

The Greater Atlanta Music Festival of 1939-1950: A Showcase of Patriotism and Democracy

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Marching band festivals are important and exciting events for high school band programs. Since no equivalent of a Georgia Music Educator Association (GMEA) marching band Large Group Performance Evaluation (LGPE) exists, many directors utilize marching band festival ratings as a barometer of the success of their programs and as a motivational tool for students. The marching band festival/competition movement began in the late 1960s and early 1970s; yet, often overlooked is the popular Greater Atlanta Music Festival (GAMF), Georgia's first large-scale marching festival, held at Georgia Tech's Grant Field from 1939 through 1950. This annual event filled Grant Field each year and produced a great amount of publicity for the participating bands; however, unlike marching band festivals that debuted two decades later, the annual GAMF events were organized strictly as patriotic extravaganzas.

1939 GAMF

In the early spring of 1939, the GMEA 5th District Instrumental Music Festival included the usual large ensemble and related solos and small ensembles; however, in a major departure from established precedent, a new Saturday night marching festival, sponsored by *The Atlanta Constitution*, was added as a GMEA event. The newspaper's first announcement of the GAMF occurred as a page one news article on Tuesday, January 24, 1939. In addition to the normal logistical information, the article provided rules for the April 21 Band Contest as articulated by Ben L. Sisk, band director at Commercial High School and chairman of GMEA's 5th District band director's committee, who was engaged as the GAMF coordinator.

The new GAMF represented a huge public relations benefit for the cause of music education in the Atlanta area. Writing in his weekly message in *The Atlanta Constitution*, Willis A. Sutton, City of Atlanta Schools Superintendent, exclaimed, "the purpose of this great concert is to stimulate the study

of music and the harmonious co-operative working together that is required in order to produce a good band.”¹ In a follow-up article, Clark Howell, editor and publisher of *The Atlanta Constitution*, announced that the newspaper was sponsoring the marching festival at Georgia Tech’s Grant Field in an effort to “stimulate interest in high school music and activities.”²

To help advertise the event, and to generate exposure for the bands, *The Atlanta Constitution* wrote long articles about, and attached photos of, each participating band in successive days leading up to the GAMF. Junior division bands included: Joe E. Brown Junior High (Jimmy Rutan); Murphy Junior High (Evelyn Sisk); O’Keefe Junior High (Owen Seitz); Richardson High (Walter Sheets); Commercial High (Ben S. Sisk); Chamblee High and Ella W. Smillie Elementary (Dr. R. C. Edwards at both). Senior division bands included: Tech High (N. R. Beacham); Russell High (Roy Drukenmiller); North Fulton High (W. T. Jackson); Georgia Military Academy (G. M. A., Capt. John T. Lee); Fulton High School (Charles E. Taylor); and Boys’ High School (R. J. Martin).



GRAHAM T. OVERGARD,
Band Contest Judge

To assist with the management of the night marching festival, *The Atlanta Constitution* enlisted over 500 school patrol students to work as ushers, while PTA groups joined in publicity efforts.³ Mr. Graham T. Overgard, Director of Bands at Wayne University in Detroit, Michigan, was hired to serve as an adjudicator and guest conductor of the massed band performance.⁴ After observing each band enter and parade on the field, Overgard selected Boys’ High as winners in the senior band category with a I rating [I = Superior; II = Excellent; III = Good]. The Russell High Band finished second with a II rating. Other senior high

1 Willis A. Sutton, “Superintendent’s Message,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 16, 1939, p. 7B.

2 Clark Howell, ed., “Thirteen Bands Will Participate in Festival Here,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 2, 1939, p. 13A.

3 _____, “P.T.A. Urged to Back Band Festival,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 14, 1939, p. 3.

4 _____, “Michigan Band Director Will Judge Contest Here,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 11, 1939, p. 1.

division ratings were: G. M. A., II; Tech High, III; North Fulton High, III; and Fulton High Band, III.

