

**The Stillwater High School Band:  
1926 to 1949: A Legacy of Excellence**



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*"As long as the blare of trumpets fills the air, as long as the shrill tones of a piccolo are heard, as long as trombones resound, we will always remember one of the main contributions to school life --- **the band.**"*

***Stillwater High School Yearbook 'Kabekonian' 1949***



*Director Wayne Feller with a young baritone student at Oak Park Elementary School in 1992*



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*Pictures from the 1948  
yearbook*

*\*\* Cover photograph is of the 1934 Stillwater High School Band*

## **A Legacy of Excellence**

This year was the 65<sup>th</sup> year consecutively that the Stillwater High School Band won superior ratings at contest; they had multiple players in the All-State band and orchestra, and were invited to the Music for All National Festival in Indianapolis, Indiana. They have performed on international tours to Norway and Romania, national tours to San Francisco, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, New York and many more! Many professional musicians have blossomed from this program such as oboists Rob McManus and Amy Goeser, trumpet players Timothy Will and Dan Fretland, and flute player Charles Gibb, just to name a few.



*The Stillwater Wind Symphony performing at Music for All National Concert Band Festival on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

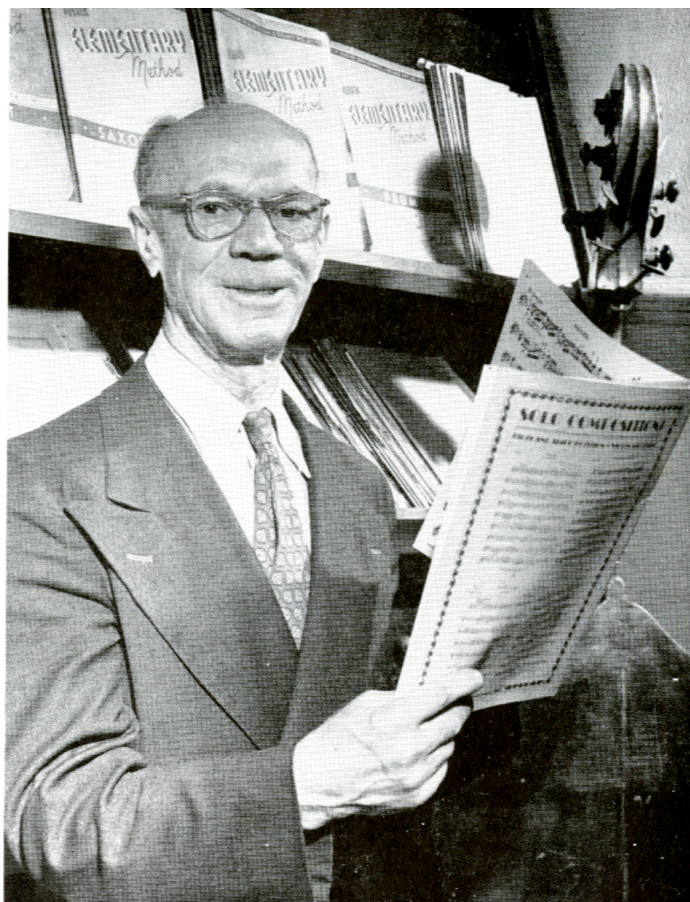


The band program at Stillwater High School can be divided into five sections, based on each band director. The directors of the band were: Hugo Frey (1926-1933), William H. Bastien (1933-1949,) George Regis (1949-1980), Wayne Feller (1980-2005), and the current director is Dennis Lindsay (2001-Present). Each director to set foot on the podium in front of the Stillwater Band has left his mark, each one staying on average 20 to 30 years. In a world where people are switching jobs and moving constantly, having a director that stays has likely been the backbone and the success of the band program at the high school for generations.



*Mr. George Regis conducting a rehearsal at the old Stillwater High School. [Now the Stillwater Junior High School]*

The first two band directors at Stillwater High School set the stage for music education, musical growth, and inspired many Stillwater High School students to play in the band. The continuing successes after 1949 could not have been achieved if Hugo Frey and William H. Bastien hadn't taken the role as band director at Stillwater High School.



