



Music and Oil in Beaumont: A History of the Magnolia Petroleum Band

Bryan Proksch

The 1920s were a turbulent time for bands in the United States. The ensembles dominated American popular music from the late nineteenth century through World War I, more or less coinciding with the famed careers of P.S. Gilmore and John Philip Sousa. In the immediate post-war period, however, bands faced numerous challenges to their preeminence. On the one hand there was no heir apparent to Sousa, who was already in his mid-sixties and faced constant speculation that he would retire. Indeed, Sousa's force of personality would never permit retirement, but the Sousa Band's tours gradually shortened year by year through the 1920s as his audiences and profitability declined.

Changing tastes and pressure from jazz and a variety of up-and-coming forms of popular music were as much to blame for these challenges as newer forms of entertainment such as movies and radio. The idea of using bands as an educational mechanism at high schools and colleges was still relatively new, though professional and semi-professional municipal bands—the precursors of modern amateur community bands—were still providing regular entertainment at parks and concert halls in some locales. Industrial bands—ensembles connected to a corporation and staffed by employees—provided a crucial if short-lived bridge between the earlier professional band movement and later community-based organizations.¹

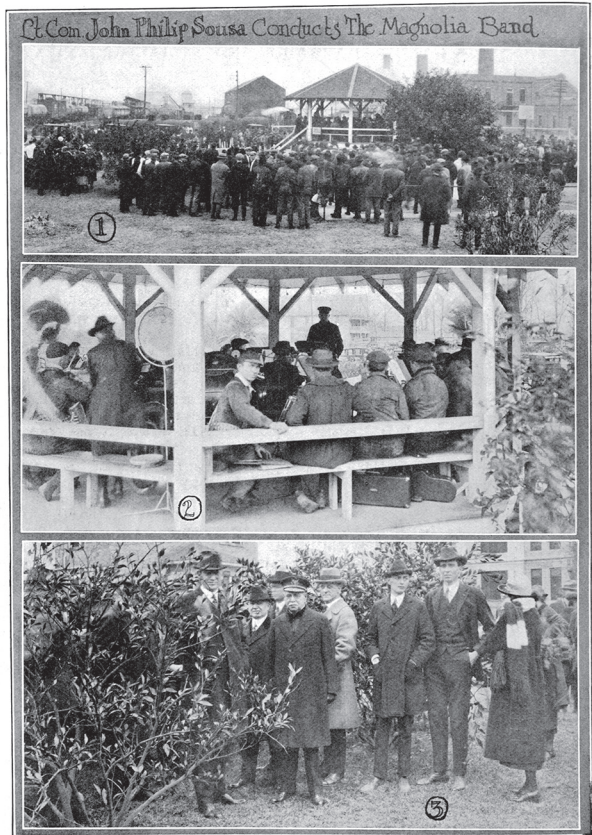
While bands affiliated with factories or other companies began appearing in the 1870s, what might be called an industrial band movement emerged in the years just before World War I. The Ford Motor Company Band in Detroit and the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band in Huntsville, Ontario, both achieved early prominence for different reasons. The Ford Band mostly performed in Michigan and undertook a well-publicized tour to the Pacific Coast in 1915. The Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band rocketed to prominence when Sousa's famed cornet soloist Herbert L. Clarke assumed its directorship in 1918.² Neither ensemble was conceived of as an advertising group, though there were clear benefits to brand recognition. Henry Ford personally insisted on the Ford Band's creation as a "philanthropic work" designed to provide workers with a positive outlet for their creativity in the midst of a monotonous day

on the assembly line. It was one piece of his larger and then-controversial sociological reform efforts.³ The Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band was formed by proprietor Charles Shaw, a cornetist himself who took lessons from Clarke and who by all appearances was simply a band enthusiast with the means to create his own private ensemble.

