

THE LIFE & TIMES ON RAILROAD AVENUE IN

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THE SAXTON BOY SCOUT BAND

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The Saxton Boy Scout Band

The birth of the Boy Scout movement in Saxton was sparked by the arrival in our town of Mr. & Mrs. Vernon N. Herbster who moved into one of Dr. Miller's row houses on Railroad Avenue. The Herbsters had no children of their own, but loving kids, Mr. Herbster organized the first Boy Scout Troop in the area. Brother Bill was one of the original members of the Eagle Patrol. He was the only Eichelberger boy old enough to join at that time. They would meet every Monday evening in the basement of the Reformed Church and then march to the beat of a bass drum to Dr. Miller's office for a course in first aid.

The Boy Scout Band of Lewistown, Pennsylvania, came to Saxton and gave a benefit concert in the old movie theatre above Barnett's Pop Shop. That sparked the idea for the creation of a Saxton Boy Scout Band. Mr. Herbster had played in the National Guard Band of Clearfield, and he became the leader in the band movement. Many Conn musical instruments were ordered through E. Eichelberger & Son's Store, who sold them to the various scouts at dealers' cost. Band practice was held on the second floor of the old town hall on Spring Street.

Some candidates for the band were still below scout age, but if they were willing to practice and had an instrument, they were allowed to join. Brother Bob was one of those fortunate ones. He played a cornet that formerly

belong to Dad. The first march ever learned by the band was christened, "Saxtonette."

On Memorial Day of that year the Saxton Boy Scout Band made its first official public appearance. All dressed up in their new khaki uniforms, they lead the parade to the local cemeteries. It was a proud day for the Scouts and the town to have their own band. By winter, the band was ready to give its first concert, again at the old movie theatre in town.

Mr. Frank Steele joined the group as Assistant Scout Master and was the first cornet soloist. Mr. Herbster also organized a violin quartet, of which brother Bill was a member. Also a barber-shop quartet was added to the entertainment group. From then on the Boy Scout Band was in demand for parades and concerts in many of the nearby communities. Eventually, there were 36 members in all who played in the band.

Scouting opened the door to summer camping. The first Scout encampment was in Wells Tannery, some 15 miles from town. The Scouts took the Huntingdon and Broad Top train to Hopewell and then hiked across the mountain to the campsite. Tents and supplies were carried by truck. The people of the nearby village were most appreciative of the Scouts and the band and rewarded them with fresh fruit and vegetables. I am not too sure they were not tossed at them.

The next year the Scouts camped at Loysburg Gap. "Deafie" Bowers joined the troop as camp cook and taught the boys how to set outlines in the nearby stream which lead to many meals of fresh fish. All Scouts had daily assignments.

Some were on the clean-up detail, others gathered wood for the camp fire; others helped cook and serve the food while others washed the dishes. Each Scout was responsible for keeping his own tent clean and making his own army cot.

The following year, the Scouts traveled to Newton Hamilton which was on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad below Huntingdon. Again this trip was made by train. None of the Scout outings cost the individuals anything, as the expenses were made by playing concerts locally or in nearby communities. The Scouts also had a fine baseball team which challenged all local teams resulting in a lot of competition. The neighborhood people were very generous toward the Scouts and continually donated gifts of home grown fruits and vegetables.

Of all the out-of-town appearances of the local Boy Scout Band, probably the highlight was the appearance at the Bedford County Fair. This was an annual event held in the fall of the year so that the farmers could exhibit their products--prize cattle, hogs, sheep, and the wives could display their canned fruit, vegetables, and preserves. Much

farm equipment and machinery would be on display at the Fair. There were the usual grandstand entertainers as well as horse racing every afternoon. The Boy Scout Band was invited to participate annually. The Band would march proudly to the Huntingdon and Broad Top Station where they boarded the morning passenger train to Bedford, the County Capitol. The Scouts played concerts in the afternoon and evening in the oval in front of the grandstands. In return for their appearance, the members were given refreshments-- free of charge. You can imagine the number of hot dogs, bottled soda pop, and ice cream cones that the crowd devoured during their stay at the Fair.

Upon the entry of the United States in World War 1 in 1917 on the side of the Allies, the days of the Boy Scout Band were numbered. More than half the members of the Band in the 17 to 19 year age group joined the various branches of services. Brother Bill was then 16 years of age and wanted very much to join at that time. Dad agreed to send him to the New York Military Academy at Cornwall on the Hudson, near West Point, for a year of training and it was understood that he could volunteer for the Army after that period. Saxton honored its Service men, and since Bill wore a uniform, he enjoyed most of the benefits and attention.

Fortunately, the War ended with an Armistice of November 11, 1918, and the entire town and area rejoiced and paraded, with patriotic ceremonies at the bandstand on

Railroad Avenue Parkway. However, the returning veterans had outgrown scouting by that time, and the days of the Saxton Boy Scout Band were ended.