



By Christine Forster

The Riverside Concert Band began in 1876 when several citizens of Riverside, California formed a band to celebrate the nation's Centennial. Over the years, the band's name has changed several times as you will see on our journey back in time.

In 1876, the band was known as the Riverside Cornet Band. On July 10, 1880, the Riverside Press and Horticulturist wrote that the Riverside Brass Band had been organized to include 12 members and would begin to meet for weekly practice. It was noted that the services of a band are frequently needed in a community and the claims of this organization on the public should be duly considered.

On March 24, 1882, the Daily Los Angeles Herald reported on the Riverside Citrus Fair. The formal opening of the Fair took place on March 23, 1882 and was attended by many of the cities old settlers, including Judge North, first President of the Colony Association. The proceedings were interspersed with music by the Riverside Band.

Some of the venues the band played included a train ride for the Fourth of July to San Diego in 1882 which also included the Riverside base ball club members. The band furnished music along the line and upon returning home played "Home Again" to cheers from the crowd.

On June 23, 1897, the Los Angeles Herald reported on the program at the Loring Opera House for the Queen's Jubilee. The Overture was presented by the Riverside Band.



Articles of Incorporation were filed on September 24, 1889 for the Riverside City Band. However, newspaper articles still referred to the band as simply "Riverside Band." Then, on February 26, 1898, the Press and Horticulturist mention the "Concert Band" at the Armory under the baton of F. E. Darrow. The concert was enjoyed by a much larger audience than previous efforts, showing a growing interest by the public in this most pleasant pastime.

By 1900, a new start was deemed necessary and the band became known as the Riverside Military Band. In 1901, the band played under the bandstand in White Park. In 1902, there were several accounts that were noted in Riverside around political events where the band performed.

On May 7, 1903, the cornerstone of the new Court House was laid with great fanfare by the Grand Lodge of Masons of California, with the assistance of Evergreen Masonic Lodge of Riverside. May 7 was chosen to coincide with the arrival of President Theodore Roosevelt, who was due in Riverside that evening on a campaign tour. After a selection by the Riverside Military Band, the invocation was offered.

On February 20, 1908, the Riverside Military Band performed at the laying of the cornerstone of the new Masonic Temple in Riverside. 1908 was also the year that the Riverside Military Band made plans for a series of summer concerts every Sunday in Fairmount Park. The famous band shell in the park was completed in 1920 and the band played the first concert there as well.



The Riverside Military Band performed for many holiday celebrations such as Memorial Day and Veteran's Day (Armistice Day) during the early years and continue to this day at the Riverside National Cemetery. In History of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, Vol. II Western Historical Association 1922, also mentioned are the McKinley Parade, Roosevelt Reception, San Diego Exposition, Odd Fellows Encampment at San Francisco and the San Francisco Exposition.

On April 1, 1925, The Citizen reported on a nationwide radio broadcast program presented by K.F.I. radio. The Riverside Military Band, under the direction of Gustav Hilverkus, was heard as far away as Michigan and New Jersey. Many letters of commendation for the excellent program were reported.

Fast forward to 1962, the band was now being called the Riverside Municipal Band. After 50 years, the Concerts in the Park at Fairmount Park were being revived by local citizens in partnership with the City Park and Recreation Department. The band played at the first of these concerts on June 28th the program being called "Stars-a-Poppin." The final concert of the season was performed on August 23, 1962 where a record turnout crowd of 7,000 was reported. These concerts in the park continued through the 70's.

Concurrently during the early 1960's, the Riverside Municipal Band also performed many times in Anaheim, California at their annual "Under the Stars" Concert Series.

It appears that by 1968, the band was now being called the Riverside Concert Band. In the Press Enterprise dated October 13, 1968, an article "Riverside Band in Call for Musicians" appeared. The band was sponsored by the City of Riverside Park and Recreation Department and held their rehearsals at the University of California, Riverside.

In 1979, the Riverside Concert Band was eliminated from funding by the Riverside City Council for the 1979 fiscal year budget. The Executive Board of the band was determined to continue to pursue the mission and objectives of the band. They resolved to seek grants and other funding to continue the band's operation.

On July 25, 1979, the Riverside Concert Band was incorporated as a non-profit group to allow them to seek grants with a non-profit status. Grant applications began to be made to the Riverside Arts Council in the early 1980's. In March of 1984 the band was in preparation for its new concert season. The band was under the direction of Edward P. Casem with John R. Varsik as Assistant Conductor.