The most famous of the industrial bands was the ARMCO Band, intended for employees of the American Roller Mill Company of Middleton, Ohio. Founded in 1921 with a “God awful” rehearsal of employees at the Elks Hall, the ensemble flourished under Frank Simon, formerly a cornet soloist in Sousa’s Band.⁴ They started making recordings in 1922—unusual for an industrial band. In 1925 he started recruiting musicians for his band by offering them work at the steel mill, and in the same year the quasi-professional ensemble began making the regular radio broadcasts on WLW in Cincinnati. As with many other industrial bands, the ARMCO Band undertook a number of tours, including a trip to Canada. The inaugural convention of the American Bandmasters Association in 1930 was hosted by ARMCO, during which Sousa conducted the ensemble. Depression-era layoffs changed the nature of the band entirely beginning in about 1929. ARMCO now sponsored the band as a professional ensemble instead of an employee-based one. The band’s weekly radio broadcasts on NBC were met with nationwide acclaim. Their band march was the “ARMCO Triumphant,” and Peter Buys dedicated the “Iron Master March” to them in 1931. The band existed as a professional radio band sponsored by ARMCO from 1929 until its show was cancelled by the network in 1939.

A survey conducted by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1926 found that 151 large corporations had some kind of business-backed musical ensemble. A larger 1929 study conducted by the National Bureau for the Advancement of Music counted 267 corporate bands in the United States.⁵ Based on the number of photos and remarks about industrial bands not listed in that study that I have personally been able to find, it is safe to say that 267 is a gross underestimate and that at its height in the mid-1920s, the United States probably boasted 500 or more industrial bands. This was a time during which towns and cities of all sizes across the nation boasted a company band as a point of pride. As might be expected, industrial bands ranged in size, skill, and prominence relative to their sponsoring corporation’s size, moral support, and financial backing.

In late 1923 the Magnolia Petroleum Company refinery in Beaumont, Texas, made a substantial investment in their small existing orchestra to turn it into a functioning band. While the Magnolia Petroleum Band was neither a pioneer nor



1. Listening to the Magnolia Refinery Band, John Philip Sousa Directing. 2. Sousa at the helm. 3. After the concert.

Figure 1: Images of Sousa conducting the Magnolia Petroleum Band in January 1924.⁷ Courtesy of the Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, TX.

unique as an industrial band, it was recognized as the premier ensemble of its kind in Texas if not the whole Gulf Coast after only a very brief existence. Sousa himself conducted the months-old ensemble for a noontime promotional concert on January 22, 1924, while touring through Beaumont with his own band (see figure 1).⁶ A proponent of connecting music and industry, the Magnolia Band presented Sousa with the very embodiment of his ideas and the great potential offered by such a union. Some 2,000 refinery workers were present for the concert, as well as students from the Magnolia Elementary School. Corporate dignitaries including Elmer E. Plumley (the manager of the refinery and member of the board of directors who provided key financial and moral support for the creation of the band) and J. D. Helnsley (who organized the concert and who would later help found KFDM radio) also attended, together with mayor Bismark A. Steinhagen and George J. Roark, director of the Chamber of Commerce.

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1. Sousa and Dr. Cloud at noon hour concert. 2. Listening in. 3 and 4. Sections of crowd at concert.

Figure 1: Images of Sousa conducting the Magnolia Petroleum Band in January 1924. Courtesy of the Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, TX.

The Magnolia Band played so well for Sousa that he thought the bandsmen, all of whom were full-time refinery workers and only amateur musicians, were actually professionals playing a prank on him by greasing up and wearing overalls. Note how figure 1's image number two shows most of the bandsmen, save the one facing the camera, in their working garb. A change of clothing evidently was not possible even for a visiting celebrity. In fact, the concert itself was unceremoniously cut short mid-march when the whistle marked the end of the lunch hour. Nevertheless, Sousa was sufficiently impressed with the Magnolia Band and the company's foresight in using capitalism to support local musical culture, and the townspeople and employees took substantial pride in their band.

By the end of 1924 Karl L. King, the famous leader of the Fort Dodge Municipal Band in Iowa and a leading publisher of band music, compared the Magnolia Band favorably to the Ford Band, "which has always stood in a class by itself among industrial bands," and thought it would in a very short time

become the "best in the country."⁸ Although the Great Depression eventually counted the Magnolia Petroleum Band as one of its many casualties, by then the group had already made significant contributions both to the music history of Texas and to the local musical history and culture of Southeast Texas.