“To Mr. William H. Bastien, as a token of our appreciation for the splendid work that you, as our band director for the past 16 years, have displayed, we, the Class of 1949, dedicate this Kabekonian.”

-Stillwater High School  
Yearbook 'Kabekonian'  
1949



## Founding Frey



*Frey's photograph from  
the yearbook in 1927*

Mr. Hugo Frey was the school's first band director when the band formed in the fall of 1926. Born on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1880 in Hadar, Nebraska<sup>1</sup> and died in June of 1950 in Los Angeles<sup>2</sup>, Frey had come from a teaching position in Mankato, MN. He was a former Immanuel Lutheran grade school teacher and superintendent in Mankato, teaching there from 1907 until 1921. He also directed the Mankato

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<sup>1</sup> Teacher Information Cards 1928-1929, 1930-1931

<sup>2</sup> Obituary in Mankato Free Press, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1950

Municipal band, and was the choir and organ director at the church while living in Mankato.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to starting the band at Stillwater High School, Frey had several other outstanding accomplishments. He was an organizer of the Minnesota Bandmasters Association, publisher of “The Bandmaster” magazine and president of the Minnesota Division of the American Society of Piano Technicians (he was quite the prominent piano tuner in the area).<sup>4</sup>

*This newspaper clipping from the New Ulm Review is an ad by Frey for his piano tuning business.*



According to the Stillwater High School Year Book ‘Kabekonian’ from 1927:

“The main purpose for which the band was organized is the creation of school spirit among rooters at the athletic games, and it can be said without doubt that the band has not disappointed us in this respect! We have learned this year that a band is indispensable to a live High School, and we are going to stay with it. Three cheers for the band and Mr. Frey!”

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<sup>3</sup> The New Ulm Review. June 28<sup>th</sup> 1922

<sup>4</sup> Obituary in Mankato Free Press





*Band in the 1926-27 Stillwater 'Kabekonian' Year Book*

The band played its first concert in honor of Armistice Day, November 11<sup>th</sup> 1926; but its first official school concert to the public was on Friday April 20<sup>th</sup> 1928.

According to the Stillwater Arrow, Mr. Frey announced this at the concert:

The band has been in existence for just about one and a half years up to this date. At the first meeting ever held there were just sixteen boys present and today we find thirty boys actively participating in the band and about eight who are in training...Part of the credit must be shared with the boys as they have all been faithful and worked their hardest to make the band a success.

The band gave the concert in “their snappy uniforms of white with the black and red sashes, the band presented an appearance that was surely a credit to them”<sup>5</sup>

At this time the band was only rehearsing one hour a week and had only 18 members. The program for the concert was as follows:

March – Military Escort .....Bennett

March – The Victor March..... King

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<sup>5</sup> Stillwater Arrow, April 30<sup>th</sup> 1928, High School Band Plays First Concert to Crowd.

Overture – Iron Count.....	King
March – Minnesota .....	Sousa
Cornet Solo – Northern Lights .....	Siegrist
March – The Rifle Rangers.....	King
Waltz – Bliss Eternal.....	Bennett
March – Headway.....	Bennett
March – The Avenger.....	King
Overture – American Federation.....	Skaags
May Lady Waltz.....	King
March – Roll of Honor.....	King
March – New Hartford.....	Myers

In the next year to follow the band had grown in size and had received more rehearsal time.

Hugo Frey was at the Stillwater High School from the fall of 1926 through the fall of 1932. He was also the director of the Stillwater Municipal Band and in 1930 he composed a march entitled ‘Stillwater Booster March’ this number was dedicated to the city of Stillwater, to the city council and the American Legion Post 48 as well as to those who are boosters of the Stillwater Municipal band. It was played at an indoor concert in the High School auditorium.



