

Nicholas Falcone, The Band Director You've Probably Never Heard Of

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It might be tempting to assume that most of the early leaders of college bands of the teens and 1920s were, themselves, students in collegiate band programs. Looking at the role of the University of Illinois Band program under the leadership of Albert Austin Harding during this era, such assumption would appear to be true. "Harding's contributions to the development of the collegiate band program affected nearly every aspect of college bands."¹ Many of Harding's students became leaders in the early collegiate band world. Some of the most notable include, Mark Hindsley, his successor at Illinois, Raymond Dvorak at Wisconsin, Glenn Cliffe Bainum at Northwestern, Keith Wilson at Yale, Guy Duker at Illinois, Clarence Sawhill at UCLA. Others such as William D. Revelli and Frederick Fennell were deeply influenced by Harding.² In this era of training future college directors, Harding's mark certainly left a lasting impression that is the norm in present times. Harding's pioneering work with public school directors through the National Band Clinic and other activities helped to establish important links between bands and music education that still exist.³

However, the training of the early collegiate band conductors was not as homogenous as it might appear. The two Falcone brothers, Nicholas and Leonard, each led important and emerging college bands beginning in the 1920s. Both were trained as musicians and played in bands in Italy before immigrating to the United States early in their adult life. Although arriving in America at different times, the brothers worked as best as they could as professional performers largely in theater orchestras in and around Ann Arbor, Michigan. Their eventual career as college band conductors might not have been predicted. Their move to the collegiate band world shows what might be a unique element of bands at this time.

Another widely held but flawed perception is that the rise of the modern band program in the United States began with the appointment of William D. Revelli as Director of Bands at the University of Michigan in 1935. While Revelli's contribution to the development of educational bands in the United States was extraordinary and his work at Michigan brought significant attention to the bands there, the efforts of Nicholas Falcone should not be underestimated. Nicholas Falcone might be the most interesting collegiate band conductor that you have never heard of.

Two Brothers

When looking at the broad history of college bands in the United States, it is amazing that two brothers conducted college bands in the same state at the same time. From 1927-1935, two brothers, Nicholas and Leonard Falcone conducted bands at rival colleges—the University of Michigan and Michigan State College, later to become Michigan State University. Of the two brothers, Leonard was to become better known. He served as Director of Bands at Michigan State University from 1927-1967; he received many awards including honorary membership in the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA). He was also acknowledged as one of the premiere performers and advocates of the euphonium. The Leonard Falcone International Euphonium and Tuba Festival held at the Blue Fine Arts Camp in

Michigan is named in his memory.⁴ There has been some writing about Leonard Falcone, most notably Myron Welch's dissertation⁵ and Rita Griffin Comstock's book.⁶ There is also an extensive archive at Michigan State University.⁷

Lesser known is Nicholas Falcone, whose career was cut short tragically by the "musicians dread—deafness."⁸ While his career at the University of Michigan spanned a very short time, Nicholas Falcone made an important impact in the direction and purpose of bands in the United States. He had a vision of what bands ought to be, and he pursued his dream with vigor. He was the Director of Bands at the University of Michigan from 1927 through 1935, although he was not active during his last year. While he is certainly did not achieve the prominence as did his successors, William D. Revelli, H. Robert Reynolds, and Michael Haithcock, he played an important role in the establishment of the Michigan band program as one of the best in the United States.

Early Musical Training

Nicholas Falcone was born on September 20, 1892 in Roseto Valfortore, Italy, a town approximately 150 miles east of Naples. He was the oldest of seven children. His father, Dominico was a barber and as a young man sang in the church choir. It does not appear that his mother, Maria Filippa (Finelli) had an interest in music.⁹

When he was approximately two years old, his family immigrated to São Paulo, Brazil. The family returned to Italy after a four-year stay, although it appears that Dominico might have stayed in Brazil a little longer than the rest of the family.¹⁰ Nicholas began his studies in music at age ten at the Roseto School of Music and graduated in June of 1912. He studied conducting with Donato Antonio Donatelli.¹¹ By the time that he graduated, Falcone considered himself to be a skilled clarinetist.¹²

Like so many from his town of Roseto, Nicholas emigrated to the United States.

At that time everyone wanted to come to the United States. Several people from Roseto had gone to America and returned with stories of wealth and grandeur. They claimed that, in America, all one had to do was dig a hole and find gold. That was the impression anyway. It was understood that we all, one day, would be going to America. In Roseto, there were not many prospects. It was expected that people would leave Roseto, live in America for about five or six years, make their fortune, and return home.¹³

He moved to New York in November of 1912 and lived there for four months hoping to find a position in one of the large theater orchestras. He was not able to find a job and was told that employment as a musician was not likely because contracting was generally done during the summer. He wrote to a good friend from Italy, Michael Converso, who was teaching wind instruments and working as a tailor in Ann Arbor, asking if there were any opportunities in Michigan. Converso advised Falcone that he should come to Ann Arbor. Soon after his arrival, he found a position playing at the Majestic Theater.¹⁴ With the University of Michigan and a surprisingly large number of theaters in Ann Arbor and neighboring Ypsilanti, the area was very culturally refined. Converso also helped find a job for him as a tailor.¹⁵

In June of 1913 he was asked to play with the University of Michigan Band for commencement. Referring to himself in third person, he recounts this first experience with the Michigan Band.