Foundation

The earliest extant references to music at the Magnolia refinery in Beaumont come from the first volume of their corporate newsletter, the *Magpetco*, published in April 1920. A photo of the Magnolia Orchestra, really just six musicians seated at ease in a rehearsal space, shows a typical early-1920s small dance band of a violin, alto and bass saxophone, cornet, trombone, and piano, with various percussion instruments but no percussionist present. The alto saxophone player, Harry Cloud (1891–1987), was the company dentist (tasked with tending to some 400 appointments per month), though he had served as a bandsman in the US Army's 16th Cavalry prior to World War I.⁹ He founded and led the Magnolia Band up through early 1927. The more formal portraits of a men's quartet and a glee club thirteen men strong make for a stark contrast with the orchestra. It would seem the orchestra was not very good; it received no mention in the newsletter for over a year, and it is conspicuously absent from news items about corporate social events involving music.¹⁰ In the meantime Cloud was busy writing his regular "Dental Dope" column for the newsletter, issuing advice about how often one should brush his teeth with occasional comments that indicate he had a somewhat quirky sense of humor.¹¹

Towards the end of 1921 Cloud seems to have decided to turn more actively to leading bands. His Cashan Grotto Band (a Masonic lodge founded in 1916) performed for the refinery's first "monthly smoker," with some 700 employees in attendance.¹² The "delightful musical program" showed that the Cashan Grotto Band was "some band." Indeed, the performance seems to have gotten the attention of the Magnolia management, as within a few months the Magnolia Band of some 20 musicians played a "band recital"—basically an outdoor concert—on the refinery grounds during the lunch hour.¹³ Other corporate musical activities were also getting increased attention. The first performance of the "Magnolia Minstrels" (with Cloud conducting the Magnolia Orchestra) took place just weeks later. With music increasingly on their minds, the *Magpetco* editor included an essay about the "power of music" in the May 1922 issue, noting that it is a "social art" that encourages the "expression of a common feeling" and "uplifts character."¹⁴ Indeed one paragraph insists that everyone is musical and should give it a try. A follow-up essay in June 1922 encouraged the workers to "let your boy learn music."¹⁵

The corporation more heavily invested in its band from mid-1922 on. A note on “The Band” in February 1923 explained how company officials were “putting forth to establish good clean recreation of a form that helps to offset the monotony of every day work.”¹⁶ While the *Magpetco* author (perhaps Cloud) anticipated that the band would take years to develop, the article called for “experienced men, around whom we hope to build the best organization of its kind in this section” and for “all employees of the company [to] pull for the Magnolia Band and Orchestra to the end that we may take the same pride in them that we do in all other features offered by the company for the benefit and entertainment of employees.” Their rationale followed Henry Ford’s creation of the Ford Band a decade earlier exactly, with worker well-being ostensibly at the forefront over the value such an ensemble might provide to company brand recognition and publicity. While counterintuitive to today’s mindset, the company also sponsored a number of baseball teams and other recreational activities to that same end in a way that at least makes this initial assertion ring true to form.

The band’s first formal portrait proudly displayed their new military-style uniforms—and made the cover of the April 1923 newsletter. The original Magnolia Band uniforms featured two piping stripes down the front with “M.P.C.” embroidered on the collar—typical features for band uniforms of the time. Their original white cadet hats were replaced with darker hats already by late 1923. The corporate logo with a white magnolia flower was added to the uniforms a few years later. The gradual change from mixed tubas to new Sousaphones seen in formal photos beginning in October 1923 and the 1924 addition of a baritone saxophone to the existing bass saxophone indicates that the band’s budget could accommodate expensive instrument purchases at least on occasion (see figure 2).¹⁷

Now established with strong philosophical and financial backing from the corporation, the Magnolia Band achieved musical prominence in remarkably short order. Rehearsals occurred on company time, with uniforms and instruments provided at company expense. From 1923 on, the band’s routine involved regularly scheduled lunchtime concerts played every Tuesday and Friday on the refinery grounds, occasional evening public concerts played downtown in Community Hall, and various outdoor concerts played elsewhere in Beaumont. A concert played for the Texas Rotary Club’s state convention in Beaumont in March 1923 was a key event in proving the band’s value to the company, given the statewide audience in attendance and the way in which the bandmen’s “credible showing” and “neat, clean appearance [and] their gentlemanly conduct and bearing was a distinct credit to themselves and to the Magnolia Petroleum Corporation.”¹⁸

They made annual appearances at the South Texas State Fair, held in Beaumont, typically winning the trophy and medals for best band (see figure 2). It is unclear how much competition they actually had at the fair each year, though at various times in the decade Beaumont boasted having a few other bands, including Beaumont’s Permanent Italian Band and the



Beaumont City Band. Humble Oil, from just north of Houston, sent their own band to the fair in 1928, if not earlier.