### The Bastien Decades: 1933 – 1949



*"It has been entirely through Mr. Bastien's untiring devotion to his work that the band is what it is today. Due to his constant effort to arouse student interest in the band and music as a whole, the attitude of the students toward the band has improved one hundred per cent in the past few years. Mr. Bastien will always be remembered by those who played under him for his constant aim to do what is best for his charges. "*

*From the Stillwater High School Yearbook 'Kabekonian' 1949*

If you mention the last name of 'Bastien' to a jazz or classical musician in the Twin Cities, you may get a response referring to the bassist 'Biddy', or cellist and arranger 'Vin'. You may hear about the Gene Krupa Band or the studio band at WCCO and you may even hear about piano lessons. There were many Bastien's all siblings and all accomplished musicians; Vince, Annette, Gertrude, Biddy, Tony, Dave and Billy. For example, Biddy is 1 of 27 in the Twin Cities Jazz Hall of Fame. But where they came from, and who inspired the music within was their father, the second band director at Stillwater High School, William H. Bastien.

At a young age William Bastien knew he wanted to perform. He told his father, at the age of 11, that he wanted to be a concert violinist. His family didn't agree and kicked him out of the house to live in a barn. From then on William started making money as a violinist in his town. A few years down the road he met a very talented prodigy pianist named Estelle. Her mother had died in childbirth and she had been passed down from relative to relative. They fell in love and decided it would be cheaper if they were to live together. They got married around 1910; William was 16 and Estelle 13 years old.

In order to hear music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; you went and listened to a band play, or you played the music yourself. So William and Estelle took many jobs at town dances, town bands, and Estelle taught piano lessons and played scores on the piano along side the silent films. At the time they were living in Little Falls, Minnesota.

They later moved to Pine City, Minnesota where they would live until 1920, when William was offered a position in Buel, Minnesota as a bandmaster. The



family stayed in Buel until 1930, when the money ran out for the bandmaster position. William moved his family once again to Minneapolis where he started school for a teaching certificate at Minneapolis College of Music (now McPhail School of Music). Once obtaining the degree he obtained a position teaching at Stillwater High School in 1933.

According to William's grandson, David T. Bastien, "William's bands were always winning bands". This includes the town bands he had been in charge of, the Stillwater Municipal/American Legion band, the high school band and the inspiration he gave to all of his own children.



*The Stillwater Municipal Band from 1940; Bastien conducted this band in the summer and the high school bands in the fall and spring. As a result of all the students he had taught at the high school, the band was mostly made up of graduates. The Municipal band from 1940 won a first place plaque at the Minnesota State Fair.*

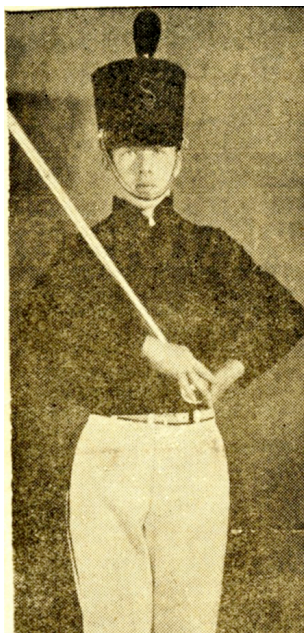


*The 1938 senior marching band with Drum Major Bob Morgan*

In 1934 Mr.

Bastien and the principal J.O. Johnson, agreed to send student Bob Morgan to the University of Minnesota to study drum majoring with Mr. Agaare. In 1935 Bastien created a junior and a senior band. The junior band consisted of about 30 students. "Mr. Bastien is looking to the future with hopes of a crack state-championship band from the material in the junior band", states the Stillwater Arrow on October 22, 1935. The senior band was left in the hands of Drum Major, Bob Morgan and had begun marching at football games and at other occasions.

By 1936 the band had their largest enrollment ever. There were 36 members and were working their way to 45 by the end of the year. Also in 1936, the band tied for 3<sup>rd</sup> place with Anoka High School at their district contest, and Bob Morgan had formed the drum corps.



*Drum Major Bob Morgan from the Stillwater Arrow, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1935*





*The 1936 band picture from the Kabekonian; in the center is director Bastien and Drum Major Bob Morgan*

Bastien was the only director at the high school to direct both the orchestra and the band. And it was under the direction of him, and the newly founded choir by Miss Fairchild in 1938 that the music department was able to have its first annual department wide concert on April 5th, which included the band, orchestra and choir. A report of the concert from the Stillwater Arrow on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1938 says this:

“A packed auditorium listened to selections by the band and orchestra... and by the choir. Several outstanding selections included on the varied program presented by the band and orchestra were: “The Big Bass Drum”; the clarinet trio composed of Jerry Davis, Helen Andrewson, and Frank Phalen; the French horn solo by Billy Bastien; and “Every Little Movement” played by the orchestra.”

