

ILLINOIS, SOUSA, & THE BIRTH OF SCHOOL BANDS

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America's early band performance traditions had deep ties with community regimental militias and company bands throughout the east and Midwest during the nineteenth century. Many professional and amateur musicians who played regularly in these ensembles did so as a service to these military organizations and commercial businesses.



John Philip Sousa in October 1926 wrote (for the *Davenport Times*): *"In smaller American towns, a man belonged to a brass band for recreation and for business reasons. He placed advertisements in the papers offering to hire plumbers, carpenters, or blacksmiths upon the condition that they were good trombonists, clarinetists,*

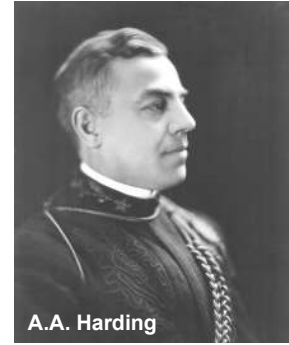
and bass drummers, and he let those workmen off for brass band duty because the town band was the great means of advertising a city, and an average small town, especially in the middle west, was known by the quality of its band... The brass band was an integral factor in our American life."

However, nearly all these musicians trained through traditional apprenticeships where sons, and sometimes daughters, followed their father's journeyman career path. John Philip Sousa's father played trombone in the U.S. Marine Band during the 1850s and 1860s, and so when the March King was a young boy he apprenticed with the musicians of the Marine Band and studied music in John Esputa's private music conservatory. Henry Fillmore, another great American bandmaster who loved circus music, followed a slightly different apprenticeship path from John Philip Sousa. Henry's formal trombone lessons and conservatory music training were both short-lived, but his early experiences with the John Robinson's 10 Big Shows Circus and later with the Lemon Brothers Circus provided him tremendous opportunities to develop his musical craft.

While many late nineteenth-century public schools provided students with some type of music education, these student ensembles were considered purely extracurricular. It wasn't until 1905 when the Richmond, Indiana public school agreed to provide academic credit for playing in their student orchestra, which was originally founded in 1897. Until 1905, no public school in America provided academic credit for participating in these school bands and orchestras.

A. Austin Harding, (1880-1958), first director of the University of Illinois Band, began teaching himself the cornet at age fourteen while growing up in Paris, Illinois, and eventually taught himself to play the fife, piccolo, baritone, trombone, and drums. Since the town's school did not have a band, he first began playing for the "The Boys Brigade"

band, sponsored by the town's Presbyterian Church, and he later served as bugler for the Paris High School Cadets. Eventually he joined the Paris Beacon Drum and Bugle Corps, and at age seventeen joined the Paris Concert Band and eventually became its director. After graduating from high school, he joined the Illinois National Guard and served as their company, battalion, and regimental bugler until 1902.



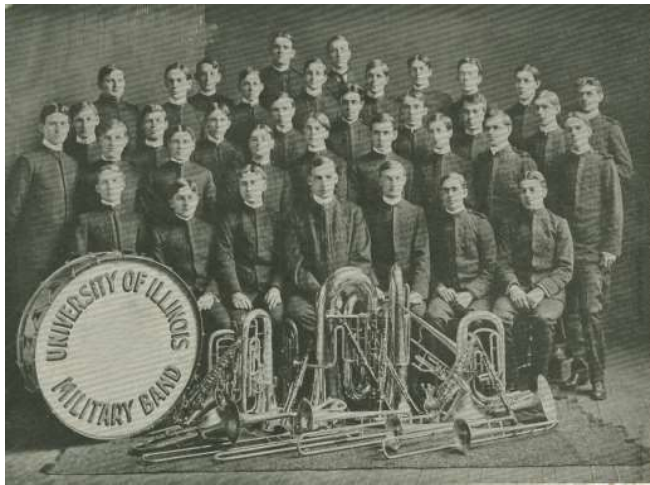
A.A. Harding

At the age of twenty-two Harding began his career at the University of Illinois as an engineering student, and was much older than most of the freshman entering university that year. Olin Browder, who was a member of the Illinois band in 1902 when Harding joined it, described him as being "a quiet and diligent new member of the band." During a 1969 interview with Calvin Weber, Browder mentioned, *"Harding gained attention of the band's members during a rehearsal of Sousa's 'Stars and Stripes.' The members were startled to hear a flawless performance of the piccolo solo emanating from the cornet section. Harding had put down his cornet and pulled out his piccolo from his jacket pocket, and started to play, and when he finished, the band's members greeted him with cheers and applause."*