He told one of the clarinet players he wanted to tune up, and to his amazement, his instrument was a half tone lower. The members of the band started to laugh and no one knew what the trouble was. After several attempts with different brass and wood[wind] players, he discovered the band was using high pitch instruments, and he had to transpose the music as they played, to one-half note higher. His clarinet was of international low pitch, which is the same as all bands are now using. The music that the band played were all marches. After the concert was over, all the players were amazed that he could transpose so rapidly while sight-reading.¹⁶

Falcone became a member of the University of Michigan Orchestra in October of 1913 and continued to play in the group until 1929. He played a number of concerti with the orchestra. He also took postgraduate courses at the University with Dr. Albert Stanley and Professor Otto J. Stahl.¹⁷

His brother, Leonard emigrated to the United States in June of 1915 at the age of 16 at the urging of his parents in order to escape the inevitable draft into the Italian army and the fear of World War I. Leonard moved in with Nicholas and found a job as a tailor's assistant. Nicholas was later able to find a position for his brother in various theaters playing trombone.¹⁸

All during this period of the teens and early twenties, Nicholas worked with a number of different musical institutions in addition to playing with the band and orchestra at the University. He played clarinet solos with several bands including the Belle Isle Concert Band in Detroit, the Baltimore City Park Concert Band, and the Fordson Tractor Concert Band. He directed the Saline (MI) City Band for nine years. He also organized the Belleville High School Band¹⁹ and led the Wayne High School Band for three years. In addition to his work at the Majestic Theater, he was asked to form and direct an orchestra at the Wuerth Theater. Each of these theaters normally employed a seven-piece orchestra consisting of piano, violin, flute, clarinet, cornet, trombone, and drums.²⁰

Conductor of the University of Michigan Band

In the fall of 1926, Nicholas was asked to organize a new University Reserve Band at Michigan. The need for a new band arose for a variety of practical reasons, one being the University requirement that wind players had to be sophomores to be able to participate in the school's only band—the Varsity Band. Leonard commented on his brother's efforts.

The 1926 Reserve Band played “beautifully.” Nothing like that had been heard before from a Michigan Band. He [Nicholas] tried to convey an orchestral (string playing) style to achieve “nuance.” He found it difficult to train his bands to understand and appreciate this type of refinement.²¹

The group gave their first concert on March 23, 1927 in Hill Auditorium on the Michigan campus. The concert was reviewed in the *Ann Arbor News*.

Nicholas D. Falcone already known to Hill Auditorium audiences for his virtuosity with the clarinet and to Majestic and the Wuerth Theaters' audiences for his ability in arranging attractive programs, stood in bold relief Wednesday

evening. The band being composed of freshman, Mr. Falcone nevertheless has succeeded in whipping together a band which responds instantly to his finished conducting. Falcone is a stylist with the baton, and knows his job from A to Z: For his sound musical training he received in Italy; as a composer, the "M" Men March; as an arranger for band, with the third and fourth movement of the *L'Arlesienne Suite*. It was in the stunning rendition of the difficult *Semiramide Overture* by Rossini that the shades of the symphonic bands that Mr. Falcone knew so well in Italy, cast their spell of musical delight over Hill Auditorium. Leonard Falcone, brother of the director, playing a trombone solo, the *Rondo Caprice* by Herbert L. Clarke, astounded the large audience with the richness and depth of tone, and marvelous technique he has at his command.²²

In June of 1927, Falcone was appointed Director of the University of Michigan Bands and Instructor of Wind Instruments at the University of Michigan School Of Music. Norman Larson has held that position for the 1926-27 academic year. Wilfred Wilson, the first official band director at Michigan had resigned in 1926 to become Supervisor of Music for the Fort Worth, Texas schools.²³ Wilson had been appointed in 1915 and was a good friend of Falcone.

