

## THE STORY OF MUSIC IN NEW ALBANY

*Music has played a part in the New Albany story since the very earliest days of the community – since that time early in 1817 when an old familiar hymn sung by Hannah Rough as she went about her tasks in her small shop inspired another settler to form a prayer group which developed into the city's first church, Wesley Chapel Methodist. Even more than a century ago there was enough interest in music that Dollen's Music Store was founded.*

The first formal musical organization in New Albany of which there is any record, aside from church choirs, was "The Callioxean Society" which was in existence in 1847. This was closely followed by the Handel and Haydn Society which was formed well over a century ago. This latter group met regularly in the old American Hall on the southwest corner of State and Market to make music and to enjoy social fellowship. But about 1860 it was disbanded for some reason and was succeeded by the New Albany Musical Association, another singing group.

Instrumental groups, too, were active before the Civil War, with the New Albany Brass Band organized prior to 1847. The Silver Band, probably New Albany's best known and most long-lived band, dated from 1848. [and 1880s.] Before the Civil War the best known was Reisinger's Saxe Horn Band – a group which in 1856 won the Hoosier championship when it was judged best in a statewide band contest. The New Albany band had a formidable opponent in a group from Bloomington, but carried off the satin banner of victory with the rendition of a selection from the opera "Lucia de Lammermoor". New Albany

had a military band in the early days, too, drawn from members of the Spencer Greys, a local militia company which saw service in the Mexican War.

In the years immediately after the Civil War the Silver Band, the New Albany Musical Union and Mannerchor dominated the musical scene in New Albany. The Musical Union was apparently a reorganization of the New Albany Musical Association and the Mannerchor was a male chorus formed by the Germans who had become an important element of the local population. The Mannerchor met in the same hall which had been home to the Handel and Haydn Society in earlier years.

Then, during the 1880s the Second Presbyterian Church began to emerge as a center of good music in New Albany. Mrs. Jennie Gebhardt Hedden, a member of the church, had brought with her from her native Pennsylvania a love of music and song and through her inspiration the church became noted throughout the Falls Cities for the quality of its choir. Special programs often were given on Sunday afternoon devoted to music alone.

The 1890s were particularly rich in musical development, even though during this period the New Albany Musical Union and the Silver Band vanished from the scene. At the beginning of the decade the Treble Clef was organized by Charles Shackleton who directed the Male Chorus, a group which was a sort of women's auxiliary to the Male Chorus and counted Mrs. Jennie Hedden as one of its best singers. In 1891 the Mannerchor was so well established that it purchased the unused Universalist Church building on Spring Street – the building now occupied by Lawn-Do-All Sales.

In 1895 the Musical Literary Club, a study and concert group, was organized by Miss Adelaide Packard who also conducted a music school on Main Street in the building now occupied by the Labor Temple. The Mozart Club

was organized in 1897 by Miss Amalie Scharf as a study group. And there was even a group called the New Albany Mandolin and Guitar Club.

In the early years of the present century musical activity and interest in music continued at a high pitch. Added to the roster of older organizations were the Mendelssohn Choir and the MacDowell Club, both directed by Earl Hedden; the St. Cecilia Club, directed by Harriet Devol; the Haydn Male Chorus, formed in 1907 by Anton Embs, and the Musical Club, directed by Ridgeway Gebhardt.

A more ambitious effort was the Summer Opera Company, formed in 1907 to present light opera at Glenwood Park under the direction of Earl Hedden. And it was about this time that Ed Platt and Reese Prosser, both of New Albany, achieved fame on the minstrel stage.

Instrumental groups included the Harmonic Orchestra and Dreyer's Band, the latter conducted by Henry Dreyer. This group was succeeded in the 1930s by the W.P.A. Band, sponsored as a Federal Government project. Concerts were presented every Sunday at Scribner Park by the W.P.A. Band. Another recent group was the New Albany Civic Orchestra conducted by Carl Eckhart and sponsored by St. Mark's Evangelical Church.

In 1929 a new musical organization came into being – one that still flourishes – the Jennie Gebhardt Hedden Music Study Club, named for the woman who had done so much during her lifetime to stimulate interest in music in New Albany. The club was organized by Miss Rosebrugh Roberts both as a memorial to Mrs. Hedden and to fill the gap caused by the disbanding of the Haydn Male Chorus and the Treble Clef.

Other musical groups active in this area today are the Floyd County Home Demonstration Chorus which draws its membership from the home demonstration clubs; the reactivated American Legion Drum & Bugle Corps,

organized in 1929 and winner of many trophies, and the New Albany Civic Music Association which brings outstanding concert artists to the local stage. And so music continues as an important part of the New Albany story, just as it has been since the days when the city was little more than a clearing in the wilderness.

[Vol. III, Historical Series No. 24]