Henry F. Reid, Jr., drum major of the University of Alabama Band, adjudicated the drum majors and drum majorettes. Russell Ellis of Boys' High was selected the most outstanding male; Mary Helen Hodges of Russell High won in the female category. In his recap of the GAMF activities and competition, Lamar Q. Ball wrote, "The never-falling Mary Helen Hodges, of Russell High School, twirled a baton with an easy facility that won her first place among the talented young majorettes, in a competition that was baffling."⁵

The GAMF closed with Overgard conducting the massed band in a performance of *Semper Fidelis* (Sousa) and *War March of the Tartars* (Karl King). The grand finale included an impressive fireworks display and the singing of the *Star-Spangled Banner* by a 1,000-voice chorus.⁶ The inaugural *Atlanta Constitution*-sponsored GAMF was an overwhelming success for the organizers, music participants and audience of over 25,000 in attendance at Grant Field.

1940 GAMF

The 1939 GAMF occurred as a program organized by the GMEA 5th District Band Division; but, because of the size and complexity of the GAMF, *The Atlanta Constitution* management decided that the 1940 GAMF and all future presentations would be stand-alone, not GMEA, events. As a result, the 1940 GAMF was held in late spring on Saturday, May 4 at Grant Field and corresponded with the conclusion of National Youth Week. The GAMF was organized to be the largest ever such outdoor music event in the Southeast. Warren T. Jackson, band director at North Fulton High School and chief organizer of the GAMF, hired Mr. Graham T. Overgard again to serve as an adjudicator and guest conductor of the massed band. As was the case in 1939, participating bands received widespread publicity through numerous *The Atlanta Constitution* articles and individual band features during the month of April. The publicity usually included a band photo, a detailed roster of the band members, and

⁵ Lamar Q. Ball, "Musicians Display Form of Veterans," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 22, 1939, p. 1.
⁶ _____. "Patriotic Fireworks Display Will Climax Band Festival," *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 20, 1939, p. 1.

general information concerning the band. Band performances included those from Bass Junior High (A. H. Richardson); Boys' High (R. T. Martin); Joe Brown Junior High (Jimmy Rutan); Chamblee High (Dr. R. J. Edwards); Commercial High (Ben Logan Sisk); Fulton High (Charles E. Taylor) combined



1940 GAMF Organizers: first row, left to right, Hoyt Griffin and Roy Drukenmiller, of Russell High, and Owen Seitz, of O'Keefe Junior High; second row, left to right, Captain John Lee, of G. M. A., Ben Logan Sisk, of Commercial High; and G. J. Giesler, of North Fulton High; and back row, left to right, E. D. Allain, of Decatur Boys' High, C. E. Taylor, of Fulton High, and Warren T. Jackson, of North Fulton High.

with West Fulton High; North Fulton High (W. T. Jackson and G. J. Geisler); Georgia Military Academy (G. M. A.; Capt. John Lee); Murphy Junior High (Evelyn Sisk); O'Keefe Junior High (Owen Seitz); Russell High (Roy Drukenmiller); Tech High (R. K.

Hamilton); West End Elementary (Roy Lee); Tucker High (Rudy Westbrook); Smillie Elementary; and, Decatur Boys' High (E. D. Allain).

Several changes and additions made for the 1940 GAMF produced a more generic music festival. Marching band performances were no longer adjudicated on a competition basis, but rather with an exhibition format; however, the male and female drum major competition contest remained. Also, the GAMF included the addition of a group of over 600 elementary school folk dancers and a massed chorus of over 3,000, a large percentage of whom had started rehearsals organized by Anne Grace O'Callaghan at Russell High as part of the GMEA 5th District Music Festival held earlier in March. Choral selections included *Sweet and Low* (Barnaby) and *God of Our Fathers* (Warren).

