

The West Newbury Cadet Band: Enlivening the Occasion at the Turn of the 20th Century

From 1894 to around 1905, the West Newbury Cadet Band “[enlivened the oc\[c\]asion](#)” be it a summer’s church lawn party or a winter’s masquerade ball. Comprised primarily of a core group of brass, woodwind, and drum players from West Newbury, the band also included an occasional violin or banjo as well as musicians from neighboring towns. It was a for-fee venture of some 18 to 25 fellows whose day jobs included farming and shoemaking.

In an era when patriotism and parades were ascendant, wildly popular brass bands “[became the centerpieces](#) of parades, public events and social gatherings, including funerals [and] weddings.” Nowhere was this more true than in Massachusetts, where Irish-born band leader [Patrick Gilmore](#) helped launch the brass band movement in Boston and [Salem](#) in the 1850s. The bands’ popularity was cemented during the Civil War, when [association with a well-known band](#) became a means of attracting recruits. Nearly all regiments had a band, famous or not, generally dressed in [colorful uniforms](#) (often baby blue) so they would not get shot at. The bands’ role in the war was significant. [It was said that](#) “such music ... has revived the drooping spirits of many a weary soldier, or soothed the pain of many a wounded patriot.”

If a report in the *West Newbury Messenger* were to be believed, all might have benefited had the war’s conduct been left entirely in the hands of the brass bands. While the two armies were encamped across from each other at the Rappahannock “one morning the brass band of the northern troops played the national air, and all the northern troops cheered and cheered. Then on the opposite side ... the brass band of the Confederates played ‘My Maryland’ and ‘Dixie.’ But after awhile one of the bands struck up ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ and the band on the opposite side of the river took up the strain, when the tune was done the Confederates and Federals all together united as the tears rolled down their cheeks in one great huzza, huzza!”

The bands played on when musicians and soldiers returned home at the war’s end. Veterans’ organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic met and marched to the tune of local cadet, cornet, and other military-style bands into the 20th century. Towns, factories, schools, clubs, and churches sponsored their own brass bands. Marching and fancy dress uniforms were essential parts of the act.

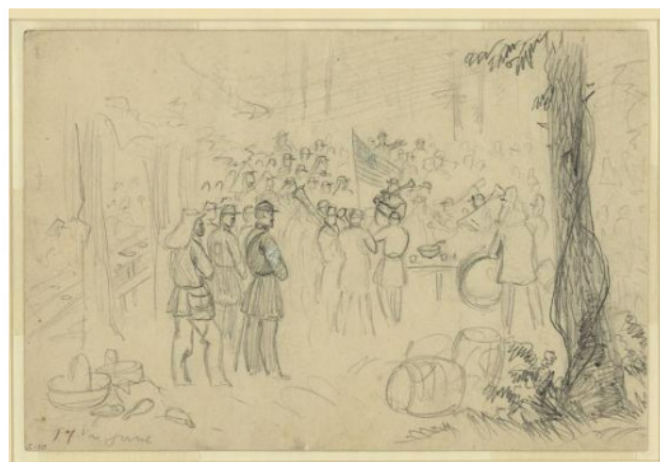
On [October 17, 1893](#), the West Newbury Cadet Band came into being under the tutelage of a Mr. Goodwin of Merrimac. In early January 1894, it was reported that officers had been elected and that the band was making fine progress and would soon be ready for concert engagements. By the end of January the band had “purchased suits which are quite attractive. They are made of blue material trimmed with gold braid and red wristbands.” The band was “in a [very flourishing condition](#) and their music [was] very fine” at its debut performance on February 23, 1894 at Town Hall.

In April of 1894 the West Newbury Cadet Band began marching drills under the supervision of Moses Stanwood, who had been a captain in the Mass. 19th Volunteer Regiment during the war and by then was active in the G.A.R. On Memorial Day it gave a concert at Post Office Square and “at each cemetery played appropriate music while the [G.A.R.] Post performed the duty of decorating the graves of fifty dead comrades.” In [August](#) the band launched its annual West Newbury day on the [steamer Merrimac](#), serenading day trippers coming and going. It closed out the year with a performance at the First Congregational Church’s Sunday school [Christmas festival](#).

And so it continued through the 1890s and the 19-aughts. Concerts on the Training Field and in Town Hall were standard fare. The band sponsored [masquerade balls](#) at Town Hall in the depths of winter. It played for several years at [Byfield’s annual picnics](#) and appeared in [Rowley](#) for Memorial Day and [Newburyport](#) on the 4th of July. It was the first band in the first division of Newburyport’s 1895 [Knights of Pythias thousand-man parade](#). It was a “conspicuous feature” in the [Sound Money Parade](#) held in West Newbury in 1896. In [1897](#) one of its concerts at Town Hall also featured performances of seances, sleight of hand tricks, and club swinging culminating with “swinging lighted lanterns and burning Indian clubs.”

One of the band’s final reported engagements occurred in [October 1905](#), when it joined friends and family to serenade and celebrate First Parish newlyweds. “The party was headed by the West Newbury Cadet band and as they approached the house, the sound of familiar strains of ‘Marching Through Georgia’ fell upon the listening ear of the people.” Other bands came and went thereafter, but none the same as the West Newbury Cadet Band.

The West Newbury Cadet Band: Enlivening the Occasion at the Turn of the 20th Century



Boston Brass Band 9/20/1851 *Gleason's Pictorial Source:*
[Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

Civil War musicians and bands served many roles, including performing for patriotic or celebratory events. In this sketch by Alfred Waud, musicians with the 5th Massachusetts Regiment play for a celebration of the battle of Bunker Hill for companies of the regiment from Charlestown. *Library of Congress*

Source [American Battlefield Trust](https://www.americanbattlefieldtrust.org)

WEST NEWBURY.

Captain Richard Newell and son Joseph left yesterday for New York, where the latter will take ship for a voyage to Japan.

The friends of the West Newbury Cadet Band wish the public to understand why there was no more music on Memorial Day, as many of the townspeople who subscribed towards the \$40 paid the band for their services on that day were disappointed at there being no more music on the street. The members of the band were perfectly willing to pay all day as far as they were concerned, but the commander of the post requested them not to play while going through the town, so there was only a short concert on Postoffice Square before the procession started, after it returned and one selection at each cemetery. The blame therefore cannot be laid to the band members.

The committee appointed at the last town meeting to investigate the project of cutting down Pipesave hill will go over the proposed route of the new road next Friday afternoon accompanied by Civil Engineer J. P. Titcomb of Amesbury. This committee is composed of the selectmen, together with Dr. Warren and M. M. Woods.

The W. N. Cadet Band has been engaged for the Farmers' Club fair next September and Representative William Cogswell has accepted an invitation to be present and speak.

Source: [6/7/1894 Newburyport Daily News](https://www.newburyportdailynews.com)



Newburyport Parade, High & State Streets Source: Museum of Old Newbury