By 1903 Harding was performing first cornet with the university's regimental band, and bassoon with the university orchestra, and in 1905 he was offered a temporary position as assistant band director and teacher of band instruments. As he continued his engineering studies in 1906, he played solo cornet with the band and by 1907 was regularly listed as assistant director of the band in the ensemble's programs. In 1908, Harding was offered a full-time non-faculty appointment as the director of the University bands under the School of Music, but he never completed his undergraduate engineering degree. Seven years later he was promoted to assistant professor with the understanding that Harding's services would be divided equally between the School of Music and the University's Military Department.



Illinois Symphonic Band in 1897



Illinois Symphonic Band in 1904

Shortly after his new appointment, the University bands were reassigned as a sole unit under the Military Department. The following year the University eventually awarded Harding a Bachelor of Music degree to formally complete his college education.

While some scholars consider 1905 the year when Illinois' modern band department was formally started, the groundwork for the development of America's new approach for the instruction of public school and collegiate bands was started by Harding in 1908.

The University of Illinois' band was formed in 1868, one year after the founding of the university as the state's only land grant institution, and its principle responsibility was to serve the University's Military Department. Illinois was the first collegiate institution in America to grant academic credit for students' participation in its regimental ensemble. While Notre Dame's band had existed since 1846, it did not provide academic credit to its members, and others like the University of Maryland's and the University of Michigan's bands weren't formed until the 1870s. However, Illinois' early legacy as a leading collegiate band under Harding in 1905 was not readily recognized by campus administration or the general public.

The 1905-1906 band consisted of 47 players who were described by Paul Lester in 1942 as "self-styled, inexperienced, and poorly equipped." Most American wind bands of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lacked the rich vibrant tonal colors of most symphonic orchestras because they were often overly populated by brass musicians of varied skills better suited for ballyhooing across battle fields than playing for a Sunday social. However, that did not deter Harding's new vision for the Illinois band and the training of its musicians to exemplify the professionalism and performance abilities of John Philip Sousa's civilian band he first heard in 1899 in his hometown.

During the 1907-1908 school year Harding received \$3,379 from the Illinois Board to purchase fifty new instruments

for the band, nearly three quarters of them clarinets, flutes, piccolos, oboes, bassoons, and saxophones to strengthen the ensemble's woodwind section. When the Sousa Band performed on February 8, 1908 as part of the year-long dedication of the University's new Auditorium, completed in 1907, Harding finally had an opportunity to meet the March King and discuss with Sousa his plans for a new approach for the development of college and university bands. From Harding's fortuitous 1908 meeting with Sousa, the birth of America's collegiate band movement began, and by 1920 America's public school band movement soon followed.



University of Illinois Military Band in 1912

The University of Illinois' Military Band continued to grow and mature musically from a single regimental music ensemble of 47 musicians in 1905 to two regimental bands consisting of 141 musicians (i.e., Regimental Band 1 with 79 players and Regimental Band 2 with 62 players), and a drum and bugle corps consisting of 36 musicians in 1915. By 1915 Harding's band program had nearly quadrupled its 1905 size, and the instrumental makeup of each of the regimental ensembles mirrored closely the instrumentation and music repertoire that was used by John Philip Sousa's band.

Also in 1915, Harding gave his paper, "The Band as a Community Asset," at the 9th annual Music Supervisors National Conference held in Buffalo, New York. It outlined his requisites for a productive concert band program. While his eight-point vision focused on a comprehensive methodology for the management of collegiate and public school bands, Harding placed significant weight on the instrumentation needs of this new type of music ensemble:

