

COE COLLEGE BANDS' HISTORY

by Rollie Raim, Retired Cedar Rapids Music Educator (written in 1995)

The COE COLLEGE Band was organized by Coe students in 1915 as a campus pep band. In 1917 the Coe Band became a part of the Military Department, providing music for drills and military reviews. Most of the original band members departed for Europe and World War I in September of 1918, playing band concerts in France. After the war the band became part of Coe's ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) program.

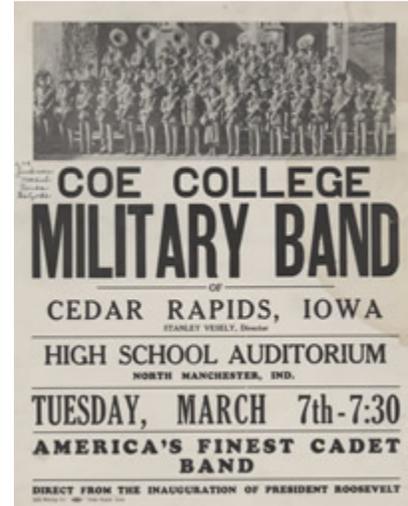
In 1925 the band was reorganized as part of the School of Music, while continuing as a military unit. Stanley Vesely Sr. was appointed director of the band in 1928 and the first great accomplishments of the Coe Band took place under his leadership. By 1929 the number of band members had grown to seventy-five with a waiting list of fifty. That year the U.S.

Government gave Coe \$5000 for new instruments after a brilliant performance at an ROTC inspection.

The band's first big achievement came when the Governor of Iowa appointed the Coe Band to represent Iowa at the Hoover Inauguration ceremonies and parade on March 4, 1929 in Washington, D.C. While in the capitol the Coe Band played a private concert for President Hoover at his executive offices near the White House and was photographed with the president. This broke a long tradition of the president only allowing his picture to be taken with his own Marine Band. The Coe Band also won the first place banner in the Class A Band Division in competition with thirty other parade bands.

The band's second inauguration trip took place in 1933 for the inauguration of President Roosevelt. At this time the Coe Band was reorganized as one of the best college bands in the United States. While in Washington the band played a pre-inaugural concert over a coast-to-coast NBC radio hook-up. The following day a second concert was given over a similar CBS radio hook-up. Music from Coe was being heard in the homes of millions of Americans throughout the United States. On their way home the band performed a concert at the World's Fair in Chicago.

In the 1934-35 school year, Band Director Vesely organized the first Coe Women's Band. This group would prove very important during World War II in keeping the Coe Band traditions and concerts going while the Coe men were fighting overseas. At this time, the Coe Band began a series of annual spring band tours, playing concerts around the Midwest and ending with a gala Palm Sunday concert at Orchestra Hall in Chicago. The concert was sponsored by the Chicago Sunday Evening Club, which invited the Coe Band back for the next twenty-one years. The Coe Band was the only college band allowed to perform at that hall, the home of the Chicago



Symphony Orchestra. The average Coe Band spring tour lasted two weeks and involved playing about sixteen concerts.

In 1937 the band performed at Roosevelt's second inauguration and later for the inaugurations of Truman and Eisenhower. In 1953 Stanley Vesely Sr. retired and turned the band over to his son Stan Vesely Jr. Under the son's direction the band never achieved the level of success accomplished by his father. For the next twenty years, the Coe Band had its up and down years. Highlights of this period included trips to Europe and the Far East and performances at the College Band Directors National Association under the direction of Tom Slattery.

When Dr. Carson took over directorship of the band five years ago (in 1990), he inherited a band of sixteen members. Due to his enthusiastic leadership, the Coe Band has grown to almost seventy members. The band has become an accomplished musical organization and a credit to the college. Last spring the Coe Band took its first spring tour in seventeen years, performing in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The tour ended with a performance at the Mall of America on Palm Sunday weekend. With its historical heritage as a challenge, the band continues to improve, moving forward to a playing level representative of the best Coe Bands of the past.

Since Mr. Raim wrote his article, the Coe College Bands have undertaken five additional tours:

- Seattle (WA), Honolulu and Maui (HI), in 1987, including a Memorial Day Performance at Pearl Harbor
- Fulton (IL), St. Louis (MO), and Kansas City (KS), 1989
- South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Oregon, in the year 2000, including concerts at the Buffalo Bill Historical Society, the Northwest Folklife Festival beneath the Space Needle in Seattle, and the culmination being a concert at the foot of Mt. Rushmore
- England and Scotland
- Honolulu, Hawaii and Cheju, South Korea