Robert Campbell had assumed the position of faculty band manager during the Wilson years. Probably more important, Campbell was also Treasurer of the University and became Mayor of the City of Ann Arbor. Known as "Uncle Bob"²⁴ to the students, Campbell held considerable authority at Michigan. Nicholas was keenly aware of Campbell's role and most likely was interested in advancing his career at the University. He adapted a march that he had written for his orchestra at the Wuerth Theater for concert band. He titled it *M Men March*, dedicated it Campbell, and performed it with the Reserve Band in 1927. Campbell was in the audience that night and was impressed with the band's playing a piece that was dedicated to him. The favorable review in the newspaper (see review above) certainly must have helped Nicholas' cause. When Nicholas was appointed Director of the Michigan Band, Professor Samuel Lockwood from the School of Music told Nicholas that "this was long over due."²⁵



Figure 1. Nicholas Falcone as Director of Bands at the University of Michigan
Courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan

The band position opened in the same year at Michigan State College. Herman Halladay, Secretary of the College, contacted Robert Campbell for suggestions on who might be appointed as Director of Bands at State. Campbell suggested Leonard for the post.

An August 6, 1927, *Ann Arbor News* article about the selections [of the band directors at Michigan and Michigan State]...suggests that though the appointments for the top band positions at the two schools came separately, there were publically announced simultaneously—or nearly so. Nicholas it states, “was officially named last June to succeed Norman Larson as head of the local Varsity Band, (though) the appointment was not made public until today. Leonard Falcone, however, was not appointed to lead the Michigan State band until recently.”²⁶

Two brothers attaining top band director positions at neighboring schools was remarkable. In a letter at the end of his first semester as bandleader, Dr. Charles A. Sink, President of the University Musical Society made the following statement to Nicholas. “Your appointment as leader of this organization [at Michigan], and the appointment of your brother as leader of the State College Band, is more than ordinary interest.”²⁷ During Nicholas’ tenure at Michigan the two brothers would guest conduct each other’s bands, and the friendly rivalry between the two marching bands attracted some interest. The *Michigan Daily* noted that it had “become a leading feature of the traditional Michigan-MSU [Michigan State College as it was known at the time] game and (was) known all over the country.”²⁸ Regardless of the outcome of the game or the battle of the bands, the day ended with a spaghetti dinner at the home of the host band director.²⁹



Figure 2. Nicholas and Leonard Falcone at Interlochen c. 1930
Courtesy University Archives and Historical Collections, Michigan State University

Nicholas also accepted a position as band director at Ann Arbor High School in 1927, a post that he held for just one year.

At Ann Arbor High School, Falcone was following Joseph Maddy’s three years as Coordinator of Music in the Ann Arbor Public Schools and his groundbreaking work in music education techniques. Falcone took the first steps in developing the high school band as a separate organization from the orchestra. Juva Higbee, who

had been hired in the fall of 1927 as well, lead the orchestra and rehearsed her group three times a week, while Falcone rehearsed the band twice a week, with students in each ensemble receiving a quarter-credit. Falcone was naturally not able to significantly increase the size or quality of the high school band in his one year, but he was able to keep the momentum going for his successor, William Champion.³⁰

The fall of 1927 was an important time for the new band director. The newly constructed Michigan Stadium, with a capacity of 83,000 people, was dedicated in October of 1927. Undoubtedly, the Marching Band attracted considerable attention that fall.³¹ His first concert conducting the Varsity Band has held in December in connection with the Michigan Glee Clubs. In a review of the concert that appeared in *The Ann Arbor News*, Carl E. Gehring made the following observation.

“New history” in the annals of the Varsity Band was recorded Wednesday evening in Hill Auditorium: Another epoch, which began with the appointment last summer of Nicholas D. Falcone as University Bandmaster, was definitely established in this, the first home concert of the organization. The Varsity Band proved its ability as a Symphonic Band as they are known in Italy. To the fore among compositions heard on this occasion was the *Rienzi Overture*.³²

While there was nothing in Nicholas’s background or training that would prepare him to take charge of a marching band, he was, nevertheless, astute enough to realize that the Michigan Varsity Band was not on the same performance level—marching or playing—with other collegiate bands. With the rising popularity of Michigan Football and the weekly opportunity to be seen by thousands in the country’s largest collegiate stadium, Falcone understood the importance of the marching band.³³ For these reasons, in his second year as conductor, Falcone understood the importance of a marching band. For these reasons, in his second year as conductor, Falcone arranged to have an R.O.T.C. officer drill the band; this was an innovation for the Michigan Band. Since its founding in 1897, the University Band was mostly a student run, grass roots effort. Even during the Wilson years, membership in the band fluctuated from week to week. It was not unusual for a musician to “show up” on a Saturday morning and perform with the band on Saturday afternoon at the football game. It was not a tightly run ship. The inclusion of the R.O.T.C. officer brought discipline and organization to the band that it had not enjoyed previously. It was also arranged that if any freshmen musicians took a one-hour course in R.O.T.C., they would be eligible to participate in the Varsity Band. The alliance with the R.O.T.C., however, had a price. The name of the band, much to Falcone’s displeasure, was changed to the “University of Michigan R.O.T.C. Band” by pronouncement of the University president.³⁴

Partly because of this, band enrollment in 1928 grew from 72 to more than 100 members. In a few years, sometimes more than 200 men auditioned for the band for half that many positions, limited by the number of uniforms.³⁵

In regards to the actual music being played, he poured considerable energy into making special arrangements for the Michigan R.O.T.C. Band. Most notable of these was an excerpt from Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger*. He performed this when the band went to Boston in 1930 for the Harvard/Michigan game, where it received an enthusiastic review from the Boston press.³⁶

Seeing that a number of high school band directors took courses at the School of Music during the summer, Falcone decided to organize a summer band beginning in 1930. He and the high school band directors shared the conducting. This was the first time that a college or university in the state of Michigan recognized that, during the summer months, the needs of music educators could be addressed.