### ***Thumbs Up . . .***

*Much too frequently our attitude towards the music department has been that of general acceptance; not necessarily willful but only unconscious of the miraculous development which has been accomplished during the lapse of a few short years. Unselfish and sincere endeavor has been rendered by its heads, Mr. William Bastien, band and orchestra leader, and Miss Marion Fairchild, choir director, to make these organizations what they are today, a credit to our institution.*

*Stillwater High School Yearbook ‘Kabekonian’ 1941*

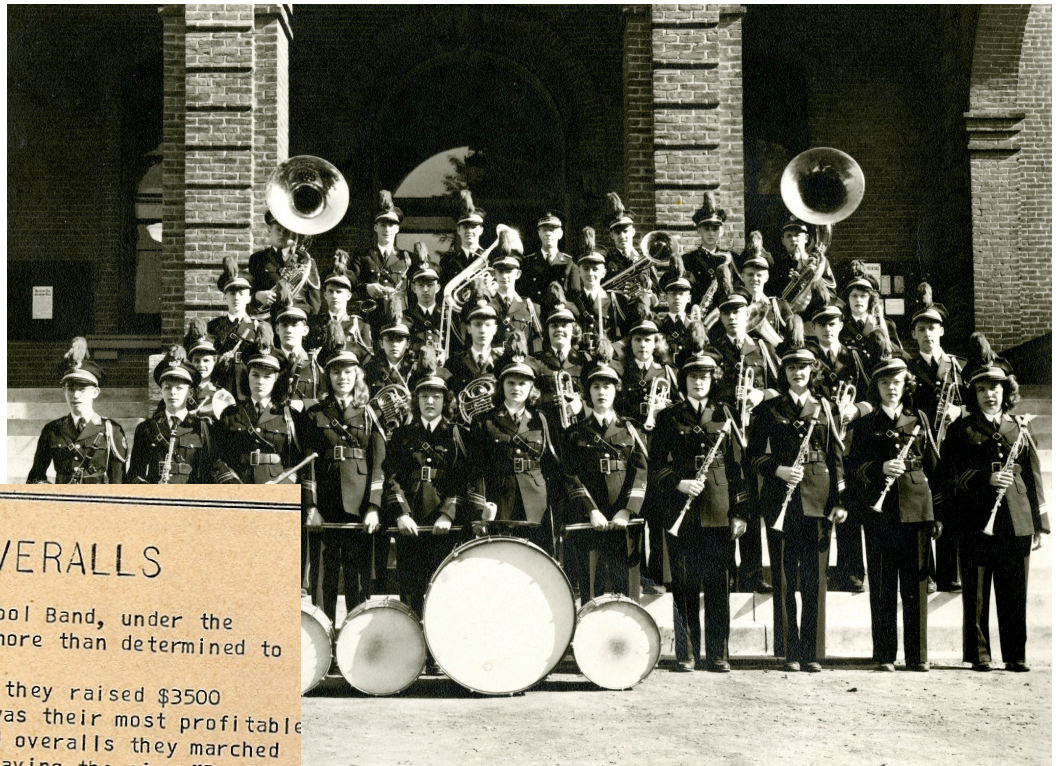




Bastien later had to abandon the orchestra because of lack of interest in students wanting to learn stringed instruments. Bastien himself was responsible for all of the private instrumental lessons each student would get each week at school. On average he would be giving sixty or seventy individual lessons each week, on various instruments.

By 1938 and 1939 the band had grown significantly. There were about 40 in the band, and 20 playing in the orchestra. With the creation of a concert choir in 1937, Stillwater's music department had become quite large. Because of the growing numbers the band was constantly fundraising for new uniforms for the incoming students and replacing of the used uniforms.