The Magnolia Band was, at its heart, a communal endeavor in a symbiotic relationship with its parent corporation. Harry Cloud maintained his dentistry practice even as the band’s demands on his time increased. The same was true of the rest of the bandmen, who sacrificed their lunch hour twice each week to play for their colleagues. The amateur nature of the band was somewhat obscured in the larger *Magnolia Oil News*, the Dallas-based corporate-wide newsletter, which never mentioned that “Dr. Cloud” was a dentist and not a doctor of music. The original 28 members of the band included pipe fitters, railcar painters, brick masons, boiler shop workers, mechanics, and all variety of tradesmen (see figure 3).²⁰ Besides “Doc” Cloud (as the bandmen called him), only one member was white-collar: clarinetist L. E. Downs, who worked in the office as a clerk. The class distinction is evident

in a cartoon printed in early 1924, where a host of gruff figures blow on their instruments in stark contrast to the bow-tie wearing Downs (#18) and the suit-donning Cloud (#25). Equally notable was the absence of professional musicians hired by the corporation to populate the band or serve as section leaders, as was sometimes the case with such ensembles elsewhere.

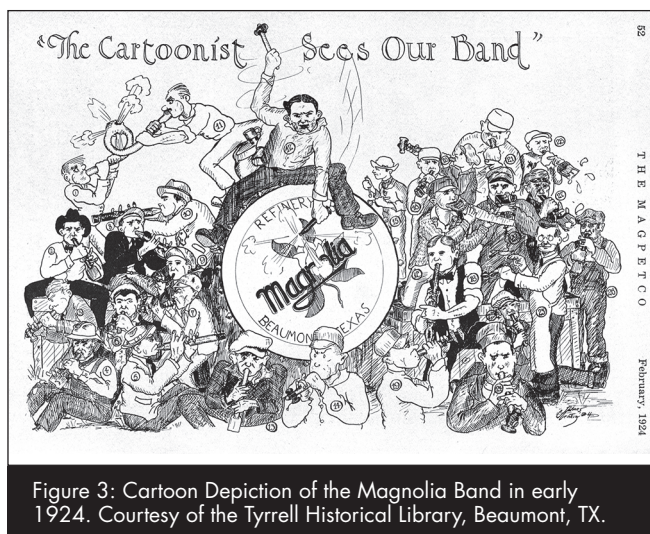


Figure 3: Cartoon Depiction of the Magnolia Band in early 1924. Courtesy of the Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, TX.

Turnover in band membership was high, as might be expected given the difficult workplace environment for oil refinement in the 1920s. Of the original 28 members only five—E. E. Dickens (#24), H. M. Hodge (#10), Frank Sedivy (#27), Carl Quinn (#16), and A. B. Yoder (#4)—appeared in the band’s final formal photo, celebrating their victory at the 1929 South Texas State Fair band tournament.²¹ The most noteworthy departure was Cloud, who was succeeded by Raoul A. Dhossche (1896–1971) sometime in the first months of 1927. Cloud would go on to a long and far-flung career as a band director. He remained in Texas long enough to be noted as a “band master of outstanding repute” for services rendered as a judge for a Texas Band Teachers’ Association contest in Bryan, Texas, in May 1929.²² From there he went on to be the head of music at Palo Alto Boys’ Military Academy in California. After a brief stint in Prescott, Arizona, he became the band director at Sparks Junior and High School in Reno, Nevada, in 1948.²³ He eventually returned to Galveston, Texas, where he died at age 96 in 1987.²⁴

Raoul Dhossche (pronounced “Dough-shay”) replaced Cloud as the second and final Magnolia Band director and transformed the musical education of Beaumont’s citizenry for a generation of students. He was a trained flutist born in France with a degree in music from the Royal Conservatory

of Ghent (Belgium).²⁵ He immigrated to the United States in time to serve as the director of the Army’s 12th Cavalry Band during World War I, and he spent time as a freelance musician in New York City after his discharge.²⁶ He began as an assistant conductor alongside Cloud in October 1926. His first (and perhaps only) “Band News” column as director of the ensemble appeared “translated from the French” in the January 1927 issue of the *Magpetco*.²⁷ In spite of his initially limited English, his skill as a band director seems to have improved the ensemble’s quality during its final years even as references to the band declined in corporate publications.

