

History of the EHS Band, and important musical/historical moments in EHS History, as researched by Mr. Stalter

Origin of the Eureka High School Fight Song

Throughout the 1920's, several articles appear in The Nautilus urging students to write school songs or "Pep Songs" that the students could sing together. It seems that by the frequency of its printing there was a fairly popular one in the latter 1920's whose words were set to "On Wisconsin." Every once in a while The Nautilus printed new "school songs" set to various tunes, written by students. Along with the songs, students were encouraged to make up "yells" to support the team, and the paper printed these yells fairly regularly, especially in the fall during football season; the first appearance of our traditional "E-E-E-u-r, E-E-E-k-a" yell was printed in the November, 1928 Nautilus for students to learn; however, one could safely assume that it probably was in use prior to its printing.

In early October, 1933, the words to our current fight song appear in The Nautilus for the first time as a "Pep Song." In 1932, new band director Mahlon Saxton (who served through the spring of 1956), began having the band play at some home football games (their first one was September 30, 1932), and it is logical to assume that there was an interest in playing and singing something together as a student body, something that was unique to Eureka and not a copy of a college fight song. There are also many articles in the early and mid-1930's that refer to student "Pep Meetings" before big games, usually involving evening bonfires (outside the city limits), lots of singing and yelling, and walking and driving around through the town, and it is logical to assume that this song was used frequently at those events. Almost every old alumnus I have talked to over the years has referred to the music of the fight song as being written by Mr. Saxton, and I think there is enough circumstantial evidence to bear that out (he was also directing the Chillicothe H.S. band at the time, and their school song is also an original piece). The October 27, 1955 edition of The Nautilus stated that the lyrics were written one evening by an English teacher on faculty named McMillan (who was employed only during 1933-34), Mr. Major, a history teacher, and some students. In 1939 The Nautilus mentions that at the dedication of our current football field (it was completed for use in the 1938 season but dedicated on October 13, 1939), "the band marched and paraded around, coming to a halt on the 50 yard line. After playing several fitting pieces, the band ended with the school song 'Go Eureka.'" So, there is definitive proof that at least by 1939, that song was the official School Song of Eureka Township High School.

During George York's tenure as band director, he asked Bill Anderson, his assistant, to rearrange the school song to clean up the voice leading and add a countermelody, a feature that all good fight songs have. Bill composed the countermelody that is used in the current arrangement.

In 1992, Todd Stalter rearranged the school song once again in a more "block" style arrangement, and changed the key of the school song from A-flat major to B-flat major, which is a brighter key and one in which the countermelody lays more comfortably for trombones and baritones. In 2002, to pay homage to the early history of the high school's athletic teams, the 8-measure introduction known as the "Green and White" was added as a tribute to that pre-1940's era.

“Hornets” as the school nickname

The first printed mention of a Eureka athletic team being called “Hornets” was of the 1940 baseball team, referred to as the “Green Hornets” in the May 6, 1940 edition of the Nautilus. Starting in the fall of 1940, most athletic teams were referred to both as “Eureka Hornets” and “Eureka Green Hornets.” Before that time, teams were referred to as “The Green and White.” In 2002, Mr. Stalter chose to honor that era by inserting the current 8-bar “Green and White” introduction, and it is played by the marching band when the football team scores during games.

Condensed History of the EHS Band

In the summer and fall of 1928, a band consisting of students learning instruments via private lessons was organized by a Mr. Thompson from Peoria, in the same manner that school bands were started all over the country during this time; a local musician who currently or formerly played in a touring band and representing a local music store would offer lessons and instruction for a certain rate, but if the instrument was bought through him, the lessons were free. The band started as a club that met as a group outside of school, and made sufficient progress to be able to give a public performance on February 25, 1929, at a basketball game between Eureka and Washburn. The school board subsequently hired Mr. Thompson to teach the program, and he stayed on as director until 1932, increasing the band’s size, and taking it to district contest.

In 1932, Mahlon Saxton was hired as band director, and under his direction the band began to perform more in public; he began the practice of playing at home football and basketball games, and was able to create bands of very high quality in a short period of time. In the spring of 1937, the band advanced out of the district contest for the first time and played at the state contest at the University of Illinois, leading to many appearances there, receiving an “A” rating in their class in 1938, 1939, and 1940. The band regularly performed every October at the Peoria Band Festival, which was at first a concert event and then, from 1939 onward, a parade marching event. It was seen as a highlight of the school year; band members received a soda, hot dog, and a free pass to a movie in the late afternoon while directors met for a professional talk from a leader in the band field of that day. A Band Mothers group was formed to help raise money for uniforms and the purchase of additional instruments.

In the spring of 1946, the band rented two timpani from the Peoria Municipal Band and a set of bells rented from Byerly Music Store for use in the upcoming state band contest, the first time any percussion instruments beyond the standard snare drum/bass drum/cymbals had been used. On March 16th, the band performed a concert in the Congerville High School Gym for the express purpose of luring students away to attend Eureka Township High School instead.

