


picture to the awe of the crowd. The front then broke, reforming the initial parade formation.

Jack Bullock, who later became a noted composer/arranger of band music, came into the corps as a soprano bugler in 1948 while a student at nearby Ithaca College School of Music. He cites John Kinyon as being one of his mentors. In the mid-1950s, he took charge as instructor/

by **Geoffrey C. Whiting**

They were a small market drum corps with big ideas. A leading innovator in the 1950s and early 1960s, the corps was born as Winnek Post American Legion drum corps in 1929.

In the post-World War I era, drum corps were springing up across the country as veterans organizations sought a means to make stirring patriotic displays and maintain common bonds among their members.

The formation of the Winnek Post drum corps by Jack Gleason and T.J. Comiskey that year was to mark the beginning of 52 years of continuous competitive drum corps in the Seneca Valley of New York State. Winnek Post quickly rose to statewide prominence, capturing the New York State American Legion title in 1934.

From 1941 on, they were nationally prominent, making the finals of every American

(Top) The Geneva Appleknockers senior corps in 1954 at the American Legion Nationals in Washington, D.C.; (below) the Appleknockers junior corps at a parade in 1972; (right) the Appleknockers senior corps in the early 1960s had a dance-type band (photos from the collection of Geoffrey C. Whiting).

Geneva Appleknockers

Legion championship they entered until their demise in 1964. By the early 1960s, they were one of the nation's oldest drum and bugle corps in continuous active existence.

They adopted the name Appleknockers sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s. It was a nickname that was being applied to them by some of the big city corps. Lore has it that when a corps member tried to discuss judging methods, one of the judges spoke up, "Go on, you appleknockers don't know that!"

It happened that this evocative name reflected the rural, fruit-growing Finger Lakes region of New York state where Geneva is located and the fact that the drum corps traveled or "knocked" about the countryside. Hence, what was meant to be disparaging was adopted as uniquely appropriate.

The corps was fortunate to have very able musical direction over the years. During the 1940s, John Kinyon, an Eastman School of Music graduate who was a local band teacher, did their arrangements. He started the tradition at Geneva of playing popular music rather than strictly marches that were the standard fare for drum corps of the day.

Kinyon had inherited a small school band program with unusual and incomplete instrumentation that required him to write custom arrangements for them to be able to perform. Thus, he was well-prepared to handle the idiosyncrasies of drum corps instrumentation.

He later went on to become a prolific composer/arranger of beginning band music and for many years was recognized as a national leader in this area.

The line was instructed for many years by local Geneva High School band director Godfrey Brown.

The Appleknockers were one of the great crowd-pleasers of the era, noted for Comiskey's big wheel drill maneuver first used in the 1940s. This was a full-corps, 360-degree wheel pivoting on the drum major, with the horn players executing the grand maneuver to the accompaniment of a drum solo. The formation was entered out of a center pivot from a parade formation moving into a company front, with half of the line facing forward and half facing backward, eyes left as the front rotated in this daring big

arranger and also played in occasional solo ensembles such as in *Bugler's Holiday*.

Under Bullock, the Appleknockers' tradition for playing popular music and jazz broadened. In Bullock's words, "I was experimenting with different ways to present the music and wrote an arrangement which included a modulation to another key. We were the first competing corps to do this and it was a real feat, for the bugles had only one valve and played generally in two keys.

"Although John Kinyon wrote in a jazz style for the corps, which featured Frankie Farr (soprano bugler reputed to have played drum corps' first improvised field show solos) in the late 1940s, I took the corps further and presented jazz sounds through most of the pieces we played by using jazz harmonies and rhythms. Frankie Farr was a natural trumpeter who had an unusual knack for improvisation . . . the kind of improvisation heard in the 1930s and 1940s."

