

Lehi Silver Band

by Richard Van Wagoner

No celebration in early Lehi, would have been complete without a lively band or orchestra. While the Lehi Silver Band was not the first musical organization in town, it was the best known, remaining in existence for more than a century.

In March 1887, the YMMIA Silver Band, under the direction of Joseph Kirkham was formed in the Lehi City Hall. Charter members of the the group were Andrew B. Anderson, Thomas Clark, Andrew Fjeld, Daniel Fowler, David Jones, Jack Jones, George Goates, William Goates, Samuel I. Goodwin, Charles Gray, James M. Kirkham, Joseph Kirkham, Joseph H. Kirkham, Franz Salzner, George A.. Smith, John Y. Smith, James Taylor, Samuel Taylor, Thomas A. Taylor, William T. Taylor, and Walter Webb.

Though the band was motivated by a Mormon Church youth group, it was intended initially as a political organization, to promote the cause of “bimetallism”.

From 1792, the United States Treasury issued both gold and silver coins. In 1834, silver was fixed at one-sixteenth the value of gold. But from 1834, until 1872, the world prices of silver were higher than the Treasury rate. Consequently silver bullion had ready commercial value and considerable coinage was melted for resale.

To prevent this, congress disallowed the coinage of silver dollars from the beginning of 1873. In the late 1870's, huge quantities of silver began to originate from Western mines. The silver market plummeted and brokers howled in anger.

Bimetallism became her rallying cry of the inflationists. They argued that if the government coined all U.S. silver at sixteen to one, “the amount of money in circulation would be managed, prices would go up, the yoke of debt would be less galling and there would be a sure market at fixed prices for silver.

This proposal made good political sense as well. It would votes in mining areas.

Besides rooting their home for bimetallism, during the Lehi 1888 “Sagebrush Democracy” fervor the Lehi Silver Band traveled to every city in Utah County drumming in support for ambitious young politicians such as Samuel R. Thurman and J.L Rawlings who wished to make names for themselves.

The band also participated in other politicking. The July 7, 1892 “Lehi Banner” reported that on the previous Saturday the Democrats were in full force cheering for U.S. presidential candidate Grover Cleveland.

They began to gather at the D&RG on Main and Fourth West at sunset. The Silver Band struck up one lively tune after another to attract a crowd. As soon as darkness fell, the largest procession in Lehi History paraded about town behind the Silver Bandwagon and its’ exuberant musicians.

The boys in the band originally purchased their own instruments from the William Grant Music Store in American Fork. Practices were held weekly under leadership of Alfred Fox director of the Brass Band. Band member A. B. Anderson later recalled that some of the budding musicians were “routed to the cow barns” until they worked out the frightful squeaks, wheezes, and caterwauls of their instruments.

I set not long however until the band members were marching the streets of Lehi making pleasant sounding music. One of the first chance to perform publicly was when polygamists Jim and George Kirkham came home from a six month stint in the territorial prison. George wrote to his Aug. 22, 1887 diary that upon arriving at the train depot the Silver Band led by younger brother Joseph, “prayed in honor of our faithfulness”.

The following month a newspaper reference to the 18-piece band noted that it was making rapid strides.

“We expect to see them rank among Utah’s best in the future”. the reported added, “and the wish and sentiment of our citizens is give us a little more music, boys.”

The band continued to improve and perform for many local celebrations and festivities. To serenade the town on the Fourth and Twenty-fourth of July, a hayrack was fitted up with seats and drawn about town by four horses. Bedecked with bunting and flags, the band played the “Star Spangled Banner” at each intersection and occasionally in front of the homes of church and civic leaders.

At the close of the three hour performance, the wagon usually stopped at a home or hotel where the hungry band members would be treated to a hearty breakfast. In the spring of 1891, the organization purchased the famed Lehi Silver Bandwagon. Band financial director William Goates was visiting the Mitchell Fair in Salt Lake City when he saw a large crowd admiring the running gears of a Cooperative Wagon & Machine Company display.

The mechanism was not painted but the wood was oiled and highly polished and the iron was beautifully bronzed. Goates immediately thought, “here is the ideal wagon for the boys”. The purchase of the outfit was announced in the inaugural May 29, 1891 issue of the “Lehi Banner”.

Gay Whipple, Lehi master carpenter, crafted the wagon box with seats at the old Jacob Hodge blacksmith shop which stood on the meeting house block. The finished wagon was given a highly polished “piano finish” and remained this way until 1895 when Edwin Evans , who had just returned from art study in Europe, was hired to paint the wagon.

Evan’s masterful job complemented Whipple’s ship-like design and included life-like nude mermaids on each side of the vehicle.

“It was a gala day in Lehi,” wrote band member A.B. Anderson when the Lehi Silver Band made its first appearance in the newly painted wagon.

“There were babies in arms, youngster holding to apron strings, the young boy had no time to wash hands, the maiden seeking romance the old folks leaning on canes and crutches, all were there seeking profitable places to see the band go by.”

