

VILLAGE VIEW

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If you're too new to the village to remember the Osterville Silver Band, perhaps you've heard of it; if you've never even heard of it, perhaps you'll have no desire to read further, this week. If, on the other hand, you remember or have heard about it, the following, written in 1905, is for your enjoyment.

Sometime in the early spring of 1902 there formed in this village what was known as the Osterville Silver Band. Twenty members comprised the original group; after several preliminary meetings, it was decided to procure the best instruments affordable and, after placing the order with one of the best known firms in the country, it was with some impatience we awaited their arrival.

The first meeting after the instruments arrived was held in the village's most popular rendezvous; i.e., the Crosby boatshop. At that meeting we elected H. Manley Crosby as our leader and Ed S. Crocker as Secretary-Treasurer.

Then began some of the most unearthly sounds that ever emanated from instruments manufactured by the celebrated C. G. Conn. Each man seemed to have his special notion of what "sound" constituted a tone. Everyone, not excepting the drummers, got very busy making all the noise he could, and after about an hour of this racket, the leader succeeded in making himself heard long enough to inform us, "If you don't become quiet, you will set me crazy!" Following his announcement we sobered down some and under his patient leadership, late into the night, we were able to make sounds somewhat resembling chords. Thus ended our first meeting after receiving our instruments.

For subsequent meetings we hired a room in the center of the village and faithfully met twice weekly for rehearsals. Thanks to Manley's untiring labor, skill and patience, we soon showed marked improvement; before long we felt worthy of some notice as a band.

At this time the boatshop served as unauthorized committee room for our organization. All new ideas seemed to originate there. Anyone with a suggestion went there to try it out first; then, after all aspects had been fully discussed, it was brought before the band in the regular order of business under the heading of "As we were saying at the boat shop today..."

I doubt that it came as a big surprise to any of us when one evening someone said, "As we were saying down to the boatshop today, we ought to get an engagement for Decoration Day, and one of our members thinks we can go to Falmouth." Everyone became enthusiastic about the plan, and the secretary was instructed to write an inquiry to Falmouth. The response was, "What are your terms?"

To the majority, this was a new thought. All we wanted was an engagement and a chance to spread ourselves. But

someone had thought of it and piped up, "As we were saying at the boatshop today, we ought to get a hundred dollars." Our price was soon set and our terms made known to the Grand Army Post of Falmouth.

Not many of us thought we'd be engaged to play anywhere that first year; well, do I remember when word came our terms had been accepted. At the announcement, a moment of perfect stillness fell among the members. We seemed paralyzed. Even our leader opened those eyes of his wider than ever as a look of blank amazement overspread his countenance. We all realized what this meant.

In about thirty days' time we must procure uniforms, learn to march, and perfect ourselves as best we could in music suitable for the occasion. For the first time some of us wondered if we really could play anyway.

This spirit of self-doubt did not long prevail. Our leader regained his usual composure and it didn't take him long to inspire us with confidence. We settled down to a month of good hard work.

A man from Lynn came to show us uniforms; we spent one evening making a choice. He took our measurements so as to make fat men lean and lean men fat, short men tall and vice versa.

The next problem was marching. We went to a field at Breezy Bluff where, to look ahead, the ground looked smooth and level, but when we got to marching, it seemed very different. One of the players said, "I almost swallowed my horn just then," while another observed, "I almost fell into mine."

There was considerable discussion of how to march. Some said all should turn a corner, each man in the same spot; others felt the whole line should swing at once, causing the rear end to go about ten rods sideways, like a crab. The short men complained we took too long steps; the tall men thought we took too short ones.

We finally procured a drum major and agreed to follow his instructions, right or wrong. Strange to relate, as soon as the responsibility rested with one person (and we stopped offering advice on a subject about which we knew nothing), our troubles vanished. We could wheel right or left, march right or left oblique, do whatever was required of us. oblique, do whatever was required of us.

Now proficient in marching and music, we awaited our uniforms. Disappointment was ours, for the delivery commitment could not be met on time. In the emergency the ever-indomitable spirit of our leader surfaced. Someone said, "As we were saying at the boatshop today, someone should go to Boston and hire suits for the day," and Manley was appointed for the errand. When he returned, our troubles in that direction were over.

In due time the 30th of May arrived. Two barges were procured, each drawn by four horses; we, in good spirits and high hopes, started for Falmouth. The roads were in bad condition and our early morning ride proved a 'nice walk' for some of us. I must pass quickly over that part of the trip and ask you to imagine our individual feelings as we lined up in marching order before the Post Headquarters.

The streets were lined with spectators. We realized the supreme moment had arrived. Our nerves were stretched almost to the breaking point. Then, at the signal of our drum major, we started our march toward the station. From there we were to march to the cemetery, and finally back to Post Headquarters.

There was a long pause at the station since the orator of the day was expected aboard the train which didn't pull into the depot until after we had arrived there. We were asked to play a selection. "Certainly," said our leader. On looking around, he found the trombone still present, but its player had deserted.

The Osterville Silver Band ever arises to emergencies; our drum major picked up the instrument saying, "All ready, Mr. Leader," and, although he had never played a note on any instrument before, he worked the slide to that trombone to the Queen's approval, and never made a discord. Did anyone notice the man at the drum? He marked his time with his foot, counted it out in audible whispers, and swung that drumstick as if the success of the band depended wholly upon him and the noise that only he could make.

And so the day passed; whether we did well or otherwise is not for me to decide. I can say, though, that each and every band boy did, to the best of his individual ability, whatever he could to make our engagement a success. Each year since, the GAR Post has engaged us far in advance for Memorial Day exercises. Much more might be written of the occasion, but suffice it to say we returned to Osterville that night well-satisfied with this, our First Engagement.