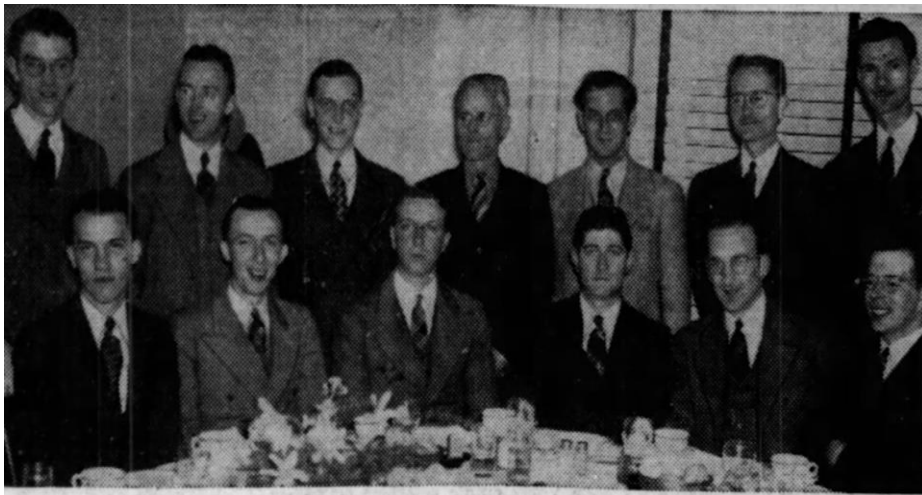
Henry Reid from the University of Alabama Band returned again in 1940 to adjudicate the male and female drum majors. The difficult task he faced was described in *The Atlanta Constitution*:

“...folks...sat spell-bound while high-stepping drum majors and higher stepping drum majorettes led prancing bands up and down and back again in whirling convolutions that dazzled the eye. They sat goggle-eyed while these same strutting bandleaders twirled the silver sticks that are the badge of their high calling in a contest the like of which has never been seen here.

Henry Reid called a halt and handed the 'winners' palms to Miss Johnnie Pair of Russell High, and high-stepping Joe Lee of G. M. A. They deserved to win. They did everything with the silvery baton but tie it in a knot and eat it like a pretzel.”⁷

A 1,000-piece massed band, comprised of the participating groups, concluded the festival with a performance of *God Bless America* (Irving Berlin). An audience of over 30,000 attended the event at Georgia Tech's Grant Field. W. A. Alexander, Tech's football coach who was in attendance, commented that the event “was one of the biggest and best behaved crowds we've ever had in Grant Field.”⁸

1941 GAMF



1941 GAMF Organizers, seated L-R: E. D. Allain, J. W. Wiggins, H. L. Haynie, Warren Jackson, Charles Bradley, R. Owen Seitz; Standing L-R: J. S. Rutan, H. T. Griffin, Ben Sisk, Capt. John Lee, Dr. R. C. Edwards, Arlie Richardson, and Fred Stoughton.

The first and second annual GAMFs were huge successes; however, the 1941 version held again at Georgia Tech's Grant Field on Friday night, May 16 promised to be even bigger. Boy Scouts troops

made their first on-field appearance as part of the 1941 GAMF, as did ROTC marching units from North Fulton High, Boys' High, Tech High,

G. M. A. and Russell High.⁹ More bands, including the Spalding County High School Band from as far

⁷ Harold Martin, “G.M.A., Russell High Winners in Band Contest,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 5, 1940, p. 1.

⁸ Lee Fuhrman, “Festival Praise Rewards Toil of Many Hands,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 5, 1940, p. 16.

⁹ Frank Drake, “Festival Crowd to See Fulton's Crack ROTC,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1941,

away as Griffin, Georgia, were added to the parade line-up. Folk dancing on the field and an audience participation special effect - the lighting of lanterns with the stadium lights off - were held over from the previous year. Numerous bands and units enjoyed valuable publicity through daily *The Atlanta Constitution* features in the days leading up to the GAMF. Participating groups included the following: Bass Junior High (Arlie H. Richardson); Joe Brown Junior High (J. S. Rutan); Boys' High (R. J. Martin); Commercial High (Ben L. Sisk); Decatur Boys' High (Eldon D. Allain); Fulton High (E. H. Moldenhauer); G. M. A. (Capt. John T. Lee); Murphy Junior High (Evelyn Sisk); North Fulton High (Warren T. Jackson); O'Keefe Junior High (Owen Seitz); Richardson High (Capt. John T. Lee); Russell High (Roy Drukenmiller); Smillie Elementary (Charles Bradley); Hoke Smith Junior High (Lowery Haynie); Tech High (R. K. Hamilton); West Fulton High (J. W. Wiggins); Spalding County High (Charles White); and West End Elementary (Fred Stoughton).