The 1930-31 academic year was an important one in establishing a strong impression for the Michigan Band. Following its successful appearance in Boston in the fall, the band presented a concert at the grand, acoustically perfect Orchestra Hall in Detroit the following spring. In a post concert critique in the *Detroit Times*, the reviewer described the concert of May 4, 1931.

The band offered a program of classical selections ranging from Weber's Overture to *Oberon*, to the latest thrill of the concert hall, Ravel's stunning *Bolero*. The piece lends itself very well to brass instruments and the band's rendition can be compared favorably with that of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra who played in the same hall a week ago.³⁷

His brother Leonard, who was also soloist at the concert made the transcription of *Bolero*. Nicholas had requested and received permission to perform the arrangement by Durand, the music publisher, for a fee of \$10.³⁸

Also heard on this concert was Nicholas's transcription of the *Passacaglia and Fugue in c minor*. To most of the players in the band, this was music of a complexity and technical demand that had never before been encountered. Compared to the repertoire performed only a few years earlier, this was a radical change in the development of the University of Michigan Band. Thirty years later, this Bach transcription would figure prominently in the programs of William D. Revelli, Frederick Fennell, and many others. In May of 1931, Nicholas was notified that he was promoted to the rank of Assistant Professor and given a thousand dollar raise.

Most of his programming relied on transcriptions of orchestral and keyboard works. This was no different than what was done at other college campuses. Yet, on the horizon, Nicholas Falcone realized that a new repertoire was coming—original compositions written for the wind band. In the 1920s, he and Leonard had met Gustav Holst when the composer visited Ann Arbor. (Holst was a candidate for the position of Dean of the School of Music.) Years later, Leonard would recall how eager they were for the publication of the *First Suite* in the United States.

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The sophistication and higher standards that were evident in the University of Michigan Band's performances on the concert stage were also seen on the gridiron at the football games. Under the guidance of R.O.T.C. drillmaster, Lt Richard Coursey, the University of Michigan R.O.T.C. Band placed more emphasis on precision drills, straightness of ranks, sharp turns, and spacing. Falcone insisted that the number of steps and moves coordinate with the phrasing of the music. More and more, picture formations were featured regularly. This represented a dramatic change.

On October 15, 1932, the marching band started a tradition that was soon adopted by another band. The Michigan Band traveled to Columbus, Ohio and performed at the Michigan/Ohio State football game. (Playing center on the Michigan football team was a young freshman named Gerald R. Ford.) Through intricate maneuvers devised by Lt. Coursey, the band formed, what has been acknowledged—even by The Ohio State University Marching Band, the

first “OHIO” spelled in script.³⁹ Also during that fall, the Michigan Band traveled to Detroit to perform before and after a campaign speech by President Hoover at the Olympia Auditorium.



Figure 3. Michigan Band in script Ohio formation, October 15, 1932

In 1933, Falcone made a decision that was viewed by many as unpopular and certainly created some controversy. In February of 1933, an African-American flute player, George Benjamin,⁴⁰ asked Falcone if he could play in the Michigan band. After an audition, he was accepted into the band and was told to report to the next rehearsal. At the rehearsal following, three flute players and one tuba player quit the band. However, Falcone did not back down. In the fall of 1933, the Michigan Band had four African-Americans members.⁴¹ The band enjoyed a very successful fall season with a trip to Chicago to play at the Michigan/University of Chicago Football game and to present concerts at the Century of Progress International Exposition that was held in Chicago in 1933.

The Musician’s Dread

Again using third person, Nicholas describes the dramatic events that began in 1934.