1. *The instrumentation should be as complete and well-balanced as the conditions will permit. Great care should be given to the assignment of inner parts. These should be taken by competent players, who realize the importance of those much-abused parts. Nine bands out of ten are handicapped by hopelessly incompetent alto-, second, and third cornet and tuba players.*
2. *Beginners should be encouraged to take up instruments that are needed to complete the band's instrumentation. Most beginners want to play the cornet, the trombone or the snare-drum. Few lean toward the clarinet, baritone, piccolo, or saxophone, while others are, protestingly, (sic) forced into the alto and bass sections. No one thinks of learning such rare instruments as the oboe, bassoon, or French horn... There should be a preponderance of reed instruments, especially clarinets, as they are the 'violins' of the band.*
3. *There should be a complete set of instruments, of good quality, proper (low) pitch, and in tune not only with the rest of the band, but with themselves.*

In addition, Harding also strongly advocated for the use of new transcriptions of traditional orchestra repertoire for these modern wind bands which he firmly believed were equally capable of playing the rich tonal works of Europe's grand nineteenth-century music masters.

The beginning of the golden age of America's school band movement is typically associated with the year 1920 even though Harding's exhaustive work modernizing Illinois' military band and his training of student musicians and music teachers at the University had already gained significant recognition by 1915.

Prior to 1920 the vast majority commercial municipal ensembles across America were orchestras, which numbered 278, while the country's city bands consisted of only 88 music organizations. In addition, very few public schools had active band programs as part of their core curriculum, and the only states to organize state-wide contests for municipal and school bands were North Dakota and Oklahoma in 1919, and Michigan and Wisconsin in 1920. However, as the trained band musicians from the Illinois campus began to filter their way into Illinois' public schools and the U.S. Armed Forces' during and immediately after World War I, the growing demand for published band music by school music supervisors led the Carl Fischer Music Company in 1920 to become one of the first American publishing houses to meet the needs of these band directors. By 1922 the number of students actively involved in public school bands had grown to over 60,000 playing in 200 different schools across the country. Circus music publisher C.L. Barnhouse also became a force in this market.

Sousa is frequently cited as one of the chief proponents for the start of America's school band movement in 1920, but in reality he served largely as the country's leading celebrity spokesperson for Harding's work with America's collegiate bands beginning in 1922 and the country's public school bands beginning in 1923. For the University's thirty-second anniversary concert that took place on March 3, 1922 a photograph of the March King and his remarks about Harding's concert band were included in the program.

Sousa's first public remarks about public school bands occurred in August 1923 when his ensemble gave two public concerts to raise funding to purchase new music instruments for George Sawyer Dunham's Brockton, Massachusetts High School band. Sousa was quoted, "Supervisors of music have been developing singers and instrumentalists for several years...A fad, some may call it. If so, it is one we endorse." (*The Enterprise*, August 16, 1923)

In November, 1923, Sousa remarked to the Sioux City, Iowa community, "In America we have plenty of talent which must be developed. The high schools will have to furnish the recruits for the musicians of tomorrow. Music today has a commercial value, which in my time did not exist. I hope to see the day when all high schools will have music as an elective course." (*The High School Record*, November

23, 1923) Finally Sousa was quoted in the November 15, 1925 issue of the *Metronome*, "Boys from the school bands and from the town bands go to Mr. Harding, and then on with Sousa if they wish...For Mr. Sousa will accept without question any musicians Mr. Harding recommends."

"The future band musicians of this country will come from the ranks of our College Bands", the March King told a reporter for a famous newspaper. Mr. Sousa pointed out that he now had three men in his organization who formally played in the University of Illinois Concert Band.

Harding's influential work promoting the education and training of collegiate and public school bands and their directors encompassed four distinct initiatives. The first of these was the creation of music clinics for band directors beginning in 1919. These clinics invited music educators to attend open rehearsals of the university's concert band as part of each November's State High School Teachers Conference that was held in a different location in the state. These open rehearsals always included performances of newly arranged and composed works for concert band to give directors of these band programs a better idea of what music was available for them to use with their students.

As interest and participation in these special sessions grew, Harding, working with the Illinois School Band Association, established the first formal State band clinic on the campus of the University of Illinois in 1930. Working with the leaders of the National School Band Association, Harding's clinic was renamed the National Band Clinic in 1932 and its focus now included bands and their directors from across the county. The National Band Clinic continued to operate from the Illinois campus until 1937, and beginning in 1938 returned to its original statewide focus and operated until 1954 from the University of Illinois.

Today's Midwest Band Clinic, which was formed in 1947, and today is considered the largest instrumental education organization in the United States, used Harding's original band clinic "always something new" philosophy from the 1920s and 30s as the impetus for their founding.

