

Band celebrates 100th year; boasts several musical firsts

By Mary Louise Knapp

The UNL Band celebrates its 100th anniversary this week, with concerts, banquets and visits from alumni. Gov. Charles Thone proclaimed Oct. 6-13 UNL Band Week in honor of the occasion, and Athletic Director Bob Devaney presented the band with a football during last Saturday's game.

According to Jon Hedges, historian of Gamma Lambda band fraternity, the band began as an ROTC unit in October, 1879.

"There is a good chance that we have the oldest university marching band in the United States," Hedges said.

When first beginning, the band was officially considered part of the university, with a paid director, and for a long time it was the only spirit group on campus.

"The band was here long before the football team was," Hedges said. In 1890, Roscoe Pound, a former drum major, returned to NU from Harvard, where football had been popular for some years, and with the band's support, organized NU's first football team. The first game, played against Omaha's YMCA, was in 1890.

The band performed its first half-time show in 1894, before the NCAA formed a provision for band performances at football games.

"As far as we know, we are the first marching band to put on a half-time show," Hedges said.

In 1927, the band traveled to the West Point-Army game, which was the first non-bowl game the band attended out-of-state. That same year, John Phillip Sousa pre-

sented the band with a silver loving cup and praised it as being the "finest college band in the United States."

Band members originally wore ROTC uniforms, but in 1938 regular band uniforms were purchased.

Band Day, an annual day on which high school bands from Nebraska were invited to participate in the half-time show, started in 1938 under the direction of Don Lentz, known as the "Father of Precision Movement." Band Day quickly spread throughout the nation. UNL no longer participates in Band Day because of lack of support.

In 1941, the band performed at the Rose Bowl, again under Lentz' direction, and demonstrated many unusual movements not previously done by college bands.

"The UNL marching band has been to every major bowl game, except during the wars," Hedges said.

In 1955, the band ceased to be a part of the ROTC unit and became an independent group. Women were not admitted until 1972.

The band toured Europe in 1974, performing for half-time shows and other events.

Currently, Hedges said, there are at least 225 people in the marching band, and more than 300 in the entire band, compared to 12 original members.

"We are proud of the fact that we have initiated many band activities," Hedges said. "Our band has had a lot of firsts that we are very proud of. We are a close-knit group—we've done a tremendous amount of things, and we have fantastic alumni support."

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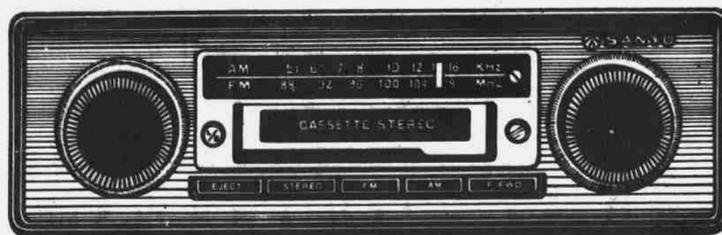
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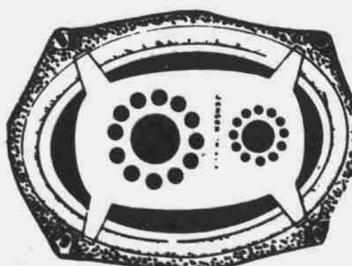
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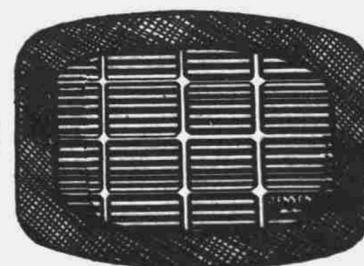
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