In January, 1934, while directing the Varsity Band in Yost Field House during a basketball game with Northwestern, Professor Falcone raised his baton, glanced over the University of Michigan Band, which was alert and watching him, and gave the down beat. The field house was jammed with cheering students and spectators. The band launched into a routine performance of a familiar Sousa March. But nothing routine or familiar was happening to their popular conductor. His band began to sound, to him, as if it had been whisked away as far as the football stadium [which is fairly distant to the field house]. This was Professor Falcone’s first warning of the difficulties slated to darken and hamper his musical activities—the musician’s dread—DEAFNESS.⁴²

This was not the first time that Nicholas experienced a hearing loss. In November 1918, he was encouraged to play in a band that marched in parades in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti to celebrate the end of World War I. Despite having a fever, he participated in these events. He returned home and went to bed. The next day he felt a click in his left ear that was followed by partial deafness. Not realizing the seriousness of the affliction, he did not seek suitable

treatment.⁴³ In 1932, he lost all hearing in the left ear, and for this reason, he was granted a short leave of absence beginning April 1, 1932 “to permit him to receive medical treatment for defective hearing in New York City.”⁴⁴ He later reported that a large number of severe colds that he had between 1918 and 1932 caused further damage to his hearing.⁴⁵

The hearing loss in January of 1934 affected his remaining good ear—the right. The next day Nicholas’ wife Thelma called Leonard and asked that he come to Ann Arbor. Nicholas asked Leonard if it was possible for him to take charge of the Michigan Band and to give lessons to his private students. Leonard went to see Earl V. Moore, who was Director of the School of Music about the arrangements. With some alteration to the band’s schedule, Dr. Moore approved of the plan. Day-to-day rehearsals and administration of the band were carried out by student leaders. As the date of a concert drew near, Leonard would come to Ann Arbor to put the finishing touches on the music and would conduct the concert. Charles Sink announced that Nicholas Falcone would be on leave of absence with pay for a period of 6 weeks beginning April 1, 1934;⁴⁶ he traveled to New York for treatment.

Nicholas returned to Ann Arbor in June of 1934. He noted that his hearing had improved somewhat and he was able to rehearse two band concert programs and organize the summer band.⁴⁷

A week before the end of the summer program, Dr. Moore suggested that Nicholas travel to Northern Michigan for a vacation with his family so that he would be well rested for the fall. During his vacation, the weather turned cold and rainy. After a few days, his deafness returned.

Falcone was given leave of absence for the fall semester of the year 1934-35 with full salary. In January, the leave of absence was continued but without pay.⁴⁸

Starting in the fall semester of 1934, the day-to-day operation of the University of Michigan Band was given to one of Falcone’s students, Bernard Hirsch who received the title of Acting Conductor and was paid a salary of \$400 for the semester; Falcone, still, was listed as the Conductor of Bands. Hirsch’s appointment was extended for the winter semester in January 1935.

Bernard Hirsch was appointed Technical Assistant in the School of Music and Acting Conductor of the University Band for the second semester of the present University year with salary at the rate of \$800 a year. The \$400 salary requirement under this appointment is to be provided by the sum of \$100 from income account of the Oliver Ditson Fund and the remainder from the balance in the salary budget of the School of Music due to the leave of absence of Assistant Professor Falcone.⁴⁹

In December of 1934, Charles Sink wrote a letter to Samuel Lockwood, Professor of Piano at the University of Michigan describing Nicholas’ ailment.

Poor Nick Falcone is in a bad way. For two or three years, he has been troubled, more or less, with deafness and, on a couple of occasions, he has spent long periods receiving treatments in New York City. He returned to Ann Arbor for the summer session, much improved. After the summer session, he went north for a good rest. While there, he caught cold affecting his ears, so that when he returned in October, it [sic] was practically stone deaf. He has worried so much about it that he has almost gone into nervous prostrations. He doesn’t want to see anybody

so that it has been very difficult for his friends to comfort him or cheer him up. Unofficially, I am very much afraid that his career as a musician is at an end. Obviously, this has broken his heart. We are all so sorry for him and at the same time are so helpless.⁵⁰

With the coming of the 1935 fall semester, it was felt that faculty leadership was needed at Michigan during Nicholas' continued leave, especially since his condition did not seem to improve. According to the *Michigan Daily*, the band's performance, the band's performance suffered during this period of student leadership.⁵¹ This might not be unexpected given that the band was under the student leadership of Bernard Hirsch.

Based on an interview with Leonard Falcone in 1973, it appears that there was at least some interest in Leonard assuming his brother's position at Michigan.

When it was evident that Nicholas would not return to his Michigan position, Dr. Charles Sink...invited Leonard to his home to discuss the possibility of succeeding his brother at the University of Michigan. The resources and facilities far surpassed those of Michigan State, and since it was his alma mater, he probably would have accepted the position. After his meeting with Sink, however, he heard nothing further about the position.⁵²

From various telegrams and letters found at the University of Michigan, it is clear that Michigan pursued the new director of Bands at the University of Wisconsin, Raymond Dvorak to come to Michigan. This correspondence appears to begin with a telegram dated August 9, 1935 and continues until August 20, 1935.⁵³ It appears that Wisconsin did not want to release Dvorak leaving the University without a band director. Shortly thereafter, Charles Sink established contact with a young high school band director from Hobart, Indiana, William D. Revelli. On August 26, 1935, Revelli was offered the position of Assistant Professor of Wind Instruments in the School of Music and conductor of the University Band for the year 1935-1936.⁵⁴

As noted, Nicholas was on leave for the fall of 1935. After more medical evaluation it was determined that the hearing nerves were damaged; mechanical aids would be of no benefit to a person with this kind of affliction. In February of 1936, Falcone resigned his position at Michigan.