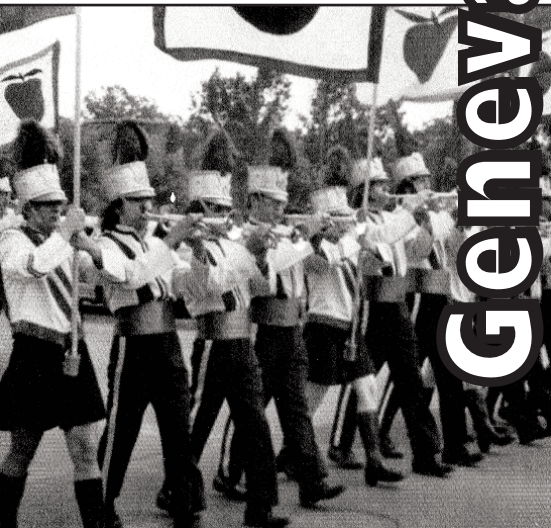
During the early 1950s, the corps adopted a unique look as they transitioned from Winnek Post to the Geneva Appleknockers, wearing green felt French Foreign Legion



caps with a flowing satin neck drape lined in brilliant yellow (photo at top of page).

They used this unusual headgear to advantage in the off the line maneuver. They donned the caps, held waist high upside down with the drape tucked inside, with a rapid downward, then upward, flick rippling down the line. This popped the drape out in a yellow blaze like a lightning bolt.

Also of visual note, says Bullock, "Hardy Carrasas (drill instructor for the senior corps from the 1950s to 1964 and later drill



instructor for the junior corps) was one of the great innovators of drum corps drill. His body movements and reactions drill-wise complimented the jazz-style music that the drums and bugles were performing. He was always trying something new that he dreamed up and 99 percent of the time it was used and became the standard for other drum corps that copied his ideas."

In 1958, resplendent in brand-new, all-white, green- and red-trimmed, cadet-style uniforms, the corps placed second in the preliminaries of the American Legion Nationals in Chicago.

Also in 1958, the corps introduced the contra bass bugle and big band-style indoor concerts. Says Bullock, "During a meeting of the New York-Canadian Drum Corps Association being held in Geneva during January 1958, the corps presented a concert for the participants of the association in the Geneva High School auditorium as part of the program for the weekend gathering. We played a sit-down concert with music stands and chairs instead of standing at attention while playing as most corps did at standstill concerts.

"The music was the previous year's show, plus music I wrote to feature some of the guys. We added a performer on drum set and a string bass and played like a "big band" of the 1940s war years. Later we added little comedy skits and featured the performers on instruments not associated with drum corps, such as marimbas.

"It was a big hit and we were asked to present the same concert a month later in the same auditorium for people of the Geneva area. And so the "winter concerts" were born . . . Kenny Petersen (still active in drum corps 50 years later with Mighty St. Joe's Alumni) became a showpiece performer and was featured with many of these selections.

"Hardy Carrasas, an excellent bugler, was featured performing duets with Kenny and, at times, I would lay the baton down, pick up a bugle and the three of us would play a trio.

"The contra bass bugle was born during this time, also. We needed a lower brass voice for the indoor concerts and so Whaley-Royce Musical Instrument Company in Toronto produced two instruments, which we used in the concerts. They were quite heavy and cumbersome and difficult to march with, although we did use them on the field for

several years. The contra instrument was redesigned by Getzen and became a standard part of the instrumentation for all corps."

Percussion at Geneva never achieved the competitive success and notoriety bugling did, but the corps did field lines with drummers of note. John S. Pratt, a member of the World Drum Corps and Percussive Arts Society's Halls of Fame, cites the Winnek line of 1947 as being an inspiration to him.

"Norm (Peth) and Vern (Alling) and the other fine drummers that played with them in the snare line of 1947 provided me with the first great motivation of my young drumming career," he said.

Pratt competed with the corps in the 1949 season and speaks glowingly of the rudimental standard of the era set by the New York Skyliners. "The Skyliners' use of five-, nine-, 13- and 17-stroke open rolls allowed them more latitude for execution cleanliness at the then-standard 128-132 drum tempos for contests than Geneva's use of more "closed" rolls like the seven," he said.

