

Preston Scout House Band

by Roy Wilson (president, board of directors, Preston Scout House Band Inc.)

THE BAND of the 1st Preston Boy Scout Troop started activities in the late 1930s, grew to become one of North America's most popular drum and bugle corps by the mid 1950s, disbanded in 1967, then returned in 1999 and again became one of the most popular units in North America, this time as an alumni band including members who originally marched in the late 1940s and through the '50s and '60s.

The first practice session was held on October 5, 1938. Local industrialist P. R. Hilborn had donated \$250 to help with the purchase of ten bugles, two side drums and a bass drum. Boy Scouts of Canada officials in Ottawa gave permission to the Preston scouting district to organize a bugle band. The band's first performance took place in June, 1939 in Preston's Riverside Park.

With no church affiliation, the 1st Preston Troop adopted a rundown old stable near the Grand River as its home. Wilf Blum organized a citizens committee to help Scouts restore the building, which became known as Scout House. The building became the entertainment and cultural centre for the entire community, with Saturday night Teen Canteen dances and other events serving as wholesome activities for local teenagers.

In the spring of 1939, Scout House Bugle Band practiced outdoors almost every night in preparation for the first public performance. On June 11, the Scout House Band of 20 buglers, four side drummers and a bass drummer led Preston's Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Brownies to Riverside Park for an outdoor church service.



Both music and marching were ragged, but everyone in town was excited with this innovative new activity for local boys.

During World War II, Scout House took part in many events supporting Canada's war effort. The Band marched an average of 40 parades annually.



Scout House Band escorting WRENS

FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

Band members were tested regularly and made to play alone in front of the entire band. The distinctive knees-up marching style with arms swinging to shoulder height was developed during weekly church parades. Every Sunday for three years, Scout House escorted 600 WRENS (members of the Women's Royal Naval Service) on a ceremonial march moving at 96 beats per minute. The Band wore traditional Boy Scout uniforms, switching to Sea Scout uniforms with bellbottom trousers for winter engagements.

Throughout the War years, Band activity remained focused on the local community. When the Band performed outside Preston, up to 45 members traveled on the back of a Cherry Mills Flour truck, often arriving at the parade site with a light dusting of flour on their uniforms.

The Band's first international tour began on July 29, 1947 when 45 members climbed aboard a big green highway bus to start a 1,400-mile tour including performances in Buffalo, Syracuse and Boy Scout Camp Yawgoog in Rockville, Rhode Island.



Scouts receiving merit badges (1947)

A new musical era began shortly after World War II ended. Bands began switching to the new single-valve piston bugles that made playing much easier and allowed more complex arrangements. In 1947, the Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association (renamed the Canadian Drum Corps Association in 1961) was developing rules for Fancy Drill contests which allowed bands ten minutes to play and perform marching routines

The premier Fancy Drill contests were at the Royal City Tattoo in Guelph and the Waterloo Music Festival, held on the last Saturday in June and widely considered to be the national championship contest in Canada. In its first appearance in the Waterloo Music Festival in 1948, Scout House won five major awards, including prizes in the senior category, competing against 47 units from across Ontario.

In 1949, Scout House drummers acquired new rod-tension mother of pearl white drums, two pairs of cymbals and two glockenspiels. The drums had no leg rests and the rod holders dug into the drummers' thighs so they often marched with blood running down their legs. In front of more than 20,000 spectators, Scout House marched home from Waterloo as national champions, winning five major awards in six competitions, including two first place prizes, one second place finish and two thirds, again in competition with senior units.

In 1950, Scout House again won top prize playing the junior category test piece titled Mountbatten. It was the most difficult piece the band had ever attempted, written for three valve trumpets and considered by most musicians of the day too difficult to even attempt on straight bugles.

The usual hectic summer schedule took the Band on a whirlwind 76 hour, 800 mile tour of Ohio, performing for audiences totaling 100,000 at the dedication of Cleveland's new \$5 million Union Station, in Port Clinton and at a Cleveland Indians baseball game in Municipal Stadium.

FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

Scout House prepared for appearances in 1951 by practicing on the new chrome plated B flat piston bugles purchased with money donated by area citizens.

Scout House was moving into new territory in 1951, musically and geographically. Music director Harold “Duffy” Duffield taught members the correct technique for playing the new horns. He wrote two original compositions in three-part harmony to honor the people of two communities where Scout House was immensely popular: Port Clinton, Ohio and the French-speaking community of Shawinigan, Quebec.

