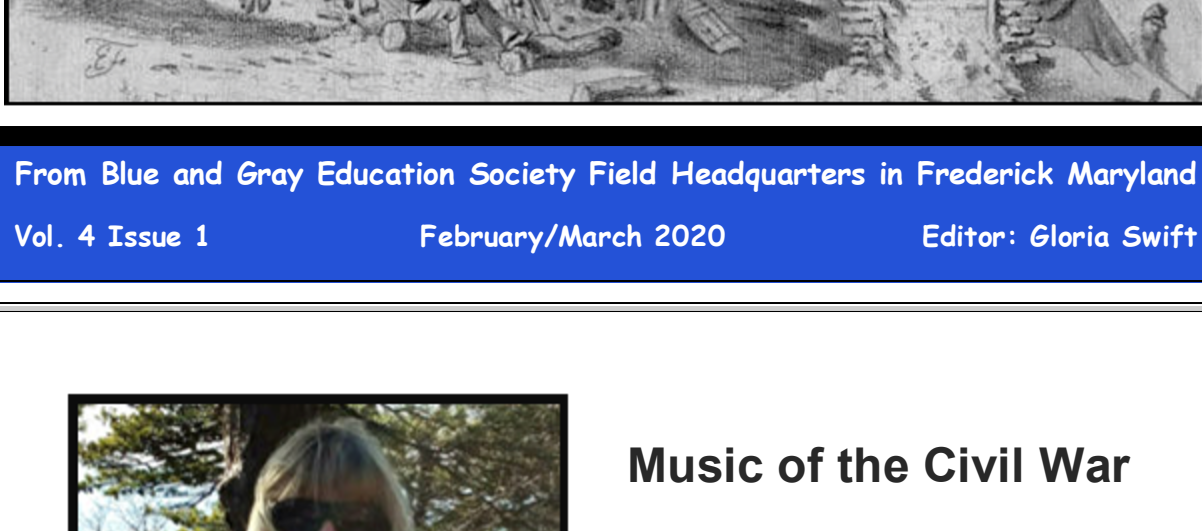




IN CAMP ALONG THE MONOCACY

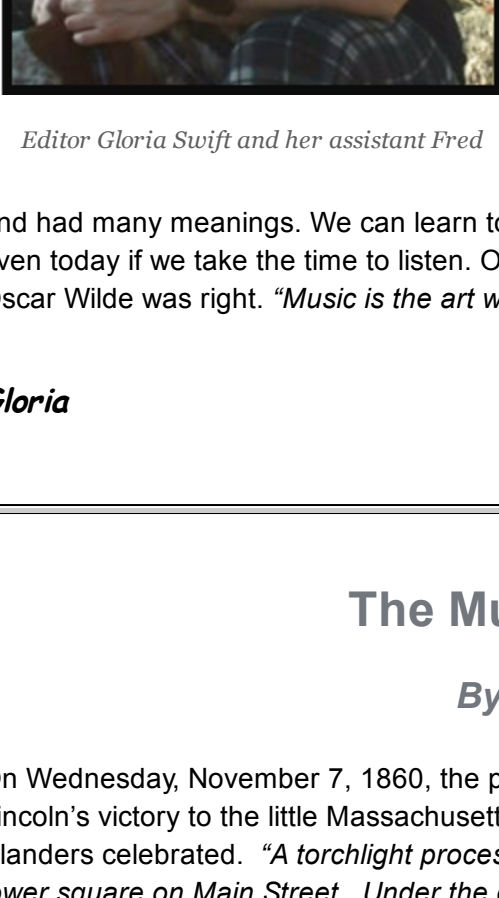


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Editor: Gloria Swift



Editor Gloria Swift and her assistant Fred

Music of the Civil War

Oscar Wilde, Irish poet and playwright, once said, *"Music is the art which is most nigh to tears and memories"*.

