



THE PRIDE HAS A BIRTHDAY

In 1904 the first band, consisting of 16 members and a student director, was organized at the University. A half-century later, the band has nearly ten times the number, a national reputation for fine music and a fitting title as "The Pride of Oklahoma."

By LARRY LEVIEUX, '55

THE HEAT BORE IN. Two hot and sweaty teams moved off the field for a half-time break. Fans for both Oklahoma and Texas shifted, considered the plunge for a soft drink, reconsidered and waited.

Out through the south entrance stepped the orange-and-white band of the University of Texas. They took their turn and departed. Then to the fanfare of trumpets and roll of drums, the University of Oklahoma marching band, "The Pride of Oklahoma," moved smartly down the field. This was their 50th anniversary and bandsmen and director were making the most of it.

With a salute to one of the greatest showmen of all time, George M. Cohan, the 140 bandsmen performed their intricate maneuvers.

After an initial cheer of welcome, the proud Oklahomans settled back in their seats, not quite as uncomfortable as before, sure that their band was capable of making Cohan proud of his salute. Even Texans

chipped in with applause as the band left the field. The band's birthday party year was well begun.

It would have taken a Nostradamus fifty years ago to foresee this latter-day appearance of the band. In 1904, 16 musically-minded young men banded together. And if you watched its progress over the intervening years, you would know how the band earned the title, "Pride of Oklahoma." It was this way.

Like so many other things at O.U., the Band, like Topsy, "just grewed." The story of the "Pride of Oklahoma" began with the appearance of Lloyd B. Curtis, '08bs, '10eng, on the campus in September, 1904. Curtis was an accomplished cornetist and had just finished the summer season playing with a band at the St. Louis World's Fair. He enrolled in the University as a freshman, and began immediately to take part in all the musical activities he could find. Seeing no band on campus, Curtis of-

fered his services to Henry D. Guelich, then Director of the School of Music. Despite Curtis' academic deficiencies, Guelich recognized his musical abilities and appointed him to the music faculty as Director of Bands.

Quickly, Curtis sent out a call for musicians to compose the Band and was fortunate in getting together 16 men with varied musical abilities. The formation of the new band was announced in the *University Empire*, forerunner of today's *Oklahoma Daily*, with an unpretentious, "The University Band has been organized. We are looking forward to some fine music in the near future."

Lewis S. Salter, '12mus, '17ba, Dean Emeritus of the College of Fine Arts, and one of Curtis' good friends, says of him, "Curtis was an extremely versatile man with an amazing musical ability. He was serious-minded and conscientious, but was friendly and well-liked by all his associ-

ates." Dean Salter recalled that Curtis had a phenomenal breath control. When playing the cornet, he occasionally liked to astound his fellow musicians by holding the last note until the listeners began to wonder if he would ever stop.

Curtis and his little group worked hard that first year, struggling through weekly rehearsals, playing at athletic games, and generally adding a little pep to campus activities. In recognition of his services, President David Ross Boyd signed a pay voucher for Curtis the next spring, reimbursing him \$14 for "conducting rehearsals." The 1905 *Mistletoe*, early-day yearbook, printed a photograph of the band, and described its first year: "Not until this year could we boast of a band. But we have one now with real military suits trimmed with crimson and cream and all the other usual paraphernalia. And, oh, aren't we proud of them, and aren't they proud of themselves!"

In 1907 the Band expanded its activities, playing at the Inaugural of Governor Frantz, and for the first time at the Texas-O.U. game. Jack Foster, '08pharm, Norman druggist and alto player in the 1908 Band, remembers well the only out-of-town trip that year—to Oklahoma City. "We got as big a kick out of that as these kids do today going to the Orange Bowl," he reminisced.

By 1911, the Band was splitting the seams of their collective trousers. It was fast expanding, and there were only half enough uniforms for the band members. They carried on as usual, but in business suits. Curtis, who now lives in Boulder,

Colorado, says that in 1913, when Dr. Brooks was inaugurated as president, "We made a special effort, and got cheap khaki uniforms for 30 men, who appeared in the inaugural procession."

While wielding the baton as Band Director, Curtis had managed to obtain a degree in electrical engineering and was teaching Spanish at the University. He left Norman in 1915, after putting the struggling band on its feet, and last returned in 1948 for a class reunion.

During the First World War, the Band did its patriotic duty by becoming the military band of the local A. S. T. camp. When peace had come, the Band faced the problem of rebuilding, but now under the baton of a new director, Oscar J. Lehrer. In the year 1922, the *Sooner* yearbook shows a photograph of a 40-piece band in red knit sweaters, white duck pants, and overseas caps with "University of Oklahoma Band" written on them. During this period, a local chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi, national band fraternity, was established on the campus.

By 1929 the University Band had proved itself, and the first full-time band director was employed. His name was William R. Wehrend. With an eager nucleus to work with Wehrend built a membership of over 200 in the late '30s and early '40s. Through the war years another innovation was made; girls were allowed to join both the marching band and the fast-growing concert band. Also, the Band acquired a new red and white uniform made in the West Point style very similar to the flashy uniforms which the "Pride" sports today.

Chiefly responsible for the post-war rebuilding of the Band to its present position is Leonard H. Haug, professor of music education and Director of Bands. Professor Haug has held this position since 1945, and has been with the Band since 1938, when he came to O.U. as Assistant Director of Bands. Much of the present-day success of the Band can be traced to Haug's ability as a musician and organizer, and to his ambition of building an outstanding band at the University.

Haug conceals beneath a mild appearance and soft-spoken manner the ability to organize students into a precision drill unit for the Marching Band, and into an accomplished musical group for the Concert Band. His mind is constantly on his work. During an interview, his ears were so attuned to the music around him that several times he picked up a sour note and went racing off to correct a practicing freshman trombonist. He insists on perfection and usually gets it.

With the rise of the University of Oklahoma as a national football power, a corresponding increase in attention has come to its Marching Band. National television coverage has boosted the prestige of the Band, and their trips throughout the country have impressed football crowds everywhere.

Not to be slighted is the concert work of the Band. In campus concerts and on many of their football trips, the Band has made an extra effort to do some serious music, adding to its reputation as a well-rounded musical group.

Among the events planned by the Band for its half-century celebration are an Alumni Band performance at the Homecoming game with Nebraska, and a special concert in February to be directed by America's "Mr. Band," Dr. Edwin Franko Goldman, Director of the Goldman Band of New York. Other affairs are the annual Band Day celebration, which last year featured 117 high school bands, and the All-State band contest which brings the state's top high school musicians to Norman for two days of competition.

A criticism sometimes leveled at the Band by football fans is that they "aren't spirited enough." Professor Haug is quick to defend his band. He says that the purpose of a university band has changed through the years. "No longer will just a pep band do; there must be a spectacle today."

And spectacle is what they get, enough to encourage one wag to comment, "Sometimes the football team has an off day, but you can always count on a No. 1 performance by the band." Perhaps a slightly unfair comment for the team, but a fine tribute to the 50-year-old "Pride of Oklahoma."



Under the leadership of student Lloyd B. Curtis, the University band was formed in 1904. The *Mistletoe* reported the event thusly, "And, oh, aren't we proud of them, and aren't they proud of themselves!" And fifty years later, Oklahomans are still proud of "The Pride of Oklahoma."