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The Cover

When the fictional "music man" went to River City, Iowa, in 1912, he convinced parents that to save their children from the "depths of degradation" (eg, using words like "gee" and "swell," playing pool, or buckling their knickers *below* the knees), they needed to get the youngsters involved in a marching band. In return for buying musical instruments and band uniforms from him, the rascally salesman promised to teach the new band members how to play their instruments. Before the townspeople recognized that the salesman was a con artist who could not read a note of music, the music man had organized a band, inspired parents to see new worth in their children, and built the self-esteem of the young people.

Bands have always been a source of inspiration to both participants and listeners. Marching armies, the precursors of marching bands, found that enemies could be terrified by a loud drum corps and an army in perfect formation. Jericho was conquered when Joshua's army, led by priests blowing trumpets of rams' horns, marched around the walled city seven times.

Bands such as we know today, composed chiefly of wind, brass, and percussion instruments (in contrast with orchestras, in which stringed instruments predominate), originated in 15th-century German military life, then spread to France, England, and later the New World. Industrial bands became popular in the 1850s, sometimes to promote unity among workers, but sometimes merely to keep their minds from the dangers of trade unionism and socialism. Instruments, which were expensive, were often in need of repair. Before a contest in Britain, one band bought a pound of soap to repair tiny cracks in their instruments caused by wear and corrosion. Marching bands did not become popular in schools until World War I witnessed servicemen marching in uniform.

Now marching bands are a tradition at parades, halftime activities at football games, and ceremonial functions such as inaugurations. Although participating in a band continues to generate self-esteem as well as promote pride in group accomplishment, Levine reports epidemic faintness and syncope in one high school band (p 2373). (Photograph by L. Willinger © Free Lance Photographers Guild, Inc.)—WILMA GEHRET FAST

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