And nothing could be any truer about music in the Civil War. Music was indeed an art. It made men want to join the army, it made them reminisce of home, or it made them lament departed comrades. Music was often a way to spend a peaceful evening with others around the campfire. It could also be the spirited piece one heard the next day before going into battle

Music for the soldiers was all encompassing and had many meanings. We can learn to know and understand what the soldiers heard even today if we take the time to listen. Only then will we be able to understand that Oscar Wilde was right. *"Music is the art which is most nigh to tears and memories"*.

Gloria

The Music They Heard

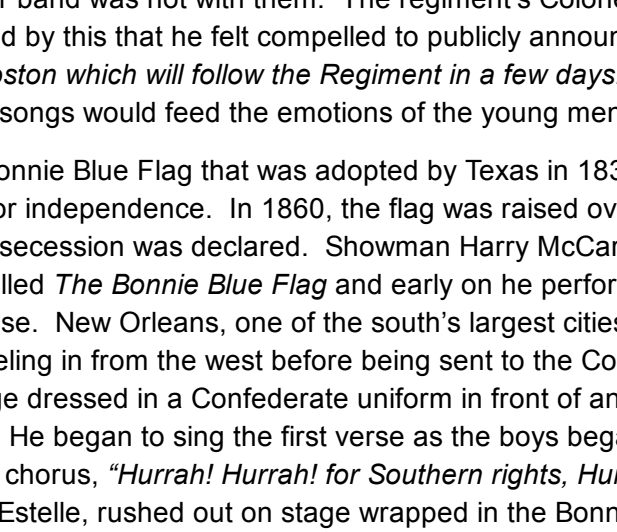
By Brian Smith

On Wednesday, November 7, 1860, the packet Wide Awake brought the news of Lincoln's victory to the little Massachusetts island of Nantucket, and that evening the islanders celebrated. *"A torchlight procession of more than 150 persons gathered in the lower square on Main Street. Under the direction of Chief Marshall Charles Wood and Captain Daniel Russell, four engine companies and the Nantucket Brass Band led the parade up Main Street, stopping before the Republican headquarters where three rockets were fired into the evening air and a 100-gun salute was raised for the President elect"*.

On Friday, April 12, 1861, at 4:30 in the morning, America's long downward spiral toward armed conflict reached its conclusion as the first Confederate shell burst over Fort Sumter, and its great Civil War began. Charleston resident Mary Chestnut wrote *"I do not pretend to go to sleep. How can I? If Anderson does not accept terms – at four – the orders are – he shall be fired upon. I count four – St Michael's chimes. I begin to hope. At half-past four, the heavy booming of a cannon. I sprang out of bed. And on my knees – prostrate – I prayed as I never prayed before."*

It was now evident that recruiting must begin in earnest, in every state, both North and South. It also did not take military recruiters long to realize that music had a very big impact on the number of men signing up to fight. When a recruiter came to town he was, most often, accompanied by, either a brass band, or at least a fife and drum playing some martial music to aid in enticing men to join whichever regiment they represented. Regiments were allowed to hire a brass band to provide music for their soldiers, both on the march and in camp. Officers soon noted that if they hired a popular, well known band, they could recruit much easier and faster. The men liked their music, and if they could hear the familiar tunes and songs from home, played well, they would rather join the regiment with the best band.