Harding's second school band initiative involved his deep commitment to adjudicating state and regional band contests, and serving as a conductor and clinician for school band festivals and summer band camps throughout the East and Midwest. The country's first National Band Contest occurred between June 3rd and 4th of 1923, and took place in Chicago with William Santelman, the director of the U.S. Marine Band, as the only judge for the thirty school bands that participated that year. The following two years the leaders of the national contest recommended that they support only regional contests to better prepare student ensembles for the next planned nation-wide band contest which eventually took place in 1925.

Intrigued by the regional and national school band contests that were taking place across the country during the early

1920s, Sousa remarked to the Sioux Falls' *Daily Argus Leader* in November 1925, "I hope to live long enough to see bands of every section of the nation organized into leagues the same as baseball, with band contests to determine the pennant winner in each league, and a world series to select the national champion." Sousa's love for American baseball and the relatively new competition between the National and American baseball leagues which started in 1903, played well that year with his idea for forming a national band championship.

Harding never served as a judge for these National Band Contests, fearing that one of his student's school bands might win and raise possible questions about his impartiality. However, Joseph Maddy, the director of the University of Michigan Department of Music beginning in 1924 who also played a lead role creating America's School Band movement, served as a judge for the 1926 and 1927 National contests, and John Philip Sousa served as one of the judges for the 1928, 1929, and 1930 contests. The competition also standardized the size of these school bands to seventy-two instruments which was the instrumentation used by Sousa for his 1924 civil band.



Joseph Maddy, John Philip Sousa, A. Austin Harding in 1930

Harding's third initiative focused on the Illinois Band's tour and on-campus presentation concerts that were given regularly to high school students across the Midwest. The earliest documented off-campus tour performance by the band occurred on April 7, 1908 at Paris, Illinois. This performance would have included selections from Bizet's *Carmen*, Wagner's *Tannhauser*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Rossini's *William Tell*, and Lehar's *The Merry Widow* which were played for the band's 18th annual anniversary concert performed on campus eight days later.

Arthur Pryor's *Triumph of Old Glory* which introduced the playing of the *Star-Spangled Banner* by the band was used to end each of these concerts. In addition, during the Illinois State Music Contests that were held at the University between 1926 and 1938, Harding's band provided complimentary concerts for all the high school bands that competed each spring. For the Illinois band's first complimentary concert on April 24, 1926 Harding had his combined concert bands of three hundred students move to the plaza in front of the University Auditorium to

play Bagley's *The National Emblem March* and Wagner's *Huldigungsmarsch*. While performances with the combined Illinois bands was typical of Harding's annual Anniversary Concerts, he decided to have the fifteen Class A high school bands that participated in the 1926 music competition with their 1,000 students join his combined Illinois bands for a special colossal ensemble performance of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever*. After this extravagant finale for his first Complimentary Concert, Harding discontinued this novel practice for these complimentary concerts. However, when the Illinois band performed for local high schools across the region, he continued to invite these schools' bands to join his Illinois ensemble for a combined finale performance to close out these special concerts when the band was on tour.

Finally Harding's fourth initiative focused on the training of band leaders through courses he taught through the University of Illinois and his work with band students and their directors who attended the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan which was a summer arts camp founded by Joseph Maddy in 1928 with Harding as its director of band education. In 1918 Harding was given a second appointment as assistant professor of music for the School of Music, where he developed new courses in band conducting, instrumentation, and music arrangement for public school educators. In 1921 he was promoted to full professor and developed additional instrumentation, orchestration, management, and athletic band courses for advanced undergraduate and graduate music students. Much of the instructional course work he developed at the University of Illinois was also used during the summers when he taught at Interlochen. In 1930 Sousa was invited by both Harding and Maddy to visit Interlochen to work with their music students and to help spreading the word about the importance of music education in the public schools.

Both movements would eventually change the educational methodology used to train generations of bandsmen and women across the country. The University of Illinois' unique music education and band heritage is extraordinarily rich and continues to be preserved and promoted through the work of Illinois' Sousa Archives and Center for American Music and the exceptional performances and instruction of today's University of Illinois Bands.



Illinois Concert Band in 1930