

Interview with Harold Ellshoff  
March 17, 1998  
Interviewers were Ruth Medsker and Ryan Tyhurst

**Q:** What was the first year the band was put together?

**A:** The city band was organized in 1875. The fellow that organized it was Professor L. A. Wallace. He was a professor at the college where the North School now sits.

**Q:** At that time, and now, what is the general type of music played?

**A:** Well back years ago, it, it's pretty much the same now. The only difference is that you've got your show tunes and your movies and your themes from your movies and stuff like that you've played more and more and some of your pop tunes. And basically back then you had your marches and overtures. And pop tunes of that era.

**Q:** What are some of the songs they played?

**A:** Oh, well, of course they played a lot of the marches we play today. Uh, of course your John Phillip Sousa marches and Carl King marches and overtures like your William Tell Overture, Peak Daub, White Cavalry, Point and Pheasant, and all that kind of stuff. And some of the songs back then one was Marching Along Together, it was kind of a singing song, and Take Me Out to the Ball Game, just really songs of that era of the late 1800s to the early 1900s.

**Q:** What is the average number of members per year?

**A:** I'd, I'd say the average number of members is around 40.

**Q:** Now when it first started, was it that amount?

**A:** When it first started it had maybe 15 to 20. My granddad, my mother's dad, was in the band, he played drums, and I'd say then they had about 15-20. I've got pictures of the 1901 band, and there were two clarinets and the rest were all brass.

**Q:** When the band was started it was mainly just a brass band?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Then later did it become a woodwind/concert band setting?

**A:** Back years ago, 1800s, most of all your bands were brass bands. And then your flutes and piccolos, clarinets and stuff. You always had piccolos in all your brass bands. Then your clarinets and stuff, then you had horns starting to come in, and a little bit later

on you had your French horns instead of your old altos, what used to be called peck horns. They played the after beat and the basses played the down beat.

**Q:** When does the band generally perform? I do know that they go through the summer, but do they start before the summer?

**A:** Well we generally start the first of May for rehearsals. And our first engagement is always Memorial Day. And then our concerts generally last through June, July and August. We try to go through August but sometimes schools start and we can't go as long as you want to.

**Q:** How many directors of the band have there been?

**A:** Now I think that I'm the sixth one. The first one was Professor L. A. Wallace, then there was William Recktor, and there was Harold Bright, he went from here to Indiana State University. Herman Diekof, from Terre Haute, he directed for a while. Drew Kasteal was a director. Charlie Trefz played, but he directed once in a while. But mainly Drew Kasteal. After Drew, Drew Kasteal, then there was Vaughn Arney. And he retired in 1964, he was the music teacher here at the high school, grade and high school. And then when he retired in 1964, then I took over the band.

**Q:** Who built the first bandstand? It is my understanding that it has been redone since it was originally built.

**A:** It's been repaired, and it hasn't been rebuilt as such. It's basically the same bandstand when it was built in 1929. And it's still the same bandstand, of course they've done some renovation to it. New roof, and this last spring they put in new posts. Of course the others were rotting off at the top of the concrete. They drilled and put all new posts around the old posts and all that. But basically that is the same bandstand.

**Q:** Now you said it was built in 1929?

**A:** Yeah, 1929.

**Q:** At that time how much would it cost to build a bandstand like that? Do you have any idea?

**A:** At that time I wouldn't have any idea. A lot of this is donated, because my dad told me that Kirchners, and a lot of people around town donated labor and material to build it. Now I don't know who the builders were at that time because that was the year I was born.

**Q:** Why did Marshall decide to have a city band? "Cause there are other towns like Casey and Martinsville that have as much music involvement as Marshall does, yet Marshall is the only city, the only town in the county that has a city band.

**A:** Casey tries to have a city band. I don't know if they did last year or not, but they used to have a city band. I used to play in it years ago. I don't know a lot of your little towns always start some sort of little brass band. Some of them kept going and some bands folded and just didn't go. Now I think that if it were for personnel, your schools, and stuff like that. Of course back years ago high school kids couldn't play in the city band. And then when I started I was maybe one of the first high school kids to play. I played in grade school, and you had to play in grade school when I started to play. And that's so funny when a lot of the high school kids started to come in, now a lot of the older fellows started dropping out.

**Q:** Now what are your feelings toward the band? Do you see the band continuing on to the year 2000?

**A:** I do. Yes. As long as I'm here, and of course, as long as somebody will take over, and take it over and keep it going. I feel like Marshall is so used to the city band and being part of the city functions I think it will keep on going.

**Q:** From my understanding you volunteer to be in the band, but yet you get paid at the end of the year. So how does that all work out?

**A:** Well years ago it was volunteer and they'd pass a hat and try to get a little money to try to buy music and stuff like that. And then, I don't know when it came into effect, but there is what they call a Band Law, the Iowa Band Law. In fact Carl King was the one who got the Iowa Band Law started. Through your taxes, your personal, your property taxes, you used to have personal taxes, you don't have them any more, but through your property taxes a certain amount of every dollar would go into what is called the Band Fund. You have your Library Fund, you have your other funds, your schools, and your fire department, your ambulance, now all this, and that is how it got started and what happened, we kept putting in for appropriation. Now we had to put in for appropriation every year. Well, our tax money was just, we never got what we wanted, we didn't appropriate anything, but whether we something, now that was something else. And we weren't getting what we were wanting, so we went in front of the City Council, and asked them if there was any way for them to help us out. Now they said that whatever our tax money is, they would match it. And that is how we get the amount of money we do get.

**Q:** Now does the band perform anywhere but in Marshall? Do they go to like Terre Haute?

**A:** No we don't go to Terre Haute. We basically don't go any place. Now last year, the last two years, we've gone to Greenup and played a concert, and then last year we went to Greenup and also West Union. Now a few years ago we did go to West Union for the West Union Parade, then played a concert, and that kind of fizzled out, due to politicians.

**Q:** Now a days is the band open to anybody or is just high school and adults?

**A:** Well it, its open to anybody. But we don't like to have people that, you know we like to have students that are going into their freshman year. Like this year, if anybody graduates [from the eighth grade] this spring, that or going to be a freshman next year or else they can come into the band. Of course we have it now that if any sections are overloaded we can have auditions, but then they, you get so overloaded in some sections that it is just overbalanced. I've tried to have a halfway decent balanced band.

**Q:** Does the band try to help out say on like and individual basis? Like trying to send people to camps or anything like that?

**A:** We did start something like that kind of like a scholarship fund. I think we do send, we did help send tow kids to band camp. We didn't several years ago, but we do now. Now I think that through the school and your music teacher and stuff like that helps decide who would do that. Now I think we've had two of them help out on like a scholarship fund for people to go to band camp.

**Q:** To be in the band, do you have to be a resident of Marshall?

**A:** No, no you don't. It helps like in some sections you are so low on certain players that sometimes I have to go and get somebody from out of town to come in and play. Like that one player from Terre Haute, Kenny Stiverly, he comes over and helps us play. Sometimes I'll ask other people to come in for a concert and play. But basically everybody is right from Marshall.