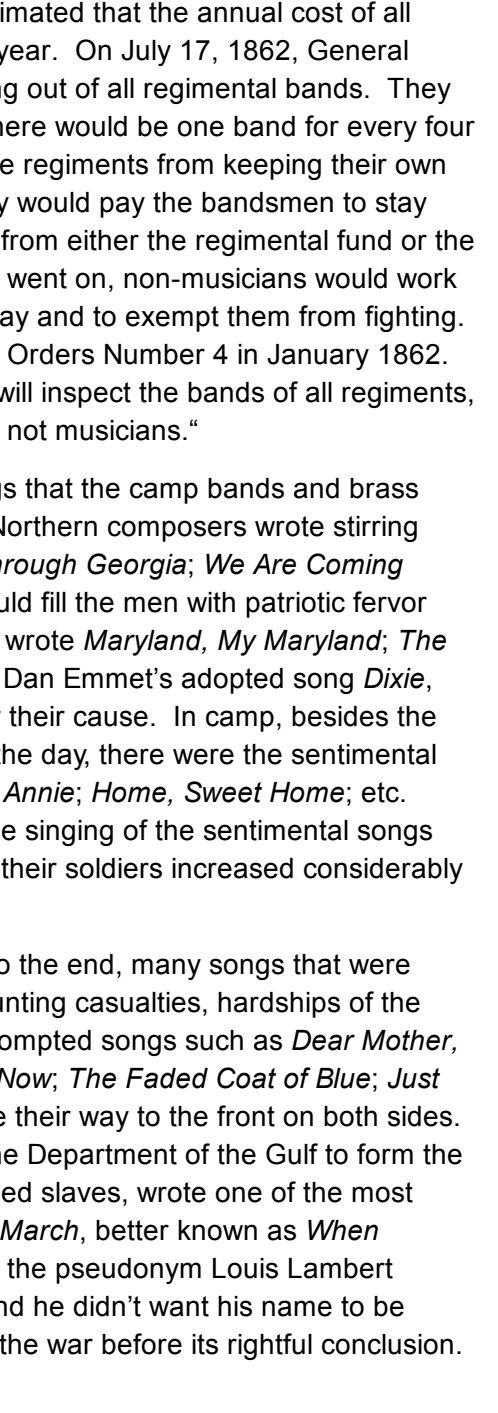
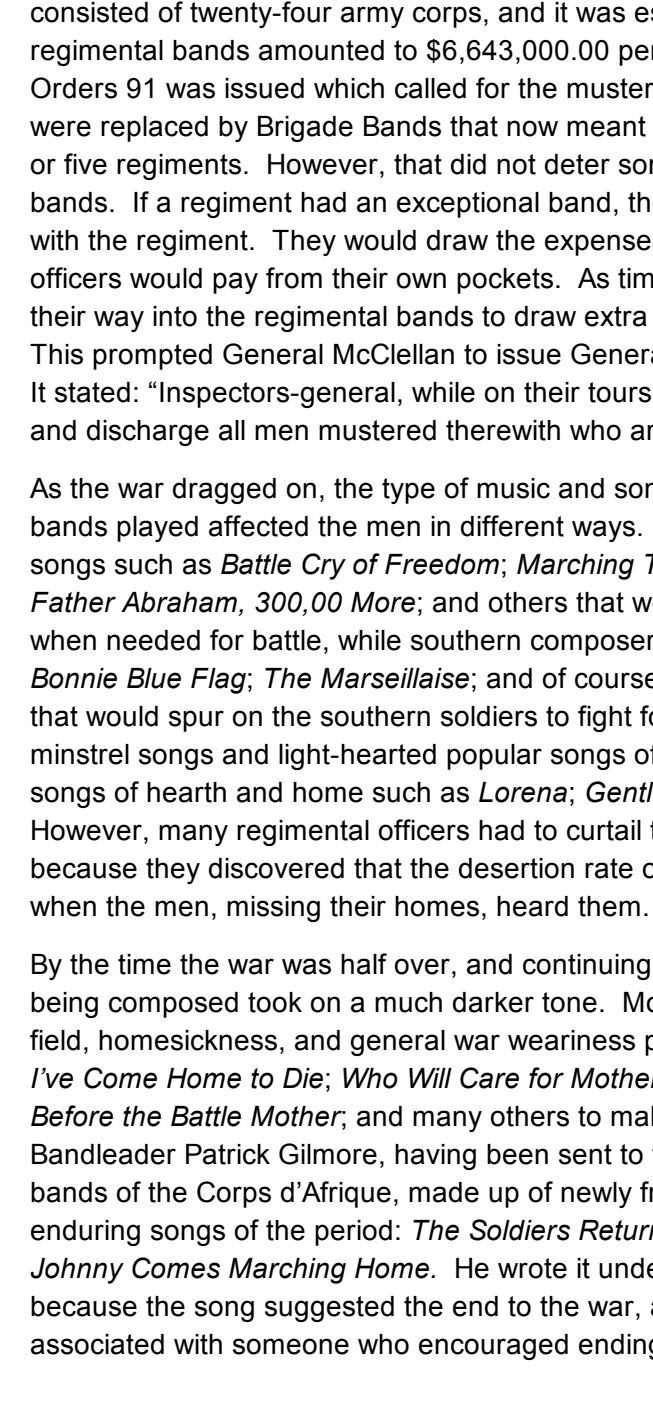
It was still a time when war fever was running high and the thousands of brand-new soldiers only thought of war as the glorious pageant of bright flags, fancy uniforms, high adventure, and plenty of music. Union volunteer U. H. Farr noted a typical reaction to music at a recruiting rally: *"The fife was playing, the drums were beating, and the new soldiers fell into line. When I saw among them boys no larger than myself, I suddenly resolved to see if they would take me, and stepped into the ranks with the others. I kept the step till the war was over."* A Confederate recruit said, *"As we marched out of town the brass bands were playing, the drums beating, colors flying and the fair ladies waving their handkerchiefs and cheering us on to 'victory or death'. Oh! How nice to be a soldier."*



