

Mattatuck Drum Band

"The Mattatuck Drum Band's long and colorful history reverberates down through the centuries. It can still be heard echoing from the hilltops and through the valleys"

-Governor John G. Rowland

You hear the sound and feel the vibrations of the Mattatuck Drum Band before you see them. As they approach, you experience their music. It is unmistakable. They call it "ancient thunder". The Band perpetuates the music, the traditions and the heritage of our founders as they perform at patriotic, political, historical, military and special celebrations of local, state and national importance. They are the oldest continuously active musical organization in the country.

The Band was organized in 1767 when two military companies were formed in Farmingbury Parish; the site of present-day Wolcott. On training days fifes and drums were used for martial music, thus their name; The Training Band. With more men joining the troops, the formation of a regiment ensued and the Band was christened the 10th Regiment Band.

In November 1772 the First Congregational Church was built in the Farmingbury district with the help of Band members. People were called to worship by drum beat and the Band became the Farmingbury Band.

When the Revolutionary War broke out many members enlisted. Their major responsibility was to give calls for camp duties but they also provided the cadence for marching while bolstering morale. After the War, under the leadership of Nathan Gillet, the Band evolved into a separate unit and was in great demand at social and patriotic gatherings. Wolcott incorporated in May of 1796, and the Band changed its name to the Wolcott Drum Band. During the War of 1812 the Band was called upon to help recruiting stations "drum-up" soldiers.

Around 1830 the Band's instructor was Samuel Wilcox. He introduced an original style of drumming. Formerly all drumming had been taught by rote. Wilcox used a simple, useful notation and from then on all drumming was learned by note. His conceptions formed the fundamental basis of Ancient Drumming as it's known today.

After being extremely active in the Civil War, interest in the Band waned until 1877 when Levi Atkins and his son, Homer, taught 16 men to play. One of these members was Charles S. Miller of Waterbury, who, in his first parade, performed with the Band in Hartford for President Grant.

In 1881 Miller and some East Side Waterbury youths moved the Band to Waterbury and they chose the name Mattatuck Drum Band, paying homage to the original native



"Mattatuck Drum Band" © 1981 W.C. Reynolds

tribe name for the area. As leader for more than fifty years, Miller was the motivating force of the Band. They even practiced at his home where he made many of the drums still in use. The first formal appearance of the Mattatuck Drum Band was at the decoration of graves by Waldhams Post G.A.R. on Memorial Day, 1881 and the first parade they attended in uniform was at Naugatuck on Memorial Day, 1882. During 1884 the Band adopted their present uniform of the Connecticut Colonial Private to reflect those stirring Revolutionary War times.

The Band was involved with the Spanish-American War and World War I. In April 1931, they moved their headquarters from Miller's property to Mort Pierpont's dairy farm on Pierpont Road. After their participation in World War II activities, the Band's most famous appearance occurred in 1961 when they played to rave reviews at John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Parade. The Band held a formal ball on November 18, 1967 to celebrate its 200th anniversary. A year later, they moved into their new headquarters on Highland Avenue, affectionately known as "The Loft." Throughout the years the Band and its individual members have won many awards for drumming and fifing.

Sando Bologna said, "Wherever the Mattatuck Drum Band performs, the corpsmen and their music evoke a deep emotional appreciation for an extraordinary form of Americana and Americanism. They are Waterbury's perennial ambassadors of patriotism and good will."