

That Michigan Band

A History of the University of Michigan Band

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Chapter Two

“Hurrah! For the Yellow and Blue” 1889 - 1896

During the last two decades of the 19th century, school spirit and loyalty to alma mater was in evidence everywhere at the University of Michigan. College songs were popular on campus, and in response to this demand, *The Yellow and Blue Songbook* was published in 1889 by Albert A. Stanley and Charles Gayley. Among the dozens of songs in this collection was Gayley's *The Yellow and the Blue* which became the most well-known and beloved song on campus.

This song came about as the result of a campus wide contest that offered a prize of \$20 to write a new college song. Charles Gayley, then one of the youngest members of the faculty and well liked by students for his engaging personality, entered the competition. He decided that the conception and image of the song would be an ode to the school's colors—maize and azure blue which were first adopted by the Class of 1867 and continued to be popular with students through the years. (The colors were not officially adopted by the University until March 13, 1912.) For a tune, Gayley selected the *Pirate's Chorus* from the Michael Balfe opera, *The Enchantress*. Gayley chose this rousing tune because it was inspired and not too hackneyed. One of Gayley's students remembered how the young professor came to his rooms one day seeking for a tune or air to which words could be written. First produced in London in 1845, *The Enchantress* soon became popular with American audiences. During the Civil War, Moravian soldiers of the Union army adapted the *Pirate's Chorus* into a marching tune known as *The Lute Quickstep*. It was not unusual to adapt well known tunes and airs for other purposes. In this tradition, it was not unusual for Gayley to have chosen a song sung by pirates for a school song!

Gayley's expectation for *The Yellow and Blue* was that it might be useful for close harmony and "tricky quartet" work. He considered it a light-hearted effort where the words would not be subject to rigid literary scrutiny. Unexpectedly, the linking of Gayley's rousing poem with all of its "Hurrahs" to Balfe's jaunty tune resulted in a school song that was "at once taken up by the students of the University." The popularity of the song led to its adoption as the school Alma Mater—much to the chagrin of Charles Gayley who considered his anthem, *Goddess of the Inland Seas*, to be a more suitable choice. For the next thirty years, *The Yellow and Blue* was the preeminent song on campus.

Years later, Gayley tried to explain its remarkable success: "A song, written in the days of one's youth, if it by good luck expresses the devotion and enthusiasm of succeeding generations of young men and women, is a thousand times more worthwhile than many books of learning."

The enthusiasm that led to the writing of campus songs such as *The Yellow and Blue* also led to efforts to organize a band for the University. An announcement appeared in the November 4, 1892 issue of the campus newspaper, *The U of M Daily* that "the University is soon to have a new musical organization to be known as the U. of M. band." The director of this new musical organization was Gerald Collins—a well-known musician whose "connection with the band will insure its success. Collins was a student at the University who also taught brass instruments at the Ann Arbor School of Music—a private conservatory. (Collins graduated from the University in 1894.) It was hoped that the new band—which boasted twenty-three musicians—would give open air concerts on campus and would perhaps, during the spring vacation, "tour through college towns and some of the large cities." The membership of the band consisted of students from the School of Dentistry; all had previously been members of the Chequamegon orchestra.

Strangely, one week after the initial announcement, the *Daily* reported that "the U. of M. band would like to hear from the following players: cornet, clarinet, saxophone, oboe, and bassoon." For reasons unknown, the needed players did not materialize; no further mention was made of the group. The "U. of M. Band" never came to be. One year later, Collins and his colleagues became the new officers of the Chequamegon Orchestra.

Meanwhile, football was becoming the most popular sport on a campus—a development that did not escape the attention of University officials who up to this point had only expressed a "mild curiosity" about this sport that used an "agitated bag of wind." As game attendance grew, the football grounds had to be roped in to keep crowds from interfering with the football players.

The *Daily* argued that more should be done to promote crowd participation at the games than to just cheer. There was a need for music at the football games. This resulted in Mass Meetings held every Friday night during football season in University Hall. The

cheers were led by Professor Thomas Trueblood, a faculty member from the Department of Elocution; the singing was led by Albert Stanley from the Ann Arbor School of Music. The Mass Meetings were necessary because few students knew all the words to *The Yellow and Blue* except for the "hurrahs" and the "hails"!

By the fall of 1896, readers of the *Daily* were urged to submit lyrics to favorite tunes—*Yankee Doodle*, *Marching Through Georgia*, *Sweet Marie*—which could be sung at the games. One tune in particular—*A Hot Time in the Old Town, Tonight*—became especially popular—second only to *The Yellow and Blue*. Each Friday, the paper would publish new lyrics which would be sung to the melody of *Hot Time* at the following day's game led by the members of the Glee Club. *A Hot Time in the Old Town, Tonight* was composed in 1896 by Theodore August Metz and soon became all the rage in college campuses across America. For many years, even after *The Victors* was written, *Hot Time* was the most popular college song on the University of Michigan campus.

The University of Michigan was not alone its love for football; college campuses everywhere were caught up with the sport. At other schools throughout the Midwest—most notably at the University of Minnesota, Ohio State University, and the University of Illinois—bands were already an established part of campus life. The time was ripe for the University of Michigan to have a band of its own.

Notes for Chapter Two

1 a campus wide contest: *Argonaut*, Vol. 5, p. 200.

1 Charles Gayley, then one of the youngest members: The son of a missionary, Gayley was educated in England and Ireland prior to his enrollment as a student at the University of Michigan during the 1870s. During his student years, he changed Michigan football to the eleven man team concept along the lines of English rugby. Upon graduation, he became an instructor of English and Latin at the University.

1 selected the *Pirate's Chorus*: *MA Quarterly Review*, Autumn, 1943, p. 53

2 Meanwhile, football was becoming: *Wolverines*, Will Perry, p. 36.