In the 1950s, the Appleknockers were to depart further from this rudimental standard with the use of more rhythmic, set-inspired parts to accompany the bugle book. Ironically, this style is more reminiscent of modern drum corps percussion parts, but it did not find favor with judging of the day, which valued more purely rudimental styles.

Innovations in percussion included drumming "huddles" in which a single snare would play trap-style riffs on the drums around him. They used a cowbell mounted on the side of one of the snare drums for a Latin arrangement in defiance of the rules. Alas, the price of innovation was a penalty!

Another percussion innovation was the introduction of spinning cymbals. One of their cymbal players with a mechanical bent devised a universal joint for the handle that, with a practiced wrist oscillation, produced an eye-catching effect under the lights. This was in keeping with the flash and showmanship of the corps and quite rapidly became the rage with drum corps of the era.

In the early 1960s, Nick D'Angelo, a music professor at Geneva's Hobart and William Smith Colleges, took over direction of the horn line. In 1964, he led the corps in a memorable concert at Carnegie Hall in the *Drum Corps News*-sponsored "An Evening With the Corps."

This was a defining moment for Geneva. The corps wowed the audience with a style of play never before heard from a drum corps. In the words of James Bascom, a bugler in the line at the time, "Ken Petersen was at his peak and we brought the house down with a 45-minute rendition of our winter concert series. All the other groups did about a 10-minute show, which was basically a stand-up performance." Petersen set new performance standards on the soprano as he dazzled the audience with beautiful 32nd-note chromatic embellishments.

After the 1964 season, these crowd-pleasers became history, due in part to changes in sponsorship by the American Legion, nationally and regionally, which left the corps unable to sustain itself. Corps were becoming larger and entering a new era of independence from Legion roots. Geneva could not support a larger corps.

But drum corps did not die in Geneva, it only shifted gears. The senior corps, at the suggestion of board member Bascom, started a junior corps in the fall of 1962 to groom future members. The new corps had experienced direction with former members Petersen as director, Dave Baroody as business manager, Thomas Hessney as bugle instructor/arranger, Carrasas as drill instructor and Bascom as drum instructor.

When the senior corps folded, all the equipment was left to the junior corps that had been practicing at Winnek Post, high above Seneca Lake. By 1965, they were ready to enter field competition after having cut their teeth for two years as a parade corps.

For the next 10 seasons, they fielded competitive units that at their best were ranked second in the state. They also sponsored one of the finest junior shows in upstate, "Drums Along the Seneca."

The corps competed in the NY/Canadian circuit and in the Associated Junior Corps circuit. The latter was co-founded in 1967 by Appleknocker business manager and former senior corps bugler Baroody. It showcased the corps in competition against upstate New York's and Canada's finest.

The competitive success pinnacle was achieving U.S. Open finalist status in 1971. In 1973, Bullock returned to the Appleknockers as music arranger for the junior corps, renewing a relationship that began 25 years earlier. He challenged the corps with *Procession of the Nobles* and *Overture to Carmen*, among others.

On the demise of the junior corps after the 1974 season, some members and instructors found success with the nearby Auburn Purple Lancers and Watkins Glen Squires. The epicenter of junior corps in the Seneca Valley moved 40 miles south as the Squires continued the small-market successes of the area in DCI from the mid-1970s to early 1980s.

The Appleknockers' cadet corps, founded in 1967, continued until 1979, bringing to a close a proud tradition of 50 years of continuous drum corps in Geneva, NY.



Geoffrey Whiting was a soprano bugler with the Appleknockers junior corps from 1966 to 1973. While he never saw the senior corps perform, he is indebted to the many senior corps members who shared memories to help bring the corps "alive" once again. His life has been forever enriched by his experience in drum corps. He is a physician in Elmira, NY, who still plays trumpet and now bugle with St. Joseph's Alumni Corps of LeRoy, NY.



The Appleknockers junior corps at the 1967 American Legion Nationals in Boston, MA (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).