



# Mile 146

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## “Strike Up The Band” *The Wainwright Band and Orchestra Camp*

Who would have ever imagined that the first nationally known band camp was located just east of Topeka? High school musicians from all over the county came to spend eight weeks of their summer at the Wainwright Band and Orchestra Camp on the east side of Oliver Lake. While most people know of the contribution of John Phillips Susa, very few know of John W. (Jack) Wainwright. And yet, it was Wainwright who may have had the greatest influence on high school music. He



established the first high school music program in Ohio, having developed a system of teaching girls and boys how to play band instruments in a class setting. In 1923, his first high school band won the first national band competition held in Chicago, Illinois.

Jack Wainwright was born in Lisbon, Ohio, on October 30th, 1889, the eighth child in a family of nine. He left school at about the age of 16 and worked in banking and printing. He learned to repair and operate linotype machines. When he was 18 he accepted a position in Galion. In 1910 he moved to Oberlin, Ohio, where he found work as a linotype operator for the Oberlin Tribune Review. Wainwright entered the Oberlin Academy where he played in the college band and conservatory orchestra. He would later become the band director of Oberlin Academy while organizing other bands in Wellington, Elyria, Berlin Heights, Lorain, and Olmstead Falls, Ohio. For eight years he was director of the Oberlin College band and head of the wind instrument department at Oberlin Conservatory of Music of three years. Wainwright organized the Oberlin Boys Band in 1913, and the following year they toured the eastern United States. On that tour they had the privilege of playing for President Woodrow Wilson.



In 1918, he enlisted in Cleveland's Navel Reserve Band traveling the country to help sell Liberty Bonds to finance the World War I effort. While on tour with the Navel Reserve Band in October of that same year, they traveled by Nickel Plate Railroad to Fostoria, Ohio, where they played a concert promoting the war effort. When the band arrived, Wainwright reportedly asked the trainman the name of the town. He said, “Fostoria”, to which Wainwright replied, “Never heard of it!”. Little did he know, that Fostoria would open the door to national recognition. F.H. Warren, superintendant of Fostoria Public School and a great music lover, was greatly impressed with Wainwright and the band's performance. Warren later said that Jack told him that after the war he would like to come to a town like Fostoria and start a new band. His dream was to see every school child have the opportunity to play a musical instrument. When he was discharged from the Navel Reserve Band in December of 1918, Jack contacted Warren. By February of 1919, the Wainwrights and their infant daughter had settled in Fostoria. It would be their home until 1930.

Jack and Jeanette Wainwright had a Hoosier connection. Jeanette was the daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ethan A. Streeter of LaGrange, Indiana. She was a violinist, violist, and pianist and a graduate of Oberlin College.

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No doubt they met at Oberlin and fell in love. Jack and Jeanette were secretly married on February 2, 1918, but the marriage wasn't made public until August. Why the secrecy; we don't know. We do know that on December 6th



AWARD PRESENTED—Captain W. H. Santelman, director U.S. Marine Band, Washington D.C., awarding first prize ribbon to J. W. Wainwright, director Fostoria High School Band, winners of the first prize, National School Band Contest of America, June 1923.

of that year they welcomed baby Betty Evelyn Wainwright into their home.

Wainwright believed that every child should have the opportunity to play a musical instrument. With that in mind, he approached the C.C. Conn company and sold them on a plan to rent instruments to students. They agreed to sell him instruments on a long term deferred payment basis. Pupils

paid a monthly rental which included repairs and private lessons. Violins rented for \$3.00, brass and reed instruments were a bit more, and a saxophone was \$5.00.

In 1926 the Wainwright Band and Orchestra Camp opened on the east side of Oliver Lake where the family owned 88 acres of land. John W. Hanan, President of the Old Settlers Association, described the camp in the LaGrange County Centennial History 1828-1928 (page 43, May 24, 1928; printed by LaGrange Publishing Company).

*Mr. Wainwright has over 88 acres of land on the east side of Oliver Lake and on the north end of this land he has constructed three buildings, two school buildings and a store room. One building 20 x 60 feet, three stories in height; dormitory 40 x 130, two stories; and the store building 20 x 80, is one story in height. These buildings will accommodate and care for 240 boys. Their first year there were 62 boys, the second there were 258, and the present year 300.*

It's said that once printer's ink gets into your blood you are hooked for life. That was true for Jack. Printing was a part of his life from his time in Oberlin and then in Fostoria, Ohio, where he opened a print shop with one of his brothers

in an old brick school. It's said that he even had a small print shop at the band camp on Oliver Lake.

The summer camp term lasted for eight weeks during June, July, and August. Five-and-a-half hours a day were devoted to musical instruction and the balance to athletics, swimming and all the lake had to offer. Jack had 16 instructors and six counselors. Such well known conductors and musicians like Fabien Sevitzky, conductor for the Indianapolis Symphony were part of the staff.

Sunday afternoon in the summer were always special at the Wainwright Band and Orchestra Camp. People from miles around came to enjoy the afternoon concerts.

DeWayne Bontrager, from Topeka, remembers Wainwright bringing a strings section to Shipshewana to accompany the community's performance of the Messiah.

The Wainwright's move to Indiana came in 1930, when Jack accepted a position at Short Ridge High School in Indianapolis. Three years later he was appointed to head the music department for South Side High School in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. It was a position he held from 1933 to 1944.