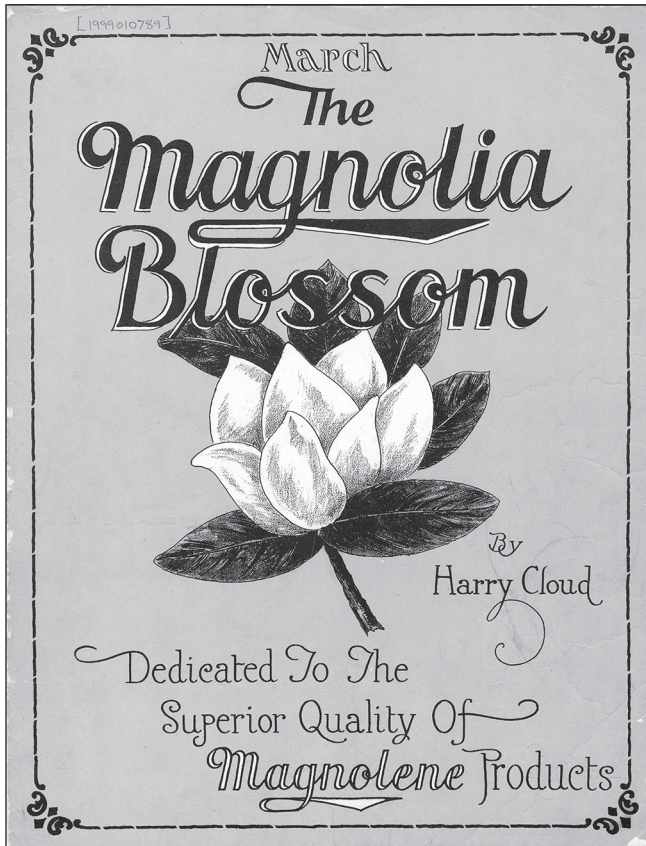
Repertoire and Compositions

The Magnolia Band’s concerts presented a mixture of marches and classical arrangements, largely following the precedent set by Sousa’s Band and typical of most band concerts during the first two decades of the century. The earliest program published for the group was for a May 1923 concert at Wiess Park in Beaumont. Included was a march by Harry Lincoln, Karl L. King’s overture *The Princess of India*, a saxophone solo by Wiedoeft played by Cloud, and a xylophone solo. The trombone section was apparently good enough to be featured with two trombone “smears,” Henry Filmore’s famous “Lassus Trombone,” and Will Kiefer’s “Raggy Trombone.”²⁸ The overture to Antônio Carlos Gomes’s opera *Il Guarany* was an unusual selection for a December 1923 concert. Lighter operetta fare frequently appeared as their classical selections. The April 1924 performance of A. M. Laurens’s (a pseudonym for C. L. Barnhouse) *Sky Pilot Overture* follows in that same trend. Marches by Sousa and King appeared frequently, as did foxtrots and other modern dances, together with solo features typical of the band repertoire of the day.