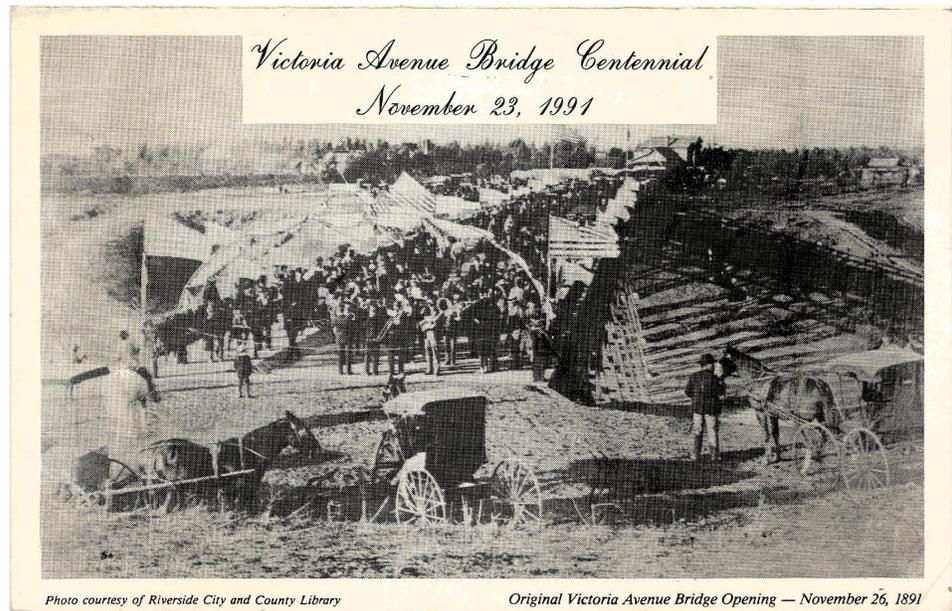
The Riverside Concert Band continued to perform at Memorial Day Services and held open air concerts on the front lawn of the Central Library. In 1984 the Riverside Concert Band was asked to play at a variety of functions intended to promote the revitalization of Fairmount Park.

In June of 1987, Conductor Casem received a letter from Mrs. Paul Beatty (Eileen Beatty) sharing her

delight over the Riverside Concert Band's performance for the Riverside Retired Teachers Association. She shared "The band performed with its usual brilliance and charm just as it did from 1954 to the early 80's when my husband Paul played flute and piccolo with the band those years. The first organization Paul joined on moving to Riverside was the Riverside Concert band."

The band played for the Memorial Day Services in 1991 at Pierce Brothers' Crestlawn Memorial Park and in November played for the Victoria Bridge 1891-1991 Centennial Program. August 7, 1994 marked a "Return to the Park" with a concert in Fairmount Park with Dan Bernstein as Master of Ceremonies.

Moving into the new millennium, the band performed in January, 2001 at Disneyland. In February, 2003 the band performed for the dedication of the Casa Blanca Family Learning Center.



Memorial Day was celebrated at the National Cemetery in 2003 with the band performing before, during and after the program. White Park was the venue in 2003 for the "Summer Nights in the Park Concert Series" and the band played in the gazebo in September.

During 2007, the band celebrated its 131st Birthday on July 4th with two concerts, one at Fairmount Park and the second at the UCR Sports Complex. The band also traveled to Vista, California during the year to perform at the Antique Gas & Steam Engine Museum. Patriotic concerts were also given at Loma Linda Springs and Victoria Springs communities.

In July, 2008, the band performed at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and later in September of the same year performed at the Grand Opening Celebration of the Orange Terrace Community Center. In 2010, the band returned to the Richard Nixon Presidential Library for another concert. California Citrus State Historic Park hosted the band in 2009 - 2013 with their Concerts in the Park.

The tradition of playing at the National Cemetery for Veteran's Day and Memorial Day has continued since 2003. The band has also performed in many of the Salute to Veterans parades in Riverside.

In 2010, the Riverside Swing Ensemble was formed within the band to provide access to smaller venues specializing in swing music of the 1920's to 1940's providing the nostalgic music of the Big Band Era. In 2019, yet another ensemble was formed within the band called the Riverside Combo comprising a small four to eight member ensemble to perform jazz favorites from the 50's through the present time.

The Riverside Concert Band celebrated its 140th anniversary in 2017 with a free Birthday Concert in Villegas Park with sponsorship from the City of Riverside. Now, in 2020 as Riverside celebrates its 150th birthday, we see what an integral part of the city the Riverside Concert Band has been in its association with multiple organizations and traditions within the city. Happy 150 Birthday, Riverside, and thanks for the memories.