Betty Wainwright, their daughter, went on to make a name for herself in the music world as an artist and composer. Blessed with perfect pitch like her mother, she began studying piano at the age of three. She added the violin at the age of six. But, her great love was the harp. Studying



Betty Wainwright age 16

under Carlos Salzedo at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, she was persuaded to change her name of "Lynne" which seemed more in keeping for a concert artist. Her four years at Curtis culminated with her being given the first Mary Louise Curtis Bok Award, as the outstanding graduate of her class. That class also included an exceptional young pianist by the name of Leonard Bernstein. Lynne Wainwright Palmer, who passed away in 2010, will be remembered as a true pioneer of the harp.

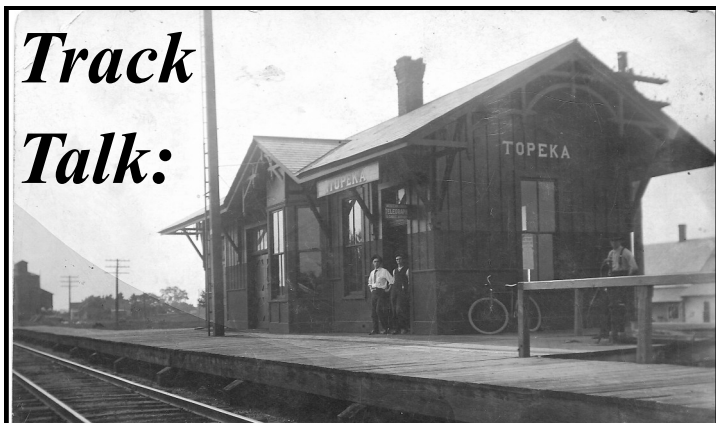


L to R: John Wainwright is on the left with his trombone. The man might be Harry H. Kauffman who was born in 1889.

## TAHS Quiz

1. Where was the first national high school band contest held and in what year?
2. Who sold John Wainwright band instruments?
3. Where did John Wainwright meet Jeanette Streeter?
4. In what year did the Wainwright Band & Orchestra Camp open?
5. Who moved the original Maple Grove Church building one mile north of Topeka?

# Track Talk:



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## Upcoming Events:



March 19, 2012

**Program: Joint Meeting With  
Shipshewana Historical Society**

**"Why & What About SAHS"**

Plus

**"The Pottawatomie Indians of Shipshewana"**

6:30 pm Farver School Museum

Shipshewana, Indiana

May 15, 2012

**Program: Dan Byler  
The Topeka Times Sentinel  
&  
The Hometown Treasures**

July 17, 2012

**Program: Annual Picnic  
Show & Tell**



Glen Roy's station on South Main in Topeka. Photo courtesy of his granddaughter, Bev Miller, who owns the Fast Lane on West Lake Street in Topeka.



Answers:  
1) Chicago, 1923  
2) C.C. Conn  
3) Oberlin College  
4) 1926  
5) Sycamore Literary Society

### Wainwright continued:

After his retirement, the camp's library was donated to Purdue University. Purdue purchased the camp in 1954, and continued to manage it until 1981. The property is currently owned by Mark and Myrna Peterman who were associated with the camp for many years.

Following retirement, Wainwright served three consecutive terms in the Indiana General Assembly where he was a member of the penal committee. With a truck load of instruments Jack headed for the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, where he taught and repaired instruments. His prison band would later perform concerts across the state; including one in LaGrange.

John (Jack) Wainwright died on January 5, 1960, and was laid to rest in the Greenwood Cemetery in LaGrange. The Wainwright legacy continues. It would be impossible to count the number of young people whose lives have been enriched because of his musical contributions. Several of his descendants still live in the area. His grandson John lives in LaGrange. John's sister, Jana Wainwright Reinking, who also inherited perfect pitch, is a music teacher here in Northeast Indiana.

HG

### **Topeka Area Historical Society**

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## *Hawpatch History Detectives Investigative Report*

### **100th Anniversary of Topeka's VFD**

This year we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Topeka Volunteer Fire Department. A special day of celebration and family fun is being planned for the fire fighters



and their families in June. The word is that the original 1929 Model A Ford fire truck will be in Topeka for the occasion. It may also be here for Topeka's annual 4th of July parade.

### **What Happened to Maple Grove's Money?**

There has long been a question about whatever happened to the money that Jonathan E. Yoder willed to the Maple Grove Mennonite Church. We now have the answer.

A Civil War veteran, Jonathan E. Yoder was a member

of the Maple Grove Mennonite Church. His wife, Rebecca belonged to Topeka Mennonite. (See July - September 2010 Newsletter for the full story on Jonathan E. Yoder) When he died in 1922, Yoder's will left \$25,000 to each church. Topeka Mennonite used their money to build a new building on East Lake Street in 1926. But, few seemed to know what happened to Maple Grove's money. That is until now.

While both churches have written histories, they read a bit different. Maple Grove was started first as an Amish Mennonite Church in 1854. Topeka Mennonite began in 1893, with the aid of John C. Mehl, pastor of Silver Street Mennonite east of Goshen. Both congregations experienced growth. By 1856, Maple Grove had built a frame building a mile south of Topeka and later built one of brick. The frame building was moved one mile north of Topeka by the Sycamore Literary Society. Topeka Mennonite purchased the old Eden Chapel building and moved it to the edge of town. It came to be known as "the church across the lake".

Division and a split took place at Maple Grove in 1924. The reason has been clouded by the passing of years. About 90 people withdrew from what was the Indiana-Michigan Conference maintaining possession of the building and the money. They officially joined the Central Conference in 1927. The remaining group found themselves locked out and were forced to meet in homes until the present Maple Grove building was built on south main in 1925.

For several years Topeka had three Mennonite churches; two with the Central Conference and one with Indiana-Michigan. The Central Conference churches merged in 1930. About 90 people moved to Topeka Mennonite bringing with them Jonathan Yoder's bequest as well as the proceeds from the sale of the brick building south of town.

*HG*

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