In his "Town Talk" column in the *Detroit News*, George W. Stark reported on Falcone's career after become deaf.

Many stories have been told of Beethoven and the music that the master conceived after he became deaf. There's something comparable in our own neighborhood. Professor Nicholas D. Falcone, formerly Director of the University of Michigan Band, became deaf. He was forced thereby to give up his position as Director of Bands at the University. But he still used music as a means of making a livelihood. Employing the only talent he had acquired and developed through the years, he put himself to the task of writing band arrangements for the modern symphonic band.⁵⁵

Falcone did indeed become even more active as an arranger than he was prior to becoming deaf. From 1936 until 1942, he was employed by the Federal Music Project (FMP)

and then the subsequent WPA Music Program, both parts of the New Deal.

Instituted in May 1935 as part of the Four Arts Project of the WPA, the Federal Music Project built on the musical activities of the earlier Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Civil Works Administration. At its peak in 1936, the project employed over 15,000 people in 42 states and the District of Columbia.⁵⁶

Most of these federal activities stopped with the beginning of World War II, although they were not officially terminated until July 1943.

It is likely that Earl V. Moore, first Director (1923–46) and then Dean (1946–60) of the School of Music at the University of Michigan, played a role in Falcone's gaining employment with the federal program;⁵⁷ Moore had become Director of the program in 1939. As one of the country's leading arts administrators, Moore certainly would have had an influential voice. "During that time [Falcone] made 43 arrangements for modern symphonic band."⁵⁸

Nicholas had long arranged music both for his theater orchestra and bands. Several of his arrangements are still widely performed. The fact that he continued to do this after he became deaf speaks to his impressive musicianship. One of his best is his arrangement of Bach's monumental work for organ, *Passacaglia And Fugue In C Minor* (BWV 582). Other available arrangements include *Symphonic Concert March* by Giouse Bonelli, *Moto Perpetuo*, op. 11 by Niccolo Paganini, and *Passo Doppio Sinfonico* by Leonard Marino. In another brotherly effort, Nicholas arranged *Campane di Roma (Bells of Rome)* for a concert by the Michigan State Concert Band on February 9, 1967 at the national CBDNA conference held in Ann Arbor.⁵⁹ His composition *Mazurka for Solo Euphonium* is still in print.

Sometime after his work for the WPA stopped, he went to work in a factory in Ann Arbor. "It was a very noisy facility, a good place for Nick because he couldn't hear anything."⁶⁰

Especially remarkable given his deafness, "...he attended almost every concert by all the Michigan bands following his retirement despite the fact that he could not hear a single note being performed."⁶¹ When attending a concert, "Nick would sit there like he was holding his clarinet and play the notes. If he knew the music, he could tell where they were by the way they were fingering and the vibrations, but if the music was new to him, he couldn't do this."⁶²

Falcone was honored at halftime ceremonies in October, 1975 by the University of Michigan Band Alumni Association.⁶³ He was named Director Emeritus of University Bands by the Board of Regents in 1978.⁶⁴ As part of this action, Richard L. Kennedy commented, "Mr. Nicholas Falcone is truly an 'M' man with contributions indelibly recorded in the historical annals of the Michigan Bands."⁶⁵

Nicholas Falcone passed away on February 11, 1981 at the age of 88. He was survived by his wife, Thelma and two children, Nicholas, Jr. and Mary.

Coda

It is a remarkable story that two brothers simultaneously led the band programs at two of the great universities in the state of Michigan. Their unique stories illustrate how much has changed in the band field in higher education during the last century.

Their musical training in Italy was certainly unique to the collegiate band profession at that time where many leaders rose through town and professional bands. While the Falcone's played in bands in their home country, they also received rigorous theoretical training. Nicholas

was an accomplished clarinetist having played in numerous professional organizations both as a regular player and soloist. Leonard was one of the leading euphonium players in the country and also played violin on a professional level.