The debut performance with the new horns in Shawinigan was an outstanding success. The Boy Scout Association in Montreal arranged for Scout House to perform on the way home from Shawinigan. Ten thousand people jammed downtown Dominion Square for the performance.

Before the largest crowd in the history of the Waterloo Music Festival, Scout House swept up

two Canadian championships, fancy drill and best marching band, for the third year in a row.

As the 1952 performance season approached, invitations to appear in special events flowed in to Preston from across Canada and the United States. Ongoing financial problems were eliminated with a wildly successful innovation: an early season indoor arena show to provide operating funds through gate receipts. The first Spring Show in Hespeler Arena put Scout House back in the black, including an extra \$500 from town council in recognition of the publicity the town would receive during the Band’s 25 out of town appearances during the year.

At the 20th annual Waterloo Music Festival, Scout House finished first in the fancy drill and street parade categories for the fourth year in a row. No other band in the history of the Festival had ever won a title four years consecutively: Scout House had now won two titles four years running.

Later in the year, music director Harold Duffield gave up his position because of career



Preston Scout House Band in their new uniforms and Paul Bauer's first time as solo Drum Major (May 30, 1954, Preston)

responsibilities. His replacements were Gene Seymour, a drummer with the much admired Second Signals of Toronto, and trumpet virtuoso Ted Denver, who introduced five part harmony and began teaching members how to read music. For 1953 events the Band's sound was enhanced by four tenor drums that Gene Seymour added to the drum line.

Enormous changes took place at the end of the 1953, with Scout House Band preparing to burst into the golden age of drum and bugle corps activity in North America with startling innovations that set the activity on its ear for years to come.

Years of friction between the 1st Preston Scout Troop and provincial and regional Boy Scouts of Canada officials finally ignited a blaze that consumed the Band's ties with the scout movement. The provincial association refused to renew the troop's charter, originally granted to Wilf Blum in 1929. The endless disputes over uniforms, Band

publicity, tour schedules, innovative scout activities and some personality conflicts were finally resolved. Scout House Bugle Band would continue but there would no longer be any connection with Boy Scouts of Canada.

Free from Boy Scout Association restrictions, the Band's standard Boy Scout uniform pants became tight black shorts, worn with a wide black belt with silver buckle. The Boy Scout shirt became a red short-sleeved pullover shirt with matching dickie. Red and black were considered the town of Preston's official colors. The Boy Scout neckerchief became a plain white cord. White gauntlets were added to the uniform along with red knee-length socks and shiny black slip-on shoes.

The crowning touch was the Australian-style hat, with the left side turned up and pinned to the crown with a silver maple leaf badge and white plume.

Six weeks before the debut of the "new" Scout House, the demand for tickets for the 1954 Spring Show overwhelmed the organization. Orders for as many as 40 tickets in a block flooded in from communities across southern Ontario. On May 17, 1954 a capacity crowd at Galt Arena buzzed with excitement as they waited, house lights dimmed. The Band's show that night included march music by the entire Band, drum solos, glockenspiel features, drill routines at four different tempos and the introduction of Wooden Soldiers, featuring the rocking-horse choreography that drove audiences wild with enthusiasm in following performances.

At the 1954 Waterloo Music Festival Scout House finally topped the open class competition. Scout House had finally accomplished the grand slam: the first band ever to win four titles at the Waterloo Music Festival. The titles included junior trumpet band championship, street parade and fancy drill championships and open class championship. By the time the year's activities wound up, the Band had traveled 12,000 miles to entertain almost a quarter of a million people.



**CANADA'S FAMOUS SCOUT HOUSE BAND
CANADIAN JUNIOR CHAMPIONS 1954**

Preston Scout House Band on the cover of Drum Corps World (March, 1955)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

Competing against 72 bands at the 1955 Waterloo Music Festival, Scout House repeated its sweep of all four titles again winning the junior trumpet band, junior street parade, fancy drill and open class championships. Scout House continued to push into new areas, announcing the introduction of bass baritone horns to further enhance the sound of the brass section. Despite the generally sunny outlook for the future, the first tiny black cloud appeared on the far horizon in the form of a judge's comment during the 1955 Waterloo festival.

“Keep away from the American style of band and the music they play,” he warned.

Earnings from performances in 1955 ran so high that all the Band's outstanding debts were paid, including the cost of the new uniforms. The Town of Preston was so proud of Scout House that each member received a wristwatch during a civic tribute dinner.

