

INDULGE

Beck's Band: Philadelphia Brigade Band is named official Civil War Brass Band of Gloucester County

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Beck's Band: Philadelphia Brigade Band member Bruce Lutz performing at Fort Delaware.

When most history buffs hear the word “re-enactor,” they automatically think of men dressed as soldiers reliving an historic battle of the Revolutionary or Civil wars.

But there is more to the country’s war history than just fighting.

The Beck’s Band: Philadelphia Brigade Band is a Civil War-era, brass band with nearly 30 members who appear in authentic uniforms and play both period and reproduction instruments.

The group performs the same military and social music that was played to entertain the troops, console loved ones who lost family members or welcome home weary soldiers during the Civil War.

The band was recently granted the status of the Official Civil War Performing Ensemble of Gloucester County by the county freeholders, according Band Conductor Robert Philbin of Deptford.

Philbin said he and several other members of the band approached the freeholder board about considering them as the official Civil War band of the county.

“They agreed,” Philbin said. “We are the only Civil War brass band in Gloucester County, and even in New Jersey. We’re hoping to be named the official band of the state.”

With 28 members playing instruments such as piccolo, cornet, alto and tenor horn, baritone, tuba and percussion, the mission of the band is to present the music of the early Civil War to the people.

“The music from the era hasn’t been heard for over 100 years,” Philbin said. “We still hear the top songs like ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic,’ but there is so much more music. We’re trying to bring that back.”



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The original Beck's Band.

Philbin said the band plays sheet music written by or for the original Beck's Band, and other pieces of music from the era collected from the Philadelphia Free Public Library, Johns Hopkins University's collection, the Duke University library and a library in New Hampshire.

According to Philbin, the Beck's Philadelphia Band was first formed by eight Beck brothers, along with three of their nephews, relatives and friends in 1830. Their first public performance was with the Hope Hose Company of volunteer firemen on 2nd and Pine

where they volunteered.

The band played for union balls, charity organizations, operas and at the first Republican Convention until the onset of the Civil War, by which time it was known as the Philadelphia Beck Band, No. 1.

In 1861, three Beck brothers, one nephew and 21 other band members entered the 20th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment and built forts around Washington, D. C. for three months.

The musicians then re-enlisted as the 28th PA Regiment Band, and from August 1861 to September 1862, the band supported, entertained and carried out soldiering duties on the bluffs overlooking Harper's Ferry and Sandy Hook, Maryland.

Due to a lack of federal funds, regimental bands were dismissed in July 1862, making way for brigade bands.



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Beck's Band: Philadelphia Brigade Band in uniform at Steamtown in Scranton, Pa.

So, the 28th PA Regiment Band returned to Philadelphia where the Beck brothers enlisted once again and spent six months as the 2nd Brigade (Philadelphia Brigade), 2nd Division, 2nd Corps Band.

The Beck Band took part in welcoming and memorial parades in the Philadelphia area, and began devoting all of its time and music to remembering the fallen and entertaining the veterans of that war.

The original Beck brothers played their final concert together at the 1876 Philadelphia International Centennial festivities in Fairmont Park.

Several of the original Beck members continued to play with the band until the last one, A. Walter Beck, died in 1921.

The Beck's Band was discontinued after his death, and was re-established 21 years ago.

Philbin said he has also participated in battle re-enactments and described playing the music of the period as, "much less loud."

"And it connects on more levels then re-enacting does with a rifle," he said. "There's a lot of emotion. The music is not just marches, but waltzes and polkas; there was a lot of music lost that we are trying to bring back."

Veteran tuba player Jim Ludlum of Alloway Township joined the band in 2010 and was switched to a Civil War-era instrument — the Eb Bass Saxhorn.

Ludlum explained the instrument is a forerunner of the modern day tuba and an actual horn from the Civil War Era.

"Keeping in tune with the band is much more difficult with the these older horns," Ludlum said. "During the Civil War era, the bands actually purchased full sets of instruments from the same manufacturer, so they would have the same tone and relatively close intonation."



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Tintype photo of Jim and Marie Ludlum in Civil War garb at a re-enactment in Neshaminy, Pa.

Ludlum, who is the Director of Bands at the Woodstown-Pilesgrove School District, a member of the Federal City Brass Band out of Baltimore and a member of the Recycled Brass: Tuba Quartet, said the music he plays with the Beck's Band is very different from the music he has played in the past.

"Much of this music is not performed in the modern-band era, and has been essentially lost to antiquity," Ludlum said. "It's great to get these old tunes dusted off and played for the public, both for entertainment and educational purposes."

Philbin said The Beck's Band: Philadelphia Brigade Band is always looking for like-minded musicians to join the ranks.

"We're a unique band," he said. "We're not just a community band. We play the kind of music you won't find anywhere else, that requires you to be quite versatile on your instrument."

Ludlum said one of the best parts of participating with the Beck's Band: Philadelphia Brigade Band is the feeling of pride in "being able to keep the spirit alive of what these men did so long ago in service to our country."

"I really enjoy playing with the people in the band, number one," he said. "They are a great group of musicians and genuinely good people. Secondly, I like that it has opened up a hobby that both my wife, Marie, and I can enjoy together. She attends our performances in period attire and we now both volunteer as interpreters at Fort Delaware as Captain Jon Jay Young as and his wife Jalice."

The band will perform at Independence Mall in Philadelphia on Sept. 8 and in Gettysburg in November.

Philbin said anyone interested in joining the band is welcomed to attend a rehearsal at the Glassboro Presbyterian Church at Yale and University boulevards in Glassboro at 7:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month.

Contact Philbin via email at cwbandbuff@aol.com.

For more information about the band, visit at www.becksband.com or on [Facebook](#).

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