Winning Drum Majors – Left to right are Laura Woodall, Commercial High, first place girls' division; Joe Lee, Georgia Military Academy, first place boys' division; Mildred Carroll, Russell High, second place; Frank Ward, Boys' High, second place; and John J. Heney, adjudicator.

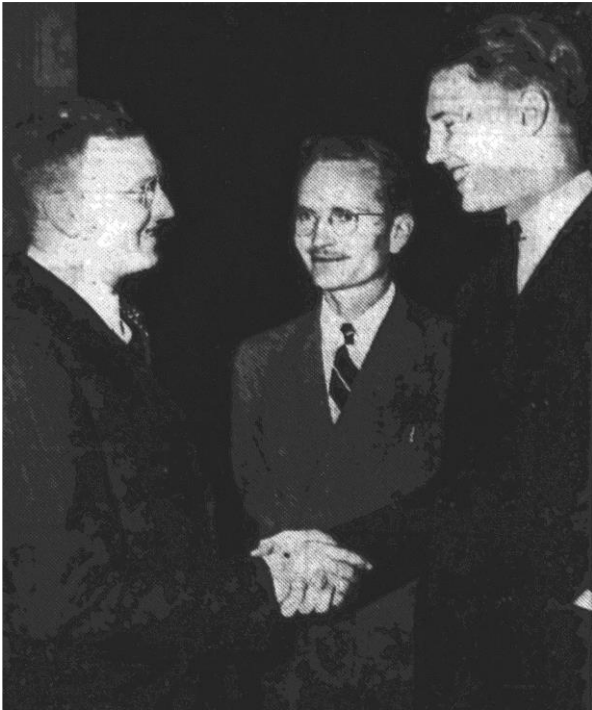
The guest conductor for the 1941 Massed Festival Band was John J. Heney, the Stetson University (Florida) Band Director and a former member of the Sousa Band. Under his baton, over 1,000 massed band members performed *There's Something About a Soldier*, *Washington Post March*, and *Stars and Stripes Forever*, the last of which was accompanied by

fireworks.

Grant Field's maximum capacity of 30,000 was reached before the start of the GAMF and

thousands were turned away, which prompted a page one *The Atlanta Constitution* apology the next day.¹⁰ Winners of the drum major competition were Laura Woodall, of Commercial High, and Mildred Carroll, of Russell High in the female division, and Joe Lee, of G. M. A., as well as Frank Ward, of Boys' High, in the male division. Marching on the field that night was C. Warren Little, a flute player in Evelyn Sisk's Murphy Junior High Band, just back from the National Music Festival in Richmond, Virginia, where he earned the only I-plus rating in the entire flute division.¹¹ Little went on to become internationally known in his long-time role as first flute with the Atlanta Symphony.

1942 GAMF



Yoder Arrives in Atlanta – from left to right, Paul Yoder, Arlie H. Richardson, Festival Chair, and Lee Rogers, *Atlanta Constitution* City Editor

Since its inception in 1939, the GAMF generally reflected a sense of patriotic flair and pageantry. Events of the previous years were always well attended; but, with America's entry into World War II just six months earlier, the 4th Annual GAMF at Grant Field drew a record number of over 45,000 spectators. Dorothy Lamour, famed Hollywood actress, who was in Atlanta to help with the Georgia War Savings Bond pledge campaign, was featured on the 1942 GAMF program and utilized her appearance to help sell bonds.

In addition to the normal GAMF line-up of activities and performances, the audience saw a 100-member flag corps, the first such group ever organized in Georgia. Virginia Page Nutt, nationally noted instructor from Chicago, trained the unit. Her husband, H. E. Nutt, head of Chicago's Vandercook

¹⁰ Clark Howell, ed., "The Constitution Apologizes," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 17, 1941, p. 1.

¹¹ Frank Drake, "Warren Little Wins High Rating at Richmond," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 13, 1941, p. 8.

School of Music, was originally engaged to be the GAMF guest adjudicator and conductor; however, Paul Yoder, the famed band director and arranger also from Chicago, ultimately served in that capacity.