But a major administrative storm was rolling closer to Preston. The CBTBA introduced a new



Scout House (1958)

rule that made a major impact on Scout House. The Association did away with the open class and separate music classes that had long been the standard for judging at the Waterloo Music Festival. Now, groups would register for competition as either junior or senior organizations and be judged on marching, music and general effect during a single 15-minute performance. The change was hotly debated in the marching music community and was widely perceived to be a political move to end Scout House's monopoly on major prizes. Also, the age limit for junior members was increased to 21, as it was south of the border. The higher age limit allowed several Toronto-based units to compete in the junior category.

Wilf Blum used the fourth annual Spring Show at Kitchener Memorial Auditorium on May 30, 1956 as a forum for innovation under the new rules governing field shows. It was the start of a new era: Scout House as a drum and bugle corps: new music, a new field show concept and new E flat bass baritone horns ranging half an octave lower than the other baritones.

The field show opened with Waterloo Fanfare. The standstill concert number was Rhapsody in Blue, one of the first examples of a drum and bugle corps playing classical music. Wooden Soldiers, with the Band members rocking back and forth like wind up toys led into Wish Me Luck as Scout House headed to the finish line, turned to face the audience, kneeled, and waved goodbye to the people in the stands.

The Band's growing international reputation led to appearances in such high profile contests across the border as the Cavalcade of Champions in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania; Tournament of Drums in Rochester, New York and Drums on Parade in Madison, Wisconsin by invitation of Madison Scouts.

Because Scout House traveled so widely, it was impossible to develop a field show that would meet

FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

all regional judging standards: regional associations and contest circuits modified timing and other rules so that standards could not be applied uniformly over a wide area. Despite concerns, Scout House entered the 1957 contest season with confidence in the ability to compete at a high level.

People across the continent were infatuated with Scout House. So much fan mail poured into Scout House with requests for information the Band and the Chamber of Commerce ran out of promotional material. People from across Canada and the United States telephoned the Chamber of Commerce office to request the Band's performance schedule, so they could plan vacation routes to follow the Band.

In September, Scout House won the Canadian junior championship contest in the morning by six full points, with a score of 89. The Band marched in the evening parade to the stadium, appeared in exhibition during the senior championship contest then members jumped into cars for an overnight trip to New Jersey and an exhibition performance at the Dream Contest. The response of more than 26,000 in the audience was so tumultuous, contest officials allowed Scout House extra time to perform their

Canadian championship routine a second time on the field.

The year represents the high water mark of Scout House achievement on the contest field. The Band would never again dominate the activity as it had for the previous decade. En route to winning almost every contest in 1957, Scout House held



Scout House (1958)



Preston Scout House Band performing their renowned "March Of The Wooden Soldiers" (Nationals, Galt, 1958)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

135 practice sessions, traveled more than 8,200 miles through Ontario, Quebec and nine states, marched in 30 parades and entertained more than 1,234,000 people.

September 1958 became the most eventful in the Band's history, beginning with a third consecutive invitation to perform at the Dream Contest. No other group had ever been invited three years in a row. A record crowd of more than 30,000 in Roosevelt Stadium again called, "More, more," and "Don't let them go," as Scout House marched off the field, then played an informal concert in the parking lot, remaining in place to sign autographs.

A week later back at home in Dickson Park in Galt, Scout House scored 80.11 to finish second to

the new national champion Toronto Optimists who scored 81.61. On the following weekend, Scout House finished almost five full points behind the Audubon Bon Bons all girl corps at the second annual International Championship Music and Pageantry contest in Toronto.

There were more highlights to come over the following ten years. Scout House remained enormously popular with spectators, but never again dominated the contest field as it had in the previous decade.



The discipline of Scout House is obvious as they arrive for a performance (1958)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)



Preston Scout House Band (Nationals, Galt, 1958)

Preston Scout House Band in the 1960s



Scout House (Sarnia, 1964)



Scout House (Shawinigan, 1964)



Scout House (Sarnia, 1964)



Scout House (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)



Scout House at inspection (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)



Scout House (Grape Festival Parade, 1960)

The Scout House Alumni Band

Visit the Scout House website: ScoutHouseBand.com

Visit Scout House on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/28903338105>



Scout House Alumni Band (Cambridge, 2009)



Scout House Alumni Band (Buffalo, 2010)



Scout House Silver Leaves Ensemble (Oshawa, 2009)



Scout House Cadets (Burlington, 2016)



Scout House Alumni Band (Oshawa, 2013)



Scout House Alumni Band (Simcoe, 2014)