

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

**NORTH BRANFORD FIFE AND DRUM CORP
HISTORY
1933-1955**

by

Edna Hall

1965?

Transcribed and Digitized

by

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The North Branford Fife and Drum Corps made their first appearance in the Memorial Day parade of 1934. The newspaper report of this event reports "but for those who like to see the results of earnest work and find leadership the local boys meant a real thrill for every bystander. Marching along together with their brand-new equipment, huge silken flag and natty uniforms, these boys who less than a year ago never had tried to play a fife or drum made the friends and neighbors get a lump in their throats and their hearts swell with pride. Aroused by the performance which the Highland Heights boys had put on previous years, and with the financial backing and encouragement of the Athletic Club and friends, these boys accomplished what seemed an impossible feat. Under the splendid tutorage of Mr. Bradley of Stony Creek older boys were able to help guide these boys, and with their weekly lessons great things happened. We will never forget the thrill of that first parade." Their were card parties, food sales, and numerous fund raising events to finance the equipment and travel of the Fife and Drum Corps. They in turn gave of their talent to the community participating at an annual field day of the North Branford Athletic Club, the Northford Carnival and in front of the homes of shut-ins on Christmas eve. They journeyed to several Fife and Drum Corps meets in 1934 and at the close of that year they had won four cups, Milford first place for best playing, Walnut Beach, first place for best playing, Massachusetts State Fife and Drummers Association Convention, first place for best playing and longest distance traveled. Their leader was Mr. Earl B Colter, the secretary and treasurer was Frank Haslett, committee men Percy Bean and Edward Daly. The first major was Forest Hill, the first Sergeant, Arthur Daly and drum Sgt. Ralph Colter.

The first anniversary of the North Branford fife and drum corps was celebrated at Trap Rock Park last Monday evening (July 2, 1934). "The rapid development of the Corp has been remarkable. Organized but a year ago without any traditional background of a Senior Corp, from a group of young boys from 8 to 15 years of age, who have had to be trained from the ground up; the corp is now well-trained, snappily uniformed and adequately equipped." Their first uniform consisted of white duck pants, maroon sweaters, and white sailor caps.

"Mrs. Dennis A. Blakeslee and Alexander McKernan presented respectively an American and a Corps flag to the boys of the Drum Corps Monday night at Trap Rock Field Mrs. Blakeslee presented the flag in memory over late husband. Both flags were accepted for the corps by Earl Coulter". This was July 8, 1935, the Corps second anniversary. "The Corps,

which is but two years is composed of 44 boys. They are supported in their work to a large extent by the North Branford Athletic Association. Generous gifts have made possible their advancement and participation in many out-of-town events."

On July 27, 1935 the corps took part in the Tercentenary Parade. Followed by "an exhibition drill by the Stony Creek and North Branford Fife and Drum Corps on the historical training ground at the intersection of North and Main Streets."

On January 26, 1938 the North Branford Fife and Drum Corps were given a "Championship Banquet" in order of the "State Champions," in their class. "At present the boys have launched a drive for funds with which to purchase new uniforms. The present uniforms are sadly outgrown."

"In August, the American Drummers Association sponsored a worldwide competition in the Court of Peace at the World's Fair" (1939). "The local drum corps has been declared the World's Champions." "No one expected that in the short span of six years this group of boys ranging in age from 8 to 19 would be "tops" in their field. In the individual competition at the World's Fair, Anthony Daly was awarded second prize for the World's Championship in bass drumming. Each boy received a little gold drum as a personal trophy while a handsome large trophy was awarded to the Corp." "On the very next day the Corps participated in the annual State Convention of the Connecticut Pipers and Drummers Association at Torrington and won for the third consecutive year the State Championship. The corp has acquired some 44 trophies which are currently being displayed at the Grove Service Station on Route 80, North Branford. In addition to these trophies held by the corps there are scores of individual medals proudly worn on the natty new uniforms of red, blue and gold."

"Mr. McKernan is credited the role of good Samaritan when the corps needed new uniforms at a cost of \$750 and were able to raise but half of the needed sum it was Mr. McKernan who dug into his own pocket to make up the balance. When an out-of-town trip is made to defend one of the championships held by the Corp it is Mr. McKernon who finances the trip for the boys. In appreciation of Mr. McKernan's aid the boys of the corps presented him with an album of photographs picturing each member in uniform and ordinary clothes as well as group views depicting the Corp on Parade. The album is inscribed "to a true friend of the boys, Alexander

McKernan, whose faithful cooperation and unfeeling affection has not only inspired but has made possible the remarkable achievements of the North Branford Fife and Drum Corps we dedicate and present this book to him as a token of our esteem."

"Both Mr. McKernan and Mr. Colter share the honors for the development of the splendid organization."

As the years passed the boys became a Senior Corps due to the several boys who had reached the age limit for the Junior Division. The corps also sent off several of its members to service during World War II. The names were kept on the roles and the dues frozen until they return.

This quote appears to be from the newspaper of 1941, "North Branford's famous Fife and Drum Corps will again fill an important role in the Santa Claus Parade when this great annual spectacle gets underway through the central streets of New Haven on Saturday morning, November 30, in company with the greatest galaxy of musical units that has ever assembled for any single public event in southern Connecticut."

"The North Branford Fife and Drum Corps, Connecticut State Champions for four consecutive years in the Junior Ancient Class. They also hold the same title in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New York. The drummers won the national Junior Championship at the Worlds Fair last year and this year entered the senior division and again emerged National Champions."

On Saturday, July 5, 1947 the North Branford Fife and Drum Corps held its first annual field days on the high school grounds in Guilford, Connecticut. Their program for this affair lists Howard Burlingame as Major, with 14 members in the pipe section 15 in the drum section and two honorary members.

During the years of World War II, 1943, 1944 and 1945 there were no contests. "On April 6, 1949 the corps made its first appearance with new uniforms of the "Civil War style" at the Army Day Parade in Stamford." "The North Branford Fife and Drum Corps was recently awarded a plaque in recognition of its again having been judged "The Corps of the Year" in Connecticut. It amassed the greatest number of points and competition during the past year. It became the first corps to have won the title twice,

having captured it the first time in 1946." This caption was under their newspaper picture in 1949.

The corps continued traveling about Connecticut and the surrounding states winning awards as a Corps and in individual competition until 1955. At the close of 1955 about nine of the original members of the Corps formed in 1933 were still active with the group. They had really put the little town of North Brantford on the map.

The afore written were gathered from two scrapbooks, one 1933 - 1948 and one 1949 through 1955, of the North Brantford Fife and Drum Corps. The quotes were from newspaper items in those books, most of which did not give the exact newspaper or year that they were clipped from. They were graciously loaned to me by Mr. Ralph Coulter one of the members of the corps from 1933 through 1955 and the son of Earl B. Colter, the corps leader.

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