Not unexpectedly and as was noted above, Leonard Falcone's career has been studied. However, there has been very little written about his brother. Perhaps earlier than some popular accounts hold, it was Nicholas Falcone's tenure that started the dramatic development of the band program at the University of Michigan. As H. Robert Reynolds, former Director of Bands at Michigan has noted, "there were fine bands at Michigan before William D. Revelli's time."⁶⁶

When Falcone arrived in Ann Arbor, the University of Michigan Band was a somewhat informally organization with modest expectations. As Earl V. Moore would remember, "they were the best we had in those days, and perhaps they made up in enthusiasm for what they lacked in technique and drill."⁶⁷ Through the introduction of more demanding repertoire, insistence on higher musical standards, and his ability to attract the best musicians on campus to play in the band, the level of performance increased dramatically as evidenced by very positive newspaper reviews and laudatory comments made by University administrators.⁶⁸ From these sources, one can conclude that there was a major change in the band's performance on the concert stage and on the football gridiron. Clearly, the Michigan Band at the end of Falcone's brief tenure was a completely different band than it was before he came. It had progressed significantly from the loosely organized group that he inherited.

The story of Nicholas Falcone raises so many questions about what might have happened to the development of the collegiate and school band movements if he had not been forced to resign because of deafness. What directions would have been taken should William D. Revelli not been appointed at Michigan? Obviously, this and other questions cannot be answered. Still, his story shows a slightly different narrative of what happened in the rise of the band program at the University of Michigan, one of America's leading collegiate bands.



Figure 4. H. Robert Reynolds, William D. Revelli, Nicholas Falcone (l. to r.)
Photo was taken by Richard Gaskill on October 25, 1975; courtesy of H. Robert Reynolds

Endnotes

- ¹ Joseph Manfredo, "Albert Austin Harding and His Influence on the Development of the Instrumentation of the American Collegiate Wind Band." *Bulletin of the Council of Research in Music Education* 125 (Summer 1995), p. 60.
- ² George A. Brozak, "Revelli and Fennell: The Albert Austin Harding Influence." *Journal of Band Research* 38 no. 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 1-24.
- ³ In his speech given at the dedication convocation ceremony for the band building at Illinois, Harding details many important contributions made by the band following his appointment as leader of the band beginning in 1905. In describing the number of innovations, Harding states, "So numerous that our competitors accuse us of being like the Russians [of the Cold War era], claiming to have invented everything!" (underlines in original). See A. A. Harding, "Speaking for the Bands of 1905-1948 at the University of Illinois Bands Dedication Convocation on March 7, 1958." Harry Begian Papers, 1926-97, The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, series 4.
- ⁴ Leonard Falcone received many honors including membership in the American Bandmasters Association, honorary membership in the College Band Directors National Association, and election to the National Band Association's Hall of Fame of Distinguished Band Conductors.
- ⁵ Myron D. Welch, "The Life and Work of Leonard Falcone with Emphasis on His Years as Director of Bands at Michigan State University, 1927-1967." Ed.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1973.
- ⁶ Rita Griffin Comstock, *Solid Brass: The Leonard Falcone Story* (Twin Lake, MI: Blue Lake Press, 2011).
- ⁷ See <http://archives.msu.edu/collections/falcone.php>.
- ⁸ Nicholas D. Falcone, "Autobiography of Nicholas D. Falcone and the University of Michigan Bands, 1927-1935," Unpublished manuscript, p. 14. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
- ⁹ Welch, p. 18.
- ¹⁰ Comstock, p. 12.
- ¹¹ Falcone Autobiography, p. 1.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Leonard Falcone, interview with author, January 7, 1984.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Welch, p. 31
- ¹⁶ Falcone Autobiography, p. 1.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ See Welch, pp. 30-32.
- ¹⁹ "About Belleville," retrieved July 28, 2011, <http://www.bellevillemichigan.com/local/cityinfo.html>
- ²⁰ Falcone Autobiography, p. 3.
- ²¹ Leonard Falcone, interview.
- ²² Cited in Falcone Autobiography, pp. 2-3.
- ²³ "Michigan Marching Band, History, The Wilfred Wilson Years: 1915-1926," retrieved July 24, 2011, <http://mmb.music.umich.edu/node/43352>
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Leonard Falcone, interview.
- ²⁶ Comstock, p. 91.
- ²⁷ Cited in Falcone Autobiography, p. 5.
- ²⁸ Cited in Comstock, p. 129
- ²⁹ Comstock, pp. 127-128.
- ³⁰ "Pioneer High School Bands, Past Director: Nicholas Falcone," retrieved July 24, 2011, http://aapioneerbands.org/?page_id=100
- ³¹ The term "Marching Band" would not be used until 1936. See "Michigan Marching Band, History: The Nicholas Falcone Years: 1927-1934," <http://mmb.music.umich.edu/node/43353>.
- ³² Cited in Falcone Autobiography, p. 4.
- ³³ Regina Naomi Kane, Interview with George Hall (band alumnus), January 20, 1977; cited in Regina Naomi Kane, "The History of the University of Michigan Marching Band." MA thesis, University of Michigan, 1977. This view was also confirmed with informal conversations with George R. Cavender, former Director of Bands at the University of Michigan.