The Salem North Carolina band later became the band of the 26th North Carolina Infantry

As the troops left each city for the front, crowds of people gathered to cheer them off, and if the regiment was led by a brass band, the cheers and waves from the young ladies were even greater. As the 20th Massachusetts passed through New York on their way to the war, their band was not with them. The regiment's Colonel William R. Lee was so embarrassed by this that he felt compelled to publicly announce *"...a band is now recruiting in Boston which will follow the Regiment in a few days."* In the South patriotic music and songs would feed the emotions of the young men itching for action.

For example, the Bonnie Blue Flag that was adopted by Texas in 1836, came to represent fighting for independence. In 1860, the flag was raised over the Mississippi State Capitol when secession was declared. Showman Harry McCarthy was moved to compose a song called *The Bonnie Blue Flag* and early on he performed it in the New Orleans Opera House. New Orleans, one of the south's largest cities, was a hub for young soldiers traveling in from the west before being sent to the Confederate Army. Harry came on stage dressed in a Confederate uniform in front of an audience of young men eager to fight. He began to sing the first verse as the boys began to cheer. But, when he began the chorus, *"Hurrah! Hurrah! for Southern rights, Hurrah!"* his beautiful actress wife, Lottie Estelle, rushed out on stage wrapped in the Bonnie Blue Flag. The boys went wild, stomping and cheering. The police tried to quell the disturbance, but it only resulted in a wild fight that spilled out onto the street. Overwhelmed, the police called for the Provost Guard to help, and eventually the soldiers were quieted down. That incident catapulted The Bonnie Blue Flag to rival Dixie as the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy. Music could motivate the men for both good and bad.



