

Royal Italian Band was pride of Dennison

Famed leader Dominic Greco shared his talents



Sabatino Fischio as a bugler with the Italian army band. He later played with Dominic Greco's Royal Italian Band at Dennison.

In their snappy black uniforms with gold trim and shako caps, they were the pride of Dennison.

The Royal Italian Band, under the leadership of Dominic Greco, gave concerts, marched in holiday parades and even played the dirges for prominent Italians' funerals.

The band was organized about 1919 and existed for about five or six years. Its musicians mainly came from Italians employed at the Dennison railroad shops with both the shops and the band victims of the infamous Pennsylvania Railroad strike of 1922.

At its peak the band had about 45 members. Only a few, including Jordan Besozzi of Uhrichsville and Sam Bonanno of Dennison, survive. Besozzi played clarinet and saxophone, while Bonanno handled a French horn.

Both were about 6th-graders when the band was formed, but the age range of members extended to some in their 40s or 50s, Besozzi recalls.

Besozzi is not sure how or why the band started, but Greco, who already was well-known as leader of the Dover Concert Band, came down as director.

"He was young and energetic," recalled Besozzi. "I remember how patient he was with us."

Greco would give lessons twice a week in the upstairs

of a hall on S. 3rd St. where the James Berni grocery is located now.

"A lot of us started from scratch at reading music," Besozzi went on. "We had no other training other than what we had gotten at school."

He added that Greco "impressed on us that every instrument has a place in the music and that beat and tone were so important."

The band played mostly marches and "some symphonic stuff," but very little of the era's popular music.

"I remember 'The Song of India' as one I especially liked," he said.

The band would march in parades on Memorial Day, Labor Day, July 4 and the equivalent of Independence Day for Italy.

Three or four times a year, the band would present concerts, usually in the unpaved street at 3rd and Grants and sometimes a block further east at 4th.

Band members paid for their own instruments and uniforms, quite a family sacrifice in those days. Besozzi said he was especially proud to dress up in his outfit.

"We had a lot of fun and met a lot of wonderful people," he went on.

However, the railroad strike which split the community did the same with the band.

"For a while there were two Italian bands," he recalled. "The other one brought in a director from New York, but after he found out about the rift, he left."

Both bands passed out of existence about 1925. However, Besozzi went to still another local group, the Amphion Band, until he graduated from high school.

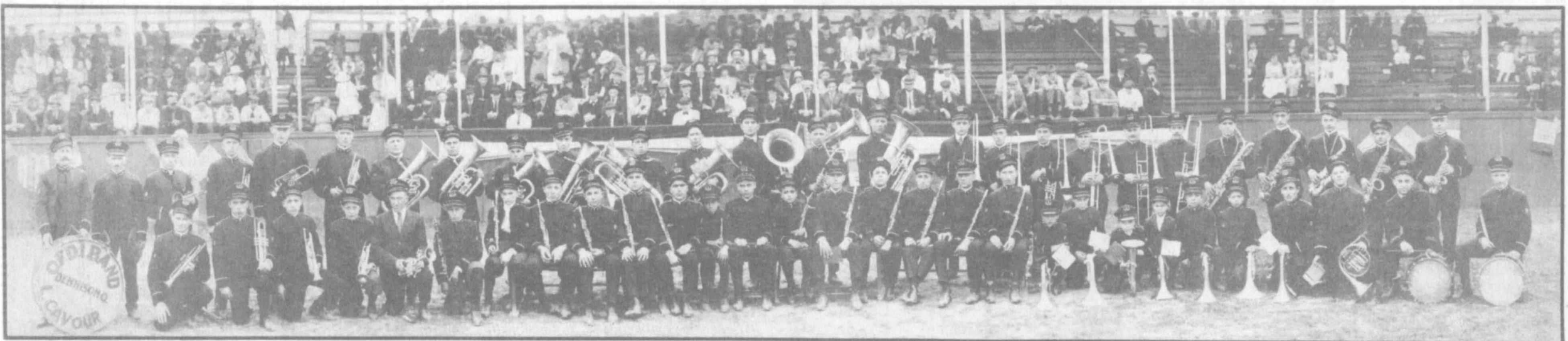
"I haven't played since," he lamented. "I don't even know what I did with the instruments."

He recalls the days with fondness, and even through the Dover group was regarded as "the varsity," Besozzi commented, "I always felt we had a pretty good band, too."

The photograph of the Dennison Italian Band is through the courtesy of Mary Jo Fischio of New Philadelphia, daughter of band member Sabatino "Sam" Fischio.

Fischio had a musical background in Italy where he was born just southeast of Rome. He was a bugler in the Italian Army in 1913. His daughter has papers concerning that part of his life, but cannot supply any details. He took music lessons from Greco.

He married Angela Marchione in Italy, and eight of their nine children were born in the United States. In addition to Mary Jo, Pat, Frank and Jim Fischio live in New Philadelphia.



Dominic Greco's Royal Italian Band was the pride of Dennison. It's members in this photo could not be identified.