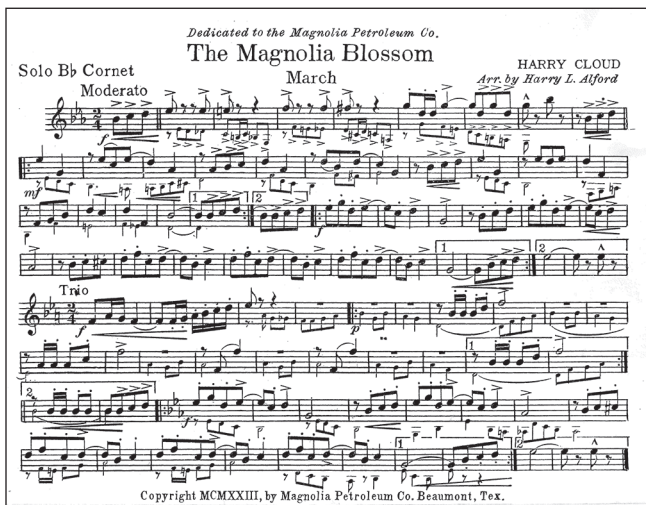
Any band worth its salt in this era had a theme march that was composed specifically for them and that would be played at least once at every concert. The Magnolia Band’s *Magnolia Blossom*, written by their director Harry Cloud, served this purpose. The march is interesting on more than one account. In the first place it was actually published both for piano and as a full band arrangement by the company (see figures 4a and 4b). Note how Magnolia held the copyright and not a music publishing house (as would have been expected otherwise). The printing runs of both must have been exceedingly small, and apparently only one copy of all the compositions presented in this paper made it into a library collection.

The *Magnolia Blossom* itself is a well-written march, especially so considering Cloud was a dentist by trade. One distinct feature of the march is that the trio section modulates up a fifth to the dominant instead of down a fifth to the subdominant (see figure 4b). It likely was a simple mistake

Figure 4: Published versions of Harry Cloud's *Magnolia Blossom*, the signature march of the Magnolia Band.



a) The cover to the published piano version. Courtesy of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Collection at Texas A&M University-San Antonio.



b) The Solo Cornet part (also used by the conductor) of the full band arrangement made by Alford.

on Cloud's part given that it was his first composition and he was not trained as a composer, but the resulting composition is thus very unusual. Another oddity is the return to the tonic in the final strain, whereas marches typically end in the subdominant.²⁹ The syncopations in the second strain are a typical ragtime feature of many 1920s-era marches, while the dogfight-like introduction and woodwind-dominated trio are idiomatic. Regardless, it is the only march this author is aware of that does not modulate to the subdominant in the trio.

The band had two additional feature compositions in its repertoire: the *San Jacinto March* and *Magnolia Triumphal*. Joseph Ricci, conductor of the Beaumont City Band, wrote the *San Jacinto March* for the dedication of the San Jacinto Life Insurance Building, on August 15, 1923. A 15-story office with a four-faced 17-foot diameter clock, the structure remains a distinctive Beaumont landmark today. The march was published in piano arrangement (see figure 5) and was apparently included in Magnolia Band concerts from time to time. Written in a lilting 6/8 meter à la Sousa's *Washington Post*, Ricci's harmonically adventurous piece starts with an introduction in A minor and a first strain in A major before



Figure 5: Cover of the piano edition of Joseph Ricci's *San Jacinto March* (1923). Courtesy of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Collection at Texas A&M University-San Antonio.

using a common-tone modulation to move directly to C major for the second strain that heads to F major in the following third strain. As part of his usual effort to promote ticket sales, Sousa agreed to include both this march and the *Magnolia Blossom* on the Sousa Band's evening program in Beaumont.³⁰

Harry Cloud's second foray into the world of march composition was the *Magnolia Triumphal*. Written sometime in early September 1924, it was apparently intended as a follow-up to the *Magnolia Blossom*, though it does not seem to have ever replaced that work as the band's standard-bearer.³¹ A 6/8 march in F major, Cloud dedicated it to the band itself instead of the corporation. Cloud goes to the correct key (B-flat) for the trio, and the march itself is markedly more amateurish than the *Magnolia Blossom* in terms of both melodic interest and harmonic simplicity. The published piano part includes a photo of the band on the cover instead of the company logo. While the *Magnolia Blossom* included an advertisement for Magnolene (Magnolia's trademark name for its refined oil) on its inside cover, the *Magnolia Triumphal* includes overt marketing or additional text.³² It does not seem that the band arrangement of the *Magnolia Triumphal* was ever published, and it was in all likelihood played from hand-copied parts.

