

# American Watch Company Band Engagement Book

1878-1883

1 volume

Call no.: MS 364



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Band of musicians who worked at the Waltham Watch Company in Waltham, Massachusetts. Engagement book itemizes engagement dates and locations, and membership (including recent immigrants), and includes information about rehearsals, business meetings, and payment.

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## Background on American Watch Company, Band

The American Watch Company had many names during the early years of its existence. It was named the American Watch Company from 1859 through 1885. As the company name changed, the engagement book reflects the band's name also changed from the South Side Brass Band to the American Watch Company Band. The band was composed of employees from the

Waltham Watch Company in Waltham, Massachusetts, who hired an instructor and purchased instruments and uniforms with little assistance from the company.

As the oldest watch company in the United States, the men and women who worked at Waltham Watch had a typical late nineteenth century experience. They lived close to their work, a component in the social fabric of the community's life. Located directly on the Charles River, the town was undergoing a rapid and extensive period of immigrant population growth in the 1870s and 1880s.

The company had started many clubs and associations for the benefit of its employees; among the first to form was the brass band. The band sought to support the members of the company community as much as the surrounding community of Waltham. During this historical period of American nationalism, the band members showed their devotion to all that was American. They reached out to their local and larger American community by blending political events with social events to include rather than exclude the needs of the community.

As a committed band, they sometimes played up to three engagements per day on a week-night or Saturday, and rehearsed on Tuesday and Thursday every week. Business meetings were held once a month. They discussed matters that dealt with the band's Constitution, the objective of which was to keep the band, "playing for pleasure and the taking of such jobs as will not interfere with our daily occupations."

The band's engagements included, but were not limited to, playing benefits at the Fitchburg Railroad depot and steamboat "up river" concerts. Important residents of the community and veteran band members who lost a loved one or were getting married, were serenaded by the band, sometimes at their homes. The band played at Walden Pond, a masquerade ball, and represented the town of Waltham at parades in neighboring Newton and Boston. The band also traveled as far north as Bath and Boothbay, Maine to perform.

With performances at fetes and fairs, the American Watch Company Band reserved a slot for their summer "open air" concerts on the bandstand at the common - a place in the center of town reserved for social activities. The members marched and the community clapped to songs like "Providence-Line Quick Step," the "Grand March of the Highlanders," and the "American Watch Company March."

While the company employed both men and women, the band was composed of mostly men, with the occasional guest accompaniment of a female soprano or pianist from the community. After two years of debate and delay, the band finally received company-owned uniforms in 1880. When they marched down Main Street for "Decoration Day" in late May, the scarlet and blue colors of their fatigue coats and caps proudly announced the band's presence. The band also provided accompaniment when employees went to the polls on Election Day. Striving to give equal attention to both political parties, the band rallied for the town's majority of Republicans, as well as its Democrats.

The band musicians paid one dollar for their membership and rarely paid for anything. A group photograph was taken for 90 cents per member (there were 38 original members), for which they printed the band's name on the bass drum. The band strived together to replace any lost instruments - as they could not afford to lose their talented members. Furthering their commitment to Waltham, the band received community donations. The band was usually paid about \$25 overall for their appearances. The performances were occasionally described as "a success financially and artistically." There are a few written records of the audience attendance, which usually numbered over 300.

This book records the band's engagements from August 20, 1878 through November 29, 1883, giving some elaborate and other short entries.

## Scope of collection

The American Watch Company Band's engagement book itemizes the date, place, and people who played or did not play at scheduled events and records the band's engagements from August 20, 1878 through November 29, 1883, with some elaborate and other short entries documented by the band's secretary G. B. Keach.

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Carmine Valentino, 1992.

### Processing Information

Processed by Jennifer Maris-Raitt.

## Language:

English

## Acknowledgments

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## Search terms

### Subjects

American Watch Company--Employees--Recreation--History--19th century--Sources.  
American Watch Company--Employees--Social life and customs--19th century--Sources.  
American Watch Company. Band--Calendars.  
American Watch Company. Band--History--19th century--Sources.  
Brass bands--Massachusetts--Waltham--History--19th century--Sources.  
Industrial recreation--Massachusetts--Waltham--History--19th century--Sources.  
Waltham (Mass.)--Social conditions--19th century--Sources.

### Contributors

American Watch Company. Band. **[main entry]**  
South Side Brass Band (Waltham, Mass.)

### Genres and formats

Appointment books.

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