


Doremus Post

by Bob BellaRosa

In the latter part of 1932, it was decided that Doremus American Legion Post No. 55 of Hackensack, NJ, had marched long enough behind other musical units and, therefore, should have a drum and bugle corps of its own.

A committee consisting of Charles Kaiser, Albert Scrivens, Henry Schurich, William Norton and George Damm was formed to look into the matter and make a report to the membership.

After carefully ironing out all the details, the committee met with the members and presented a small report with a very small but touchy item of \$75 needed in order to launch the drum corps. Everything was agreeable to the Post except the \$75 and even when the request for \$6 was made, the Post refused. (In 1932, everyone was financially embarrassed.)

The problem facing the determined committee was finances, but these five men could not be discouraged. Through various functions such as card parties and picnics, the committee raised enough money to buy drum sticks and a few \$3.50 brass bugles.

The search for an instructor to teach the boys to drum and blow a bugle was a tedious one that was met with the usual stumbling block: the instructors wanted to be paid. Then, when things looked blackest, a miracle happened. A stranger from Oradell, NJ, hearing of the formation of the drum corps in Hackensack, came around and volunteered to instruct the boys at no cost. Thus started the long career of William Carshaw Sr. in the drum corps, terminated only by his sudden death in 1942.

The corps practiced hard for the next few months. The drummers practiced their beats on wooden

tables in the Legion Post "dug-out," while the buglers gradually took to blowing their brass bugles.

By the spring of 1933, Carshaw decided the corps needed more than one instructor, so he got another bugle instructor, Herbert Landedann, and a drillmaster, Theodore Haubner. Landedann, the 230 lb. jolly bugler, arranged all the music for the corps.

Memorial Day 1933 was a great day for this infant corps. It was their first parade. The men of Doremus (28 in all) marched down Hackensack's Main Street to the Green for the usual Memorial Day ceremonies. That was a steady engagement for many years.

The first improvised uniform was blue serge trousers, white shirts, black ties and regulation Legion caps. Lacking a flashy uniform made it hard for the corps to procure engagements, but uniforms cost money and surely the Post would be unwilling to pay for them.

More than \$500 was needed, so the committee approached W. Burr Gregg, one of the original officers of the Post, and asked if he would like to finance the corps. Gregg offered to give the corps \$200 with the understanding that \$100 would be paid back and the balance would be a donation. This was only provided that the committee could find some other "angel" to put up the balance. The committee promised Gregg the world, took his money and bought uniforms.

On Memorial Day 1934, the city of Hackensack again hired the corps to play for them, but this time the corps had a new look. With Albert Scrivens, who had been the drum major from the start, wielding his baton at the head of the corps, the boys marched down Main Street resplendent in their array of

colors. What a uniform!

Never was there a circus band that had anything on the boys of Doremus for color that year. Flaming red trousers; blue coats trimmed with red; red caps topped with a red, white and blue feather plume -- what a sight! The corps was on the move and had accomplished in less than two years what had taken other corps five years to do.

A new leader

In 1935, due to pressing business, the corps' president, Charles Kaiser, appointed a committee to persuade Harold V. Reilly to take over leadership of the drum and bugle corps. At the general meeting of the corps in 1935, Reilly was unanimously elected president, and before the meeting was adjourned the title of president was changed to "commandant."

Following that election, things began to happen. First to go was the plumed cap, replaced by a Belgian overseas cap. New equipment was added, including tenor drums, baritone bugles, an additional bass drum, additional cymbals, a bugle lyre, a Chinese gong, tom-tom drums and a new set of National Colors. Most important of all, new men were added.

In 1936, the corps was in earnest and parade prizes were won almost continuously during the year. New engagements began pouring in. Men connected with other corps, hearing of the strides Doremus was making, applied for membership and, before the year was out, the corps boasted a membership of more than 40 men.

The first championship

The popularity of the corps grew in leaps and bounds during 1937. John Stull, champion drum major of New Jersey and



(Top) The Doremus Post in concert formation at a performance in 1951 (photo from the collection of Bob BellaRosa/Heritage); (right) Doremus Post, July 11, 1964 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

winner of the Silver Baton award, was elected drum major at the annual corps meeting in 1936, and with him came another new look.

The flaming red trousers were replaced with blue whipcord breeches and knee high field boots. The coats were altered to blend and the Belgian cap was replaced with a large white Australian military hat. White gloves for the buglers and white kid gauntlets for the color guard were obtained. Gold citation cords adorned each man's left shoulder.