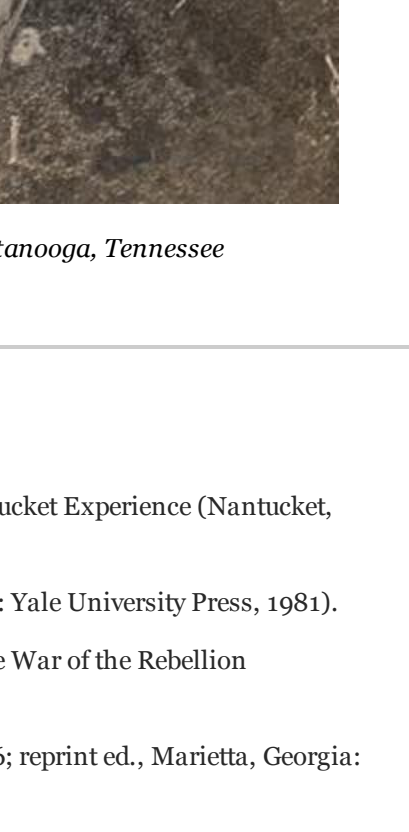
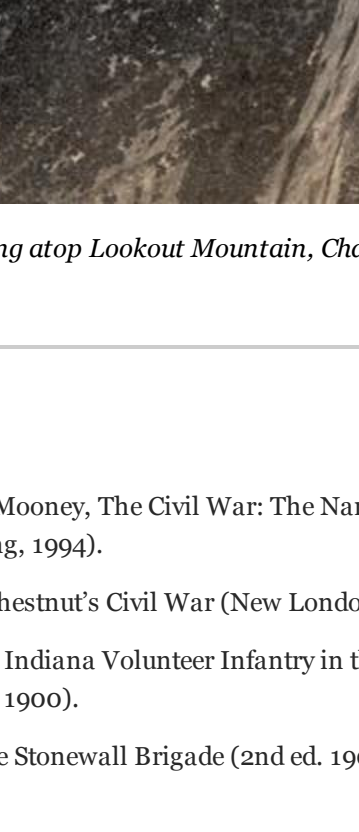
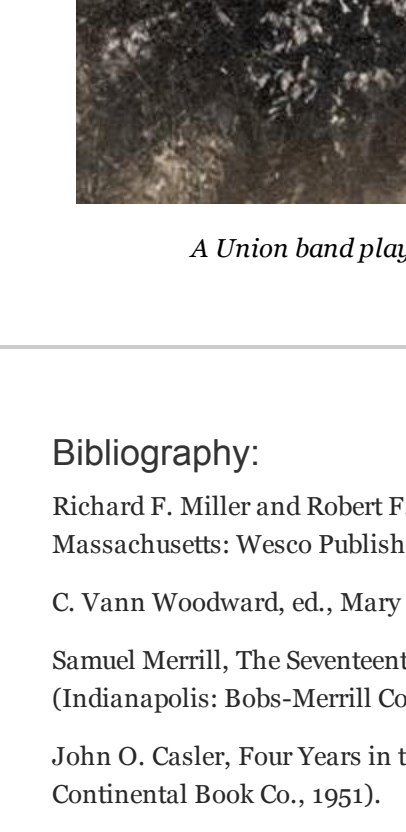
The Union and Confederate armies formed into their respective Corps and Divisions and the regimental bands and informal camp musicians brought the music from home to the troops. Many of the soldiers, because each family on the home-front had to provide their own musical entertainment, brought their expertise on guitars, banjos, fiddles, and bone rhythm instruments to the camps with them, there would always be music whenever time afforded it. One can only imagine hundreds of regiments listening to their own brass bands or fife and drum corps playing for the troops each day and evening, while the camp string bands struck up their songs around the campfires at night. The cacophony of sounds must have been deafening. The importance of the band to the rank and file of their regiment is indicated by the fact that on occasion, men who had enlisted to fight were detailed to the band to fill out needed instrumentation. Sometimes this occurred even though the band recruit had no prior musical training. Levi Lumb, of the 150th New York, was made a member of the band, which was led by Poughkeepsie native James Vassar, and in a letter to his parents he wrote:

"Now I must tell you what I am doing. I have been detailed in the Band and I like it very well. I think I will make a musician after a little while. I have no picket duty to do or any other. All I have to do is practice and I wish you could hear me make that horn sound. The instrument I have got is a trombone. I will play the first tenor part. I have got a horn already, one that belongs to the Regiment".

By the end of 1861, the Federal Government was considering the enormous cost of the war and several cost cutting measures were being discussed. One of those measures was the perceived excessive cost of the regimental bands. The combined Union armies consisted of twenty-four army corps, and it was estimated that the annual cost of all regimental bands amounted to \$6,643,000.00 per year. On July 17, 1862, General Orders 91 was issued which called for the mustering out of all regimental bands. They were replaced by Brigade Bands that now meant there would be one band for every four or five regiments. However, that did not deter some regiments from keeping their own bands. If a regiment had an exceptional band, they would pay the bandmen to stay with the regiment. They would draw the expenses from either the regimental fund or the officers would pay from their own pockets. As time went on, non-musicians would work their way into the regimental bands to draw extra pay and to exempt them from fighting. This prompted General McClellan to issue General Orders Number 4 in January 1862. It stated: *"Inspectors-general, while on their tours, will inspect the bands of all regiments, and discharge all men mustered therewith who are not musicians."*