Nineteen bands participated in the event and entered the field in the following order: Bass Junior High (Arlie Richardson); Joe Brown Junior High (J. S. Rutan); Boys' High (R. J. Martin); Chamblee High (Dr. R. C. Edwards); Canton High (William O. Sneed); Hoke Smith Junior High (Lowrey Haynie); Commercial High (Ben Logan Sisk); Murphy Junior High (F. M. Boyd); North Fulton High (Robert Lowrance); Decatur Boys' High (E. D. Allain); Richardson High (Capt. John T. Lee); G. M. A. (Capt. John T. Lee); Smillie/Clark Howell/Spring Street combined Elementary (Charles Bradley); Spalding County High (Charles White); Russell High (Hoyt Griffin); West End Elementary School (Roy M. Lee); West Fulton High (J. W. Wiggins); and, Tech High (Robert K. Hamilton). Each band performed a short individual field presentation and finished with a massed band performance directed by Paul Yoder. The massed band musical selections included: *El Capitan March* (Sousa), *Any Bonds Today* (Irving Berlin/arr. Yoder), and the *Star-Spangled Banner*. The final 30 minutes of the show, including the massed band selections and Dorothy Lamour's appearance, were broadcast live over numerous radio stations in Georgia and Florida. Winners of the Drum Major competition were Frank Ward, Boys' High, and Buddy Head, G. M. A.; Drum Majorette winners were Laura Woodall, Commercial High, and Ruth Lewis, Russell High.

Recapping the events in the Sunday edition of *The Atlanta Constitution*, Paul Warwick wrote:

“Patriotism was in the air – and in the hearts and minds of all – last night at the spectacular fourth annual Greater Atlanta Music Festival. An exuberant multitude – 45,000 strong – cheered and applauded the whole stupendous show, vast pageantry so well meshed and well oiled that its very harmony was in itself a thing of beauty.”¹²

1943-1947 GAMF

From May 1939 through May 1942, the *Atlanta Constitution*-sponsored GAMFs were popular

¹²Paul Warwick, “Patriotism in Air As Stupendous Show Moves in Harmony,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 10, 1942, p. 2B.

showcases that garnered valuable publicity for numerous Atlanta-area bands; however, the GAMF came to an end at the height of the war years due to lack of resources, security concerns and government imposed large group meeting prohibitions [In an effort to conserve resources, Joseph B. Eastman, U. S. Defense Transportation Director, issued a directive in June 1942 urging the postponement of all state and county fairs, along with non-essential conventions, meetings, and group tours].¹³ Additionally, Mr. Frank Drake, the city reporter who facilitated *The Atlanta Constitution's* GAMF sponsorship over the years, was drafted into military duty in early 1943 and was no longer available to lead the GAMF effort.

While the GAMF event dissolved, bands remained committed to their traditional roles providing entertainment at football games, in-school ceremonies, ROTC inspections, weekly chapel assembly musical interludes, monthly evening PTA programs, and regular annual evening concerts. Indeed, with the outbreak of World War II, the Atlanta area bands actually broadened their missions to include fostering support for, and promoting interest in, causes designed to win the war. For example, high school bands promoted patriotism and aided Victory events through frequent performances at War Bond drives, Red Cross parade appearances and other patriotic gatherings. With an end of the war, an attempt was made to resume the GAMF in the spring of 1947, but the festival was postponed because of major renovations to the Georgia Tech field.

1948 GAMF

The GAMF was revived and presented on May 15, 1948 with radio station WCON serving as co-sponsor, along with the traditional sponsor, *The Atlanta Constitution*. WCON's "Brother Bill" Hickok offered program preliminaries by singing and playing records, while Bob Jenkins (director, O'Keefe High) performed selections on the marimba accompanied by Mrs. Ben Sisk. A Marine Corps Color Guard, along with over 1,300 elementary school students waving flags, stood on the field as Dr.

¹³ Clark Howell, ed., "ODT Urges that all Fairs Be Deferred," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 19, 1942, p. 25.

