

Athol Daily News

Petersham Band to celebrate 100th season

PETERSHAM — The Petersham Brass Band will celebrate its 100th year of providing music on the common when it opens its concert season on Sunday, June 29. The band was organized in 1914 by Robert Douthit, who was serving as minister of the Unitarian Church. Douthit led the band as director through its



infancy and established the tradition of weekly concerts on the common during the summer. The bandstand was constructed in 1915 by Mrs. W. W. Stewart and several other summer residents at no cost to the town.

Over the course of the past 100 years, the band has only had five directors. Following Douthit, Basil Coolidge took over the podium, leading the band through the lean years of

World War II until 1961. Coolidge often directed and played his clarinet at the same time. It has been recalled in historical lore that Coolidge was often found pacing on the bandstand waiting for some of his band members to finish their farm chores and race to the common in time for the evening performance. It was also under Coolidge's leadership that the Eisenhower-style uniforms were purchased by

the band members for the 200th Anniversary of Petersham in 1954.

In 1962, Coolidge stepped down, and the baton was passed to Earl Olson. Olson, like Coolidge, was a clarinet player and also served as organist at the Congregational Church. Olson loved classical music and built up the library of overtures for the band to perform. Many of these overtures

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TO PERFORM — The Petersham Brass Band will celebrate its 100th year of providing music on the common when it opens its concert season on Sunday June 29.

and classical standards are still played by the band today. Olson was also a fan of Broadway musicals and Latin music, always including at least one selection of each type in his concerts. Olson used his position as a teacher at Mahar to recruit high school musicians to increase the membership in the band. Several members of the Petersham Brass Band today started playing as high school students during his tenure. Olson, who also loved marches, would end each rehearsal with the line "Let's play a march and go home".

In 1985, Olson retired, and the leadership of the band was turned over to Stuart Britton. Britton had recently moved to the area to become the music director at Mahar. He was a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and a low brass player.

Britton played with the band for one year and was impressed with the ability of the musicians. When Olson announced his retirement Britton eagerly accepted the position. During his tenure Britton encouraged the band to perform more challenging and complex pieces of music. Some of the larger compositions that the band played under his leadership were "The Barber of

Seville," "The William Tell Overture" and "The 1812 Overture." Britton continued to build the musical library at the band's disposal and also composed several pieces for the band during his tenure. Most notably "March and Go Home" which became his signature piece. The title of the march was inspired by stories of Olson and as a tribute to his predecessor. Britton stepped down as director after he relocated to the eastern part of the state, and the commute to Petersham twice a week during the summer became too much.

The current director, Will Choe became director in 2008. Choe, who also serves as music director at Mahar, is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts and is also an accomplished low brass player.

Choe has continued the tradition of introducing new types of music to the band and brought his own style to the podium.

Dedication to the band by the musicians who have contributed their time and talent is evidenced by the length of service. Many members have been a part of the organization for 25 years. During the past 100 years, five members have been recognized for 50 years of service to the band. They

include Andrew Doubleday (Tuba), Severin "Skiff" Anderson (Bass Drum), Harry Buell (Baritone), Lawrence "Shook" Nelson (Saxophone) and Phillip Amidon (Saxophone). Amidon played with the band for over 60 years. A few of the current members are approaching that milestone and will be recognized for the achievement in the years to come.

The band will mark another milestone at its final regular concert on Aug. 3. This will be the 800th Concert presented by the Petersham Brass Band. Special Music is being planned for this concert and former director Britton will also be on hand to help celebrate the occasion. The Historical Society is planning a "History under the Tent" event for that evening as well.

Membership in the Petersham Brass Band is open to anyone, high school-age and older, who plays an instrument and enjoys music. Current members range from their 20s to 80s. Rehearsals have begun and are held on Thursdays at 7 p.m. in the town hall. It is not too late for anyone wishing to join in the musical fun, regardless of their skill level. Anyone who would like more information can call 978-724-3571 or 978-724-3270.