³⁴ In spite of the official alliance with the R.O.T.C, the band was more commonly referred to as either “The University of Michigan Band” or the “Varsity Band”. Source: W. Stoddard White, memo, “Suggestions for Publicity Director,” University of Michigan Band, September 28, 1935, W. Stoddard White Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

³⁵ Regina Naomi Kane, Interview with George Hall (band alumnus), January 20, 1977; cited in Kane thesis, p. 26.

³⁶ R. Ray Baker, “Varsity Band Wins Triumph in the ‘Far East’ Press of Boston Rings with Praise of Musicians From Ann Arbor,” *Ann Arbor News*, November 10, 1930.

³⁷ Cited in Falcone Autobiography, pp. 8-9. The review appeared in the *Detroit Times* “U-M Band Plays Orchestra Hall Concert,” May 5, 1931. “Seldom have the rafters of stately Orchestra Hall trembled and echoed as they did last night when Nicholas Falcone swung the University of Michigan Band into the thrilling strains of the ‘Victors’ march. In a programme [sic] of eight numbers and four encores they ranged from Weber through Bach, Wagner, Bizet, and Ravel’s ‘Bolero’. [In reference to Leonard Falcone’s arrangement of Ravel’s ‘Bolero’]...the band’s rendition could be compared favorably with that of the Detroit Symphony orchestra, played in the same hall a few weeks ago.”

³⁸ Letter to N. Falcone from Elkan-Vogel.Co., April 28, 1931 found in a scrapbook held by Mrs. Falcone.

³⁹ W. Stoddard White, “Band Displays New Formations at Michigan-Ohio State Game” *The Michigan Daily*, October 15, 1932.

⁴⁰ Benjamin became an accomplished flute soloist and a music educator. He later became a pioneer in the field of music therapy

⁴¹ Falcone Autobiography, p. 13.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁴³ Falcone Autobiography, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Charles Sink. Proceedings of the Board of Regents, March 16, 1932, Board of Regents Records, Box 27, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴⁵ R. Ray Baker, “Former Director of Band Carries on with Music Despite Hearing Handicap,” *The Ann Arbor News*, July 1943. This article was found in Nicholas Falcone’s scrapbook. The date was written by Falcone; more specific citation information is not available.

⁴⁶ Board of Regents minutes, March 16, 1932, Board of Regents Records, Box 27, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴⁷ Falcone Autobiography, p. 15; also see Wayne DeNeff, “Falcone, Now Deaf, Adjusts to Life Without Music.” *The Ann Arbor News*, November 2, 1954.

⁴⁸ Board of Regents, September 1934. Board of Regents Records, Box 29, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴⁹ Board of Regents of the University of Michigan Proceedings, 1932-1936, p. 528.

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/umregproc/acw7513.1932.001/730?view=pdf> (accessed September 23, 2012).

⁵⁰ Charles Sink, letter to Samuel Lockwood, December 17, 1934. Charles A. Sink Papers, General Correspondence, Box 7, Bentley Historical Library, The University of Michigan. Samuel Lockwood was a close friend of Nicholas Falcone and was residing in Germany at the time that this letter was written.

⁵¹ “Editorial,” *Michigan Daily*, October 5, 1935.

⁵² Welch, p. 85.

⁵³ University of Michigan Board of Regents Records, Box 31, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ Cited in Falcone Autobiography, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Metro Voloshin. “Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration.” In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.libraries./subscriber/article/grove/music/30574> (accessed October 18, 2011).

⁵⁷ Moore’s role in Falcone’s employment was confirmed in informal conversations with the author, Allen P. Britton (former Dean of the School of Music) and William D. Revelli.

⁵⁸ Falcone autobiography, p. 16.

⁵⁹ “College Band Directors at Ann Arbor, February 8-11, 1967.” *Music Educators Journal* 53 no. 5 (January 1967), p. 62.

⁶⁰ Beryl Falcone (Leonard Falcone’s wife), cited in Comstock, pp. 133-134.

⁶¹ University of Michigan News and Information Services, News release, February 12, 1981, University of Michigan News and Information Services Faculty and Staff Files, Box 41, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶² Beryl Falcone, cited in Comstock, p. 133.

⁶³ “Ex-band director Nicholas Falcone dies,” *Ann Arbor News*, February 12, 1981.

⁶⁴ “Band Director Emeritus Dies,” *The Michigan Daily*, February 13, 1981, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Richard L. Kennedy, University Board of Regents Action Request, July, 1978. University of Michigan News and Information Services Faculty and Staff Files, Box 41, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁶ H. Robert Reynolds, interview with author, May 11, 2011, Ann Arbor, MI.

⁶⁷ Earl V. Moore, “College Bands,” *Music Educators Journal*, 43, (February-March, 1957), p. 18-19.

⁶⁸ A number of the reviews have been cited earlier in this article; others can be found at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Correspondence between Nicholas Falcone and various administrators at the University of Michigan can also be found at the Bentley Historical Library.