The band's second director, R. A. Dhossche, does not seem to have followed Cloud's lead in composing material for the band, although the remote possibility exists that he may have written things now lost that were never mentioned in the newsletters or programs.³³ His only extant published composition—*Invocation* (1949), a trombone solo—dates to a much later era, while an undated manuscript of a "Graduation March" by him is still extant as well. The choice of a trombone for the solo is a curious one, given that he played the flute and both his wife and eldest son Victor played piano.³⁴

Travels and Broadcasts

The Magnolia Band's founding coincided with the growing importance of radio broadcasting, and while recorded radio transmissions would quickly lead to the decline of professional and industrial bands in the early 1930s, for the majority of the 1920s the Magnolia Petroleum Company's interest in both bands and radio created an immediate and successful partnership. In fact, many industrial bands, especially in the Northeastern United States, played regular live concerts on their company's AM radio station in the 1920s. For the Magnolia Band, based as it was in remote Texas, the radio provided an opportunity to garner praise from throughout the United States without the band ever stepping foot outside of Texas. The corporation also gained public appreciation and free advertisement through frequent write-in contests for the most distant listener.

The band made its first trip outside of Beaumont in October 1923 to present a concert at Magnolia's corporate headquarters

in Dallas and to play at the company's booth at the Texas State Fair. Thousands heard the band play over the course of the fair, and more still heard the band play on WFAA, a new clear-channel AM radio station owned and operated by the *Dallas Morning News*. A write-in contest offering five or ten gallons of Magnolene oil and the sheet music to Harry Cloud's *Magnolia Blossom* was won by a man in Lacombe, Alberta, who wrote, "Hoping to hear more concerts from WFAA by your band because it was sure enjoyed."³⁵ In total over 1,000 letters were received from 44 of the 48 states, as well as other locations in Canada and Mexico.

The band returned to Dallas two more times in close succession in December 1923 and April 1924. They performed for the company Christmas party at the Magnolia Club in December and for the Salesmanship Club and Lions Club of Dallas.³⁶ The Magnolia executives were so impressed by the quality of the band and the promotional value in the radio station contest that they soon thereafter organized a Dallas-based Magnolia Band of their own (discussed below).³⁷

On October 21, 1924, a year after their radio debut on WFAA, the Magnolia Band made local radio history by playing for the inaugural broadcast of Beaumont's first AM radio station, KFDM. The station was directly owned by Magnolia Petroleum, and its call sign abbreviated its motto "Kall For Dependable Magnolene." The band received its introduction from station announcer John W. Newton with the words "and now to the music of the Magnolia Band and Dr. Harry Cloud. Oil right, doctor."³⁸ The band quickly became a staple on the station, transmitting weekly concerts to the listeners in the region for the remainder of the decade.

The band's successes on WFAA and KFDM led to the occasional high-power retransmission of their concerts from Beaumont. A New Year's Day 1924 broadcast made use of the petroleum company's 391-mile-long private telephone line to Dallas for another write-in contest.³⁹ The company received 1,788 letters from nearly every state and much of Canada and Mexico.⁴⁰ This time a listener from Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories, nearly 3,000 miles away, won the contest for most distant listener. An orchestra director from Akron, Ohio, requested a copy of the "beautiful" *Magnolia Blossom* so that he could play it. A listener from Salida, Colorado, wrote, "your band is the best we ever heard over Radio." H. R. Seiter, director of the Tracy, Minnesota-based "Ladies' Tam-O-Shanter Band," wrote a lengthy letter expressing appreciation to Cloud for his "furthering of GOOD MUSIC [sic]" and the "success" of his "very pretty" *Magnolia Blossom*. Corporate publications make occasional mention of additional retransmissions on WFAA in the years that followed.

The band never undertook a national tour; however, they made annual tours of East Texas and Western Louisiana beginning in fall 1925, as well as occasional tours to other areas of Texas.⁴¹ The impetus behind the regular annual tours was to represent the refinery at the Louisiana State Fair in Shreveport each year for “Gas and Oil Day.” Although their first trip took only 33 hours from departure to return, the band somehow managed to perform short concerts in towns that they passed through as a gesture of goodwill. A member of the corporate “trade trippers” that accompanied the band mentioned that he stopped counting how many times the band played once he reached 100. By 1927 the tour was lengthened to three days to allow for more goodwill performances.

Magnolia-affiliated band in Dallas, though it had substantial differences from the Beaumont original.