Ira Jarrell, superintendent of the City of Atlanta Schools, offered the pledge of allegiance to the flag. Next, the Roosevelt High Band and a 100-member female dance drill team from Fulton High School concluded the program preliminaries with a field performance of synchronized moves and dances to boogie woogie music.



Russell High Majorettes – from left to right, Patsy Phillips, Jerry Long, Joyce Wing, and Anna Malone

Parade Marshall Ben Sisk (director, Roosevelt High) directed 11 bands separately onto the field for exhibition in the following order: West End Elementary (Roy M. Lee), Fulton High (Don Robinson), Russell High (Robert B. Waggoner), O'Keefe High (Bob Jenkins), Hoke Smith High (George Lazanas), Murphy High (J. S. Rutan), Decatur High (Cottie Clark), G. M. A. (Capt. Paul Koenig), Bass High (H. Lowrey Haynie), Joe E. Brown High (Robert D. Chenoweth), and Henry Grady High (R. Owen Seitz). Afterward, guest conductor Col. Carlton K. Butler, director of the University of Alabama Band, led 35,000 audience

members in a group singing of *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*, *Home on the Range*, and *America*.

Next, the Hollywood trio of Mr. and Mrs. Pat O'Brian and Jane Wyatt, in town to visit children's hospitals, were introduced and offered a few words to the audience. Then, the audience participated again in a special effect by lighting matches in a blacked-out stadium. Following that, winners were named from the baton-twirling contest involving about 100 majorettes. First place went to Peggy Heath of O'Keefe High; Loraine Alden, also of O'Keefe High, won second; Carolyn Hammond, of Murphy High, placed third. The GAMF ended with Col. Butler directing the massed band in three selections, the final of which was the *Star-Spangled Banner*.

1949 GAMF

The 1949 edition of the GAMF was held on Saturday, May 14, with Ben Sisk and Owen Seitz as organizers of the band portion. The popularity and quality of the GAMF had grown over the years, prompting a *The Atlanta Constitution* writer to state, “The GAMF in past years has been highly successful and popular with Atlantans and out-of-towners and is a ‘must’ on everyone’s entertainment calendar.”¹⁴ The 1949 edition was no different; a capacity crowd filled the stands at Grant Field and watched as the bands performed in exhibition in the following order: West End Elementary (Roy M. Lee), Fulton High (Don Robinson), Hoke Smith High (James Sedlack), Roosevelt High (Ben Sisk), Murphy High (J. S. Rutan), O’Keefe High (Robert Jenkins), Grady High (Owen Seitz), Decatur High (Cottie Clark), Bass High (Lowery Haynie), G. M. A. (Capt. Paul Koenig), Russell High (Harold Alenius), and Hapeville High (Merwin T. Crisman).



Ben L. Sisk, Program Director of the 1949 GAMF and Director of the Roosevelt High School Band with Band Captain Clayton Pitman, left, and Alternate Band Captain Bobby Bullard.

The festival highlight involved a square dance routine by numerous square dance clubs in the Atlanta area. Ray Smith, a famous “caller” from Dallas, Texas, led the square dance. Approximately 1,800 area students representing 35 City of Atlanta elementary schools, dressed in red, white, or blue, were also involved in the program by forming a

large, human flag. Col. Carlton K. Butler, adjudicator and director of the massed band the year before,

returned again in 1949 to adjudicate and led the massed band and audience in a community sing.

Massed band selections included: *Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean*; *My Country ‘Tis of Thee*; *Dixie*; and *God Bless America*.

¹⁴ Ed., “Select Best Drum Majorette,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 1, 1949, p. C-1.

Drum Majorette competition winners were: Peggy Heath, of O'Keefe High; Charlotte Bailey, of O'Keefe High; and, Lorene Mauldin of Campbell High. Graham Jackson, a popular Atlanta-based African-American organist of national renown, provided music prior to the start of the GAMF. Following the event, *The Atlanta Constitution's* Celestine Sibley offered favorable comments in a review entitled, *Music Festival Delights 35,000 With Its Variety*.¹⁵

1950 GAMF

The 7th Annual GAMF was held on Saturday, May 13. In a major departure from previous years when the event was held at Georgia Tech's Grant Field, GAMF organizers sought to better accommodate the overflow crowds by producing the event in three separate locations: Grady and Cheney Stadiums for the white students, and Herndon Stadium for the African-American students, who prior to this time were not invited to participate because of racial segregation.



