

**Marching Through History
with the Charlottesville Municipal Band**

October 14, 2018

Harry Lowe – First Conductor

When Sol Kaufman and his friend Ed Joachim seriously began to consider forming the Municipal Band in the late winter and spring of 1922, they doubtless discussed many important questions. Not the least of these was the question of who would lead the band? Neither of them knew much about bands, let alone how to organize and operate one—but they *did* know that finding the right person to fill that job was of primary importance. We don't know exactly how they went about finding that person, but in the end they offered the job to Harry Lowe, who turned out to be the perfect man for the job.



Harry Lowe was born on Friday, January 13, 1888 in London, England. We don't know anything about his parents or how and where he received his musical education and training. Harry immigrated to the United States in 1913, arriving in New York City on May 18th of that year. He was 25 years old. It's said that he worked for a time in New York, playing trumpet and cornet in the pit orchestras of various theaters on Broadway—and possibly on occasion even with the New York Philharmonic. He also served as a musician in a military band during World War I. Exactly how and why he wound up in Charlottesville also isn't known for certain, but one account indicates that he was hired to play in a small orchestra at the Jefferson Theater to provide music to accompany the silent films of the day. And there's a chance romance was involved, too, since he married a local girl, Matilda Eleanor Smith, in 1920. He also became a naturalized U.S. citizen on December 13, 1919 here in Charlottesville.

Mr. Lowe was involved in a number of bands and musical activities prior to assuming leadership of the Municipal Band. He played cornet in both the local fire company's drum and bugle corps and in the small Woodmen of the World band in

Crozet. He was a member of Christ Episcopal Church, where he directed and sang in their choir. In the years following the founding of the Municipal Band Mr. Lowe would also be involved in reviving the University of Virginia band and in organizing bands in both Orange, VA, and Lynchburg, VA. All of this was in addition to his “day job” as, among other things, a sales manager for the Charlottesville Gas Company selling gas appliances.

A previous *Marching through History* segment has already outlined Mr. Lowe’s pivotal role in teaching the first members of the Municipal Band how to play their instruments and how to march. He would, over the course of 18 years, continue to influence the Municipal Band in many ways, laying down the foundations of excellence and organizational pride that still permeate the Band to this day. He quickly introduced band members to many pieces of music that remain standards of our repertoire, including most of the familiar Sousa marches and our summer theme song, Edwin Franko Goldman’s “On the Mall” march. Likewise, Lowe introduced the Band to familiar overtures such as “Light Cavalry”, “Poet and Peasant” and “Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna”, as well as a host of other pieces of all kinds. In addition, he led the Band to many awards and trophies for excellence at various competitions and conventions throughout Virginia and the Southeast.



Harry Lowe resigned from the Band in the summer of 1940. Not long afterwards he moved with his wife and family to Blackstone, VA, where he worked as the Post Exchange Manager at Camp Lee. The Lowes had three children, two sons and a daughter. Tragedy struck the family twice, first with the death in 1941 of their younger son, Edward, who died at age 15 from an accidental gunshot wound while cleaning a rifle. Later, during World War II their oldest son, Harry, Jr., serving as a navigator and bombardier in a B-29 aircraft, was killed during a bombing raid over Japan. He was 21 years old. Their daughter, Alice Lowe Whitehorne, would live in various places in Virginia and North Carolina until her death in 2011 at age 90.

Harry Lowe himself lived until 1947, when at age 59 he died on July 27th from heart disease. At the time of his death Harry was visiting his father-in-law,

who was then living in Winsted, CT, and he is buried in the Forest View Cemetery there. Unfortunately, Harry Lowe rests in an unmarked grave near those of his in-laws.

Now for a happier story and final tribute to Harry Lowe. On October 9, 1924 the Band celebrated its second anniversary with a banquet at the Colonial Restaurant. Around fifty persons were in attendance and after a fine meal, various toasts and speeches, the Band's Chaplain, Henry Battle, presented a gift to Harry Lowe on behalf of the Band's members. It was a Besson Prototype silver cornet, "...the handsomest and best that money can buy" reported the *Daily Progress*. Battle went on to tell Mr. Lowe that the gift "...was not only a token of the appreciation of his work as a great and successful teacher of band music but was also a testimonial of personal affection" from the Band's members. In response, Harry "...lifted the beautiful instrument to his lips, and there fell the spell of the soft and melodious strains of [the song] 'The End of a Perfect Day' on men hushed by its eloquence into almost breathless stillness." The Municipal Band is fortunate to possess in its archives that very same Besson cornet given to Harry Lowe in 1924.

We thank and salute Harry Lowe today as well. All of us associated with the Municipal Band will never forget what Harry Lowe meant to this organization and to the musical heritage of our community.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Harry Lowe", written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.