Again the corps won many parade prizes and by the middle of the year the membership had grown to nearly 70 men, representing 23 municipalities throughout northern New Jersey.

In August 1937, the corps decided to enter the state class B competition at Ocean City the following month. James J. Donnelly had been hired to instruct the buglers and arrange all the music and Vincent L. Mott, national champion American Legion drummer, was hired to teach drumming.

The two men worked jointly for about five weeks and in September the corps went to Ocean City and entered the competition.

What happened is history. When the corps left Ocean City, it took with it the New Jersey Class B Championship title, nosing out Wood-Ridge by a wide margin. To make the



(Above) The Doremus Post's famous drum major, Leonard Captain during the corps' visit to Cuba in 1951; (below) the corps' American flag squad in a 1951 parade in New Jersey (photos from the collection of Bob BellaRosa/Heritage).



year complete for the new champions, they bested two class A corps, the Houston Post of Germantown, PA, and the East Orange, NJ, corps for a parade prize at Trenton. It had certainly been a great year.

In the latter part of 1937, the corps purchased a trailer, which was converted into an equipment car, and a few months later a Ford ambulance was added to tow the trailer.

In March 1938, vice-commandant Henry Shurich resigned and William Norton, past commander of the post, was unanimously elected to fill the unexpired term until the corps' general election in October.

Class A corps

During the winter months of 1938, the corps worked hard for perfection. Donnelly and Mott rewrote much of the music and the concert number was revamped. The corps had 11 engagements booked during the months of May and June, and that alone attests to the great popularity of the corps.

It was agreed that the corps should climb to the higher bracket of class A, and in May 1938 the corps entered its first class A competition at Madison Square Garden in New York City. They finished last.

The corps wasn't as bad as it seemed, which they proved a week later in West New York, NJ, when they placed third ahead of the then-class A champions of the state, Morristown.

The year moved along smoothly and in each competition the corps looked better. Everyone was working for the big test at the state competition at Asbury Park. It was hoped that the corps could capture the class A championship in its first attempt, but due to many circumstances beyond their control, they finished third.

Still, the year had been a great success and the members were moving forward by leaps and bounds under the able guidance of

Commandant Reilly and his efficient staff of officers and instructors. Everyone was looking to the future for more championships.

The drum major

At the December 1938 corps meeting, Leonard Captain, a prominent figure even then in New Jersey drum corps, became Doremus' drum major. He went on to achieve national prominence by being a walking emblem of the Doremus corps.

Captain, who lived in Hasbrouck Heights, NJ, had been drum major of the Lane Post corps of Lodi, NJ, and held the same position with the Garfield Pleasure Club corps in the early 1930s. He was also an active member of the Morristown American Legion corps of Morristown, NJ, for several years.

In 1938, at the national American Legion convention in Los Angeles, Captain participated in national competition as a drummer with Morristown.

Captain's record with Doremus was as sparkling as that of the corps itself. He led the corps to four national competitions -- Doremus won two -- and to four state competitions, which netted Doremus four championships. Captain was named All-American Drum Major in 1939 and 1947.

He was a born showman and no one on a competitive field or in a parade worked harder than he did. His style was copied over and over again, but those who made the attempt were only half as good, at best.

Captain's willingness to pose for snapshots and sign autographs for his hundreds of admirers helped to spread much goodwill for the Doremus corps throughout the state and nation during the time he performed out front of the organization.

Here are the placements at American Legion National Championships for Doremus: 1939, Chicago, IL, first; 1940, Boston, MA, sixth; 1941, Milwaukee, WI, second; 1947, New York City, NY, first; 1948, Miami, FL, second; 1949, Philadelphia, PA, fifth; 1951, Miami, FL, fourth, their final trip to nationals.

After 32 years in competition, the Doremus corps folded after the 1964 season.



Bob BellaRosa grew up in Brooklyn, NY, and joined his first drum and bugle corps, the Junior Cadets, in 1944. He started out as a drummer and later switched to bugle.

Over the last 50 years he has instructed over 3,000 young people and he has

marched with some of the greatest junior and senior corps.

He mastered the French horn bugle and went on to win more individual titles than any other player (60 wins, 12 losses).

BellaRosa was founder, editor, writer and publisher of many magazines and books, as well as an accomplished recording engineer, producing drum corps albums under several labels during the 1950s and 1960s.

In his semi-retirement, he still publishes Drum Corps Heritage monthly.