1950 GAMF Adjudicators – from left to right, Robert M. Barr, John T. Lee, and George D. Adams.

Frances Wallace provided preliminary music at Grady Stadium, while Bob Barr of Jordan High School in Columbus, Georgia adjudicated the groups and organized the following into a massed band: West Fulton High (George Enloe), O'Keefe High, Murphy High (James Rutan), Bass High Lowrey Haynie), Grady High (H. Owen Seitz) and G. M. A. (Paul Koenig). Wannie Heston performed

incidental music played prior to the program at Cheney Stadium; Capt. John T. Lee of Columbus High in Columbus, Georgia handled the adjudication and massed band duties involving the following bands: West End Elementary (Roy M. Lee), Fulton High, Russell High (Harold Alenuis), College Park High (Harold Scott), Hapeville High (M. T. Crisman), Roosevelt High (Ben Sisk), Smith High (James

¹⁵ Celestine Sibley, "Music Festival Delights 35,000 With Its Variety," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 15, 1949, p. 1.

Sedlack), and Brown High (E. D. Allain). Activities at Herndon Stadium began with Graham Jackson's incidental music. George D. Adams, Director of Band Activities at Fort Valley State College, Fort Valley, Georgia, handled the adjudication and massed band duties for the following bands: B. T. Washington High (Earl A. Starling), Howard High (Kenneth Days), and Ballard-Hudson High (Eddie Weston) of Macon.

A total of over 40,000 spectators attended the GAMF and showed their overwhelming approval. A review in *The Atlanta Constitution* the next day stated: "It was a wonderful, glorious occasion and the great heart of Atlanta showed its enthusiasm in deafening applause as the events were run off."¹⁶

In a letter to the editor of *The Atlanta Constitution*, Bazoline E. Usher, Supervisor of Atlanta Colored Schools, wrote:

*"In behalf of the teachers, pupils and parents in the Negro schools of the city, I wish to express very great appreciation for including our children in the Seventh Great Atlanta Music Festival, and for the courtesies shown us through publicity and personal contacts with your employees. Every one had a lifetime thrill and they all want to write a letter of thanks. I am sure you will be receiving many letters of appreciation, but the principals of our schools have asked that a letter be sent from this office expressing thanks 'to all of you from all of us.'"*¹⁷

In an end-of-year report for the Atlanta Public Schools Board of Education, H. J. Landers, Chairman for the Board's Athletics, Physical Education and Military Committee, reported the GAMF "is becoming the 'high point' in the elementary rhythmic program...and created a needed incentive" for the 4,500 (Atlanta Public Schools) elementary and high school students who participated.¹⁸ Frank Drake, *The Atlanta Constitution* Promotions Manager who organized each GAMF since its inception, was pleased with the results of the most recent GAMF, claiming: "Spectators at all three stadiums were touched and thrilled...Seven years of festivals, I've enjoyed every one. And pretty soon we'll start

¹⁶ Ed. "40,000 Thrill to Music at Gay Festival," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 14, 1950, p. 1.

¹⁷ Bazoline E. Usher, "Letter to the Editor," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1950. P. 20.

¹⁸ Ed., H. J. Landers, quoted in: "School Physical Training Programs to Expand," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 14, 1950, p. 25.

groundwork for the eighth.”¹⁹

Even though Frank Drake spoke of planning for the future 1951 GAMF, his words concerning the recently completed GAMF referred to what ultimately would be the last of *The Atlanta Constitution*-sponsored music festivals. Having attracted over 40,000 spectators and over 6,000 students, the 1950 GAMF was a huge success based on any evaluation metric; yet, *The Atlanta Constitution* declined to sponsor any future GAMF events.

The obvious question, then is, why? Why did the management of *The Atlanta Constitution* discontinue sponsoring a popular annual attraction that was a showcase venue for thousands of students and reflected positively on the newspaper? Lack of interest certainly was not an issue, nor apparently was there any waning of school administrative support. Research did not reveal answers to *The Atlanta Constitution's* abrupt sponsorship cancellation; therefore, citing other reasons would be speculation at this point.