As the war dragged on, the type of music and songs that the camp bands and brass bands played affected the men in different ways. Northern composers wrote stirring songs such as *Battle Cry of Freedom*; *Marching Through Georgia*; *We Are Coming Father Abraham*, 300,00 More; and others that would fill the men with patriotic fervor when needed for battle, while southern composers wrote *Maryland, My Maryland*; *The Bonnie Blue Flag*; *The Marseillaise*; and of course, Dan Emmet's adopted song *Dixie*, that would spur on the southern soldiers to fight for their cause. In camp, besides the minstrel songs and light-hearted popular songs of the day, there were the sentimental songs of hearth and home such as *Lorena*; *Gentle Annie*; *Home, Sweet Home*; etc. However, many regimental officers had to curtail the singing of the sentimental songs because they discovered that the desertion rate of their soldiers increased considerably when the men, missing their homes, heard them.

By the time the war was half over, and continuing to the end, many songs that were being composed took on a much darker tone. Mounting casualties, hardships of the field, homesickness, and general war weariness prompted songs such as *Dear Mother, I've Come Home to Die*; *Who Will Care for Mother Now*; *The Faded Coat of Blue*; *Just Before the Battle Mother*, and many others to make their way to the front on both sides. Bandleader Patrick Gilmore, having been sent to the Department of the Gulf to form the bands of the Corps d'Afrique, made up of newly freed slaves, wrote one of the most enduring songs of the period: *The Soldiers Return March*, better known as *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*. He wrote it under the pseudonym Louis Lambert because the song suggested the end to the war, and he didn't want his name to be associated with someone who encouraged ending the war before its rightful conclusion.



At times during the war music crossed the opposing lines. An example of this is illustrated by an occurrence that happened when the Army of Northern Virginia and The Army of the Potomac faced each other across the Rappahannock River. One night a Confederate band formed near the river and played Dixie. From across the river, a Union band answered with John Brown's Body. The rebel band responded with The Bonnie Blue Flag, which was answered by The Star Spangled Banner. The unusual concert continued with the bands of both sides trading the favorite martial tunes of the South with the national airs of the North. When the concert ended, silence fell over both armies. Then a lone Union bugler began playing a tune beloved by both sides, Home! Sweet Home! A New Hampshire soldier recalled that, *"as the sweet sounds rose and fell on the evening air ... all listened intently, and I don't believe there was a dry eye in all those assembled thousands."*

There are thousands of examples of the importance of music to the soldiers during the Civil War, as evidenced by the number of brass bands, fife and drum corps, and camp bands that were part of all the armies in the conflict. Music was emotionally in many soldier's letters as they wrote of how it touched their hearts so emotionally, not only during the war, but throughout their whole lives. Perhaps John Esten Cooke, a captain in J.E.B. Stuart's Confederate cavalry best described the feelings that music would always stir in the minds of Civil War veterans as they remembered the conflict and their comrades left behind:

*Oh, band in the pine-wood, cease!
Cease with your splendid call;
The living are brave and noble,
But the dead were bravest of all!*

*They throng to the martial summons,
To the loud triumphant strain;
And the dead, bright eyes of long dead friends
Come to the heart again.*

*They come with the ringing bugle,
And the deep drum's mellow roar,
Till the soul is faint with longing
For the hands we clasp no more.*

*Oh, band in the pine-wood, cease,
Or the heart will melt in tears,
For the gallant eyes and the smiling lips
And the voices of old years.*



Brian Smith

Brian Smith is a retired software engineer and cost analyst with what is now Verizon Communications. He has had a lifelong interest in both music and history. For many years he was the principle percussionist with the Rhode Island Wind Ensemble and a member of the Providence Brigade Band, a recreated mid nineteenth century military brass band. He plays guitar, banjo, harmonica, tin whistle, bones, jaw harp, and jawbone, with which he demonstrates Civil War camp music at historic venues. Now living with his wife, Susan, in Savannah, Georgia, he is currently a member of the Historic Weapons Program at the Fort Pulaski National Monument in Savannah. He is the author of Bandstands to Battlefields, Brass Bands in 19th Century America, and The Town Band, a treatise on America's brass band era.

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