*Stillwater High School Band from 1946 in front of the high school in their new uniforms. Director Bastien is in the center. They raised the money for these uniforms by marching around town in overalls carrying a sign that read "Don't you think we need new uniforms?"*



## A PARADE IN OVERALLS

The Stillwater Senior High School Band, under the direction of W. H. Bastien, was more than determined to get new uniforms.

In slightly less than 4 months they raised \$3500 mainly through donations. This was their most profitable trick: Donning shabby shirts and overalls they marched throughout town playing and displaying the sign "Don't You Think We Need New Uniforms?" The town merchants and private individuals generously contributed until the band's dream was a reality.

On May 9 the dignified black uniforms with red trimming were worn for the first time at the spring concert.

Under the direction of Mr. Bastien, the band had improved significantly. In 1947 the band received their first 'A' rating at a district contest. They continued to the state regional contest to earn a 'B' rating. According to the 'Kabekonian', "when Mr. Bastien first began directing the band in 1933, of the thirty students to sign up for band, only three students could read music.... In the past two years the band has received an "A" and a "B" rating in the district contest and a "B" rating in the regional contest. This year the band also shows great promise for the 1949 contest."

Bastien and his family not only had the musical influence on the band and orchestra students, but Estelle being a very talented pianist continued teaching in Stillwater, gave piano lessons, rhythm classes and dance classes to children in the Stillwater area.

And it was not only Mr. and Mrs. Bastien who were musically talented in the family. Their children were all extremely talented musicians, and many of them graduated from Stillwater High School and became established musicians in the Twin Cities.

*This is a photograph  
rhythm class of Mrs.  
Bastien's at their house on  
south Third Street.*





Unfortunately in January of 1949, Bastien's son Patrick, who had just begun studies at the University of Minnesota, unexpectedly committed suicide. This left Director Bastien, his wife and family beside themselves and prompted the leave of Bastien from the Stillwater Schools. This leave was of shock to the students and provoked articles of gratitude on his leave in the Stillwater Arrow, and in the Gazette.

*"There must be first of all an innate musicianship in the director himself. Then he must be able to transmit that quality to the players in the organization. He must keep the group under control at all times and yet retain the admiration and respect of the members of his group. From my observation, Mr. Bastien certainly qualifies in all these characteristics. To you Mr. Bastien, may you enjoy many more years in the fields of work, which is, I know, close to your heart. We are going to miss you.*

*Sincerely,  
Margaret L. Clark"*

***From the Stillwater Evening Gazette Monday, May 2, 1949***

In honor of Mr. Bastien, the students and the players from the municipal band prepared a farewell party at the White Pine Inn (Which is now the Bayport Library). Mr. and Mrs. Bastien are in the center of the photograph below.





### **The End of the Beginning - After Frey and Bastien**

Presently the high school band consists of three separate bands, two jazz bands and a percussion ensemble. Since Bastien and Frey directed the bands, we have seen an increase in popularity, in musicianship, in private instructors who live in the area, and in families supporting the performing arts. We have also seen the community grow to love and care about music education in the schools.

*"Mr. Bastien explains that during the first ten years of his career here, there was absolutely no cooperation from the student body and the greatest amount of student cooperation has been demonstrated in the past two years. Stillwater has a rather small band membership for the size of the community and until more parents show interest in such activity, the band cannot increase in size."*

Stated in the Stillwater Arrow on Friday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1949.

The community and the parents of the students at Stillwater have shown that they have an interest in continuing the work that Frey and Bastien established at Stillwater High School. This is told by how carefully selected the directors to follow were chosen, and the successes of the band program to come after 1949.

The Stillwater band persevered through many struggles in the early years. From needing new uniforms, funding for music, actually getting their own rehearsal space instead of rehearsing in the 'ping pong room', to increasing how often the band was able to practice during school hours. The band was not to the level of greatness that it is today, but Frey and Bastien built the foundation for what would turn into a legacy of excellence in the bands at Stillwater High School.

David T. , Bastien. "Interview about Family." July 9, 2014.

Bastien David T. , (Grandson of William H. Bastien),  
interview by Peterson Anna, Home of David Bastien "Interview  
about Family," July 9, 2014.