Post-GAMF

While the name of the GAMF implied participation from a large geographic area in and around metropolitan Atlanta, the festival was mostly an Atlanta Public Schools event, with some involvement from Fulton County Schools. This reality, along with the realization of the educational benefit of the festival, convinced Atlanta Public Schools officials to continue the festival in 1951, but as an Atlanta Schools affair only. This Atlanta Schools Festival was held on Saturday, May 19, and incorporated the traditional band exhibitions, large group dancing and the three-stadium format utilized in 1950 (Grady and Cheney for white schools; Herndon for African-American schools). Atlanta Public Schools returned to Georgia Tech's Grant Field for a final festival on Saturday, May 3, 1952. Thirteen Atlanta high schools and 60 elementary schools participated in the event, thus ending a 13-year marching band showcase that went by the name Greater Atlanta Music Festival.

¹⁹ Ed., “Manager Happy: Smiles At Success of Festival,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 15, 1950, p. 2.

Legacy

Music is a manifestation of its time and place and serves as a mirror reflecting the culture in which it was created. Quite often we can examine the music of a particular era to understand a region's historical, social, political, and even religious environment.

The Greater Atlanta Music Festival was a product of its time and place in Atlanta immediately before, during and after World War II and offers a glimpse into the climate in which the event took place. While not advertised as an overtly patriotic affair, the GAMF nonetheless reflected the patriotic fervor that existed in Atlanta and across the nation at the time. From the flag displays, the music repertoire, to even the choice of military band uniforms, patriotism and pride in the armed forces filled the air at a typical GAMF. Celestine Sibley, commenting in *The Atlanta Constitution* concerning the 1950 GAMF, summed up this sentiment perfectly with the headline, "Spirit of America Shines Clearly In Spectacle of Music Festival."²⁰

No study of the GAMF would be complete without acknowledging a sad legacy of the event, namely the societal segregation that was commonplace at the time. No African-American bands were admitted to the GAMF until 1950, the last year of the event. Even then the GAMF was not fully integrated, for the African-American high school bands were relegated to a separate stadium in a historically African-American section of Atlanta.

In conclusion, several themes are remarkable and appear consistently throughout the years chronicled here. First, *The Atlanta Constitution*-sponsored GAMFs were popular showcases that garnered valuable publicity and increased prestige for numerous Atlanta-area bands. Secondly, the festival provided self-improvement opportunities and intrinsic rewards for the students. For example, Mr. Paul West, superintendent of Fulton County Schools and a strong supporter of the GAMF, recognized the importance and popularity of the GAMF, stating:

²⁰ Celestine Sibley, "Spirit of America Shines Clearly In Spectacle of Music Festival," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 12, 1950, 1.

“The appeal of music is one of the greatest contributing factors to the culture of our civilization. This wholesome type of entertainment has a very stimulating effect upon our youth and adults in providing them worthwhile activity.”²¹

William A. Sutton, City of Atlanta Schools Superintendent, spoke of inculcating unity when he stated that the GAMF “stimulated the harmonious co-operative working together that is required to produce a good band.”²² The collaborative effort expressed in the GAMF massed band finale performances helped students experience a sense of unity among bands across Atlanta.

Lastly, the GAMF offered a venue for bands to foster patriotism and a sense of democracy during a period of time when patriotism and popularity of the military ran high. Patriotic band performances at events such as the GAMF and civic celebrations brought much value to the lives of the band members and the community, making their respective schools and the metro Atlanta area better places to live during a dark and difficult time.

Dr. William E. Fry, Russell High Band '71, retired as a band and orchestra director in 2011 after 36 years of teaching. Currently, he holds a part-time music position at Point University in West Point, GA and is the artistic director of the Columbus (GA) Community Orchestra.

²¹ Ed. “May 14 Music Festival Gets West Salute,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 14, 1949, p. 34.

²² Willis A. Sutton, “Superintendent’s Message,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 16, 1939, p. 7B.