn, leaving a balance of \$11 0.00. That horn was the one that Walter Conant played and is still in use at the Oxford Hills Band. The last closing date of anything recorded in the minutes of the band meetings was on October 28, 1912; however, a mention of another engagement later that year was of the band playing at a drama at West Minot.

Information is rather sparse as to the activity of the Hebron Military Band for the next few years. For a known fact, during the year of 1913, there was a concert on July 27<sup>th</sup> and later on August 9<sup>th</sup> when the band played at the Norway Fair Grounds at the annual field day. They did play for the Fourth of July celebration at West Paris, Maine for the year 1914. This we know as several postcards and pictures reveal such. As to exact details of concerts and the like, I have been unable to find much for the years of 1913 through 1919. Various ones testify to the fact that the band was active during those years but concrete evidence is lacking. As to when the band ceased to be, no one seems to know exactly. The First World War was in progress at this time and took many of the younger members and those whom I have contacted cannot recollect the exact date of the disbanding of the band. One party with whom I conversed vaguely remembered of the band playing at the Sanatorium around the spring of 1919. No later account is recorded to my knowledge. Although the lifetime of the band lasted only around a decade, its impact and contribution to the town and other nearby towns added much to the events that took place during this period of time.

I would like to extend countless thanks to those who have helped in supplying information in compiling what we do have recorded and trust that this might be another small chapter in the history of Hebron for future generations.