After their successful trips to Dallas in late 1923 and early 1924, corporate executives at the headquarters in Dallas decided that they needed to create an ensemble of their own. A. J. Balcom assisted in forming the Magnolia Dallas Band, as it was initially known, which was directed by Paul E. Ashley and followed the model of the Beaumont ensemble closely in instrumentation and uniforms.⁴⁴ It also followed the Beaumont ensemble’s lead by broadcasting regular hour-long concerts on WFAA. The original makeup of the band was employees working in Dallas. However, these were white-collar office workers as opposed to their working-class brethren in

In towns like Beaumont, where residents had little access to classical music in live performance, bands served exactly this [educational] function and were seen as a way for the area to make up for the deficiency of cultural opportunities available in larger cities like Houston and Dallas.

For all the impact that the band had nationwide on the radio and in Dallas, the ensemble in the end was largely a local endeavor ostensibly directed at enhancing the cultural life of Magnolia’s employees and Beaumont’s citizenry. A letter of appreciation from the Beaumont Chamber of Commerce from fall 1924 notes how grateful the residents were for evening concerts in Magnolia Park: “Please be assured that the efforts of the Magnolia Petroleum Company in this direction furnishing to the public this recreational and educational entertainment is greatly appreciated by all.”⁴² Notice the “educational” reference. Bands at the time were seen as an extension of public cultural education, and Sousa in particular had been very vocal about how his performances presented “high class” classical works in juxtaposition with popular tunes and marches in such a way as to promote a better sense of culture among the population.⁴³ In towns like Beaumont, where residents had little access to classical music in live performance, bands served exactly this function and were seen as a way for the area to make up for the deficiency of cultural opportunities available in larger cities like Houston and Dallas.

Sister Bands and Offspring

The Magnolia Band was not a pioneer in the industrial band movement, except in Texas and regionally. However, their stature in Texas and their affiliation with big oil ended up inspiring several imitators. The most noteworthy of these was a

Beaumont. Individual employees made contributions as their skills permitted; the band’s drumhead was painted by Ned Davis, an engineer who did not actually play in the band.⁴⁵

As a director, Ashley had much different tastes in music than Cloud, and within a short time the Dallas band concerts featured trendier pieces over marches and classical arrangements. Within a few years it appears to have evolved into more of a dance band, even donning tuxedos instead of military-style uniforms. The change was likely one of utility and local needs; Dallas’s ritzy Magnolia Club (on the corner of McKinney Avenue and Harwood Street) needed an ensemble to match it for company events.

The first and only corporate-level mention of the Magnolia Olden Band, of Olden, Texas, appeared in the November 1929 issue of the *Magnolia Oil News*. E. M. Lindsey conducted the band of nearly forty members. It is unclear why the Olden ensemble received so little press in the Magnolia newsletters. It was not favorably located geographically, and their facilities were not as crucial to the company as Beaumont’s large refinery. Either way, its establishment just prior to the Great Depression, which ultimately claimed all the Magnolia Bands, meant that the ensemble was doomed to a short existence.

The Beaumont band also inspired local imitators. Petroleum Iron Works (a Beaumont shipyard eventually purchased by Bethlehem Steel) formed a band of its own at some point in

the mid-1920s.⁴⁶ This band might have been forgotten were it not for director, Everett Robert James, and his famous son, trumpeter and big band leader Harry James. Dhossche later recalled hiring the boy of 11 or 12 to play with the Magnolia Band as a ringer for their radio broadcasts at a rate of \$1 per concert.⁴⁷ Dhossche ended up being James's high school band director.

Decline and Disbandment

The 1928–29 concert season was marred by Black Tuesday in October and the onset of the Great Depression. In spite of the reassuring tone of the *Magnolia Oil News* regarding the company's finances, the Great Depression undoubtedly forced Magnolia Petroleum to reduce their association with the band, to the point where the Beaumont Music Commission took on at least some financial responsibility for the group.⁴⁸ By switching to at least partial municipal sponsorship, Dhossche and his bandsmen followed the precedents set by King's Fort Dodge Municipal Band and Herbert L. Clarke's Long Beach Municipal Band. The change was undoubtedly coupled with a severe budget cut, and clearly Depression-era Beaumont lacked the financial