The horses were well groomed and decorated with flags and bunting, the band boys were dressed in their uniforms--a linen duster and a summer helmet. As the undraped wagon moved along the parade route, there were constant clapping, shouts of “hurrah” and other demonstration of approval.

But many of the town’s straight laced ladies were mortified at the brazen display of female anatomy on the mermaids.

“You might have expected that from those boys,” remarked one. Another argued that “those band boys should be made to put shirts on the mermaids.” And the Relief Society suggested driving the entire lot out of town. But cooler heads prevailed the wagon remained uncensored and gradually became known throughout the state as an artistic masterpiece.

To protect the bandwagon from the elements the city council allotted \$125 towards construction of a shed on the jail lot on Second North. The city also assumed financial responsibility for most of the band’s needs on the condition that they “render service to the city upon holidays.”

In 1898 Professor Beesley was engaged to instruct the band once a week for three months at \$2 per lesson. The city council voted on May 29, 1906 to allow the band \$25 a month to retain instructor Robert Sauer. Later as BYU music professor, Sauer composed the popular song, “When It’s Springtime In the Rockies.”

On April 14, 1908, the city council again allotted the band a \$20 monthly stipend to defray their operating costs. In 1910 the Silver Band was reorganized and again sought financial support in employing a music teacher, Fred Fjeldsted. The 1910 city council, in accordance with previous arrangements, continued the band's \$20 monthly allowance.

In the early years the Silver Band entertained at a wide variety of events besides the previously mentioned political activities. In 1891 the band played a flag-waving tune for a throng of Lehi citizens and U.S. President Benjamin Harrison when his train stopped briefly on a siting at the Lehi Sugar Factory.

On July 24, 1893 the Silver Band accompanied a large Lehi group to American Fork Canyon where the musicians entertained throughout the day.

Outings to Saratoga were also popular events at which the band often played. The September 20, 1894 "Lehi Banner" reported that after a full day of activities at the Murdock Resort on Utah Lake the Sunday School outing was joined by the Silver Band, who "made the afternoon more enjoyable with their sweet strains of music."

When long-time bandleader John Y. Smith left for a mission in 1897, "the members of the old silver band assembled at the residence of J. M. Kirkham and gave a social to their departing leader."

When Lehi's Spanish War volunteers returned to a hero's welcome in the fall of 1899, the Silver Band led the procession from the Oregon Short Line depot on State Street to City Hall on Main.

By 1905 the band's attire had been switched from linen dusters and helmets to a dark green uniform with black trim. Matching caps had the word "LEHI" printed across the front. The group was also playing for dances during this period, as can be seen from the flyer published in the June 3, 1908 "Lehi Banner." The July

20, 1912 “Banner” announced that band members new uniforms were “gray suits and caps.”

By 1913, however, significant changes had taken place in the organization. In a period photo, shown above, band members are not wearing uniforms, Edwin Evans’s artwork has been painted over, and the raised lettering “Lehi Silver Band” is clearly seen on the side of the vehicle.

Some time after this pre-World War I photograph was taken the band fizzled out. It was reorganized in the spring of 1920 under the direction of ambitious music teacher Abraham Anderson.

On Sunday afternoon of August 27, 1920 the band initiated the first of a series of popular open-air concerts at Wines Park. As high school music teacher and director of the Lehi City Band, Anderson did not have enough time to lead the Silver Band. It soon dimmed into inactivity.

The bandwagon was stored uncovered at the Hammer Livery Stables on Main Street where it narrowly escaped destruction during a 1931 fire which burned the livery barn and several nearby buildings.

After the fire the bandwagon was stored in a far corner of the Rodeo Grounds, where it gradually deteriorated. Under the direction of Donald Wright, 1952 chairman of Lehi’s “Old Fashioned July 24th Celebration,” the bandwagon was repainted in Lehi High purple and white. At that time musicians reorganized and the Lehi Silver Band again appeared in scores of parades where it was invariably well-received.

A shelter for the refurbished relic was built onto the south end of the high school football grandstand immediately west of the Lehi Carnegie Library.

In 1975 a decision was made to retire the stately old wagon and to use Lehi's \$14,000 share of American Bicentennial money to construct a park and pavilion to display the conveyance. For several years Lehi city power crews had been removing the old oak wheels before each parade to soak them in Dry Creek. This was deemed necessary to prevent the brittle wood from breaking.

The last hurrah of the band and its purple and white wagon was the days of '47 Parade in 1976. Ray Stewart proudly sat high atop the creaky wagon driving his four beautiful horses down Salt Lake City's Main Street. Longtime band members John Broadbent, Howard Brown, Vivian Carter, Richard devey, Dick Eddington, Harold Fox, Leo Hadfield, Clell Jackson, Donald Nielsen, Alvin Schow, and others played like there was no tomorrow.

When the parade reached its end at Liberty Park, the old wagon was brought back to town and placed in the just-completed pavilion Bandwagon Park. From noon until mid-afternoon the Silver Band played its last serenade for townspeople in Wines Park.

At 3 p.m. the dedication ceremonies for Bandwagon Park were held. After the band members were honoured, the Silver Bandwagon, concluding its long-lasting career, was retired forever.