In the spring of 1947, Mr. Saxton was presented a billfold and a tie clasp from the band at the band banquet, and everyone began looking forward to the addition of Goodfield students to Eureka Township High School starting in the fall of 1948, bringing the enrollment of what would now be called Eureka Consolidated High School to 210 students.

Saxton stepped down from the high school position in the spring of 1956, deciding to teach only the grade school students. Wesley Reeder, from Momence and a representative of a Champaign music store, was director for one year, 1956-57.

In 1957, Arden Keen from Farmington began his tenure as Director of Bands. Keen established a high quality marching band, and his parade bands were legendary in central Illinois; his 1962 band won the ISNU Homecoming Parade, which resulted in the invitation to perform at the 1963 ISNU Homecoming game, which was held in the newly opened Hancock Stadium. He grew the band program's enrollment to support two concert bands, and many alumni from that time refer to the years that he and Roger Coventry (choral director) were teaching together at Eureka to be the "Golden Age" of music at EHS, due to the quality of performances and awards won at state contests. Keen left in 1967 to teach at Canton High School, where he remained until his retirement in 1985.

Max Judy was hired to take over in 1967, and it is difficult to find much of anything in print that references his time here. In talking with former director Bill Anderson, things apparently did not go well; after the years of precision and excellence in the marching program, it was soon obvious that he was not properly equipped in terms of instructing a marching band (legend has it that there were a couple of legendary collisions during halftime performances).

There was a return to stability in 1969 when Robert Allan was hired, as it was obvious the program was in good hands. Allan had taught previously in Chillicothe and Danville, and was also Dean of Students at EHS in addition to being band director, which was a nod to his administrative acumen. Allan's reputation as a master teacher and pedagogue resurrected the band program, and when he left to become Supervisor of Music for Unit 5/Normal Community H.S. band director in 1972, his assistant, George York, took over the program.

George took Bob Allan's work and ran with it. His groups were top notch, and he was liked and well respected by the community. George hired William Anderson as his assistant band director, and continued to build the parent support of the band, and has often told me that had things happened differently, he would have stayed in Eureka his entire career. But the budget cuts in 1976 due to a failed referendum decimated many programs in District 140, including the band program, and George left to teach in Chillicothe for one year, after which he headed to Normal to replace Bob Allan as the Supervisor of Music for Unit 5/Normal Community H.S. band director.

William Anderson not only assumed the duties of high school band director in 1976, but almost the entire district-wide music program, including general music and middle school bands. It is because of Bill's hard work, stubborn determination, and vision that the band program managed to survive until it was obvious that one man could not sustain that type of workload any longer. In 1981, when it was decided to hire another instrumental music position, Bill was given the choice to remain at the high school or lead the bands at Eureka Middle School, and he chose EMS, where he would teach until his retirement in 2005.

Fresh from ISU and the drum major for the Big Red Marching Machine, Kevin Jensen inherited a program in 1981 that marched the occasional parade, and performed a traditional "Moffitt style" halftime show. He instituted a corps-style marching approach to halftime shows, and taught the band its first field show in that style in the fall of 1981, which they performed at the ISU State of Illinois Invitational High School Marching Band Championships that year. He also worked to secure newer-style uniforms for the band, and began the first Band Camp to start learning over the summer. He also searched for good performance venues for his bands, taking advantage of the auditorium at Illinois Central College for several concerts. Kevin's acute ability as an arranger for bands helped broaden the high school band's

repertoire, and his talent caught the eye of choral music giant Jerry Ray, which led him to become a composer of choral music for the Alfred Music catalog. Kevin left to teach at his home high school, Rockford Harlem, in 1987.

Tony Corpus was a member of the Hall High School Band, and was educated at Western Illinois University. His skill as a percussionist is of high caliber, and he increased the band's quality in that area, as well as in color guard. Tony worked very hard at improving the marching band's competitive approach, and his bands here were known for their strong drill and energy. He exhibited that kind of energy during rehearsal as well; his fall from the bleachers and resulting broken arm forever live in Eureka band lore. He is also responsible for starting the tradition of the "Jazz Nite" Jazz Band concert each spring. Tony was very well-liked by his students, and left Eureka in the summer of 1991 to teach at Lincoln Community High School in Lincoln, IL.

Todd Stalter, a 1984 EHS alumnus, was hired in 1991. A graduate of Illinois State University (M.M. in Trumpet Performance, B.M.E. cum laude), he has guided the marching band program to 10 class championships and Finals appearances at the State of Illinois Invitational High School Marching Band Championships, has earned consistent Superior ratings for concert band at IHSA Organizational Contests, and led the band in performance appearances at the Liberty Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Orchestra Hall in Chicago, and Walt Disney World. He oversaw the construction of a new band facility, and is active as a composer of wind band music (Alfred Publishing Company) and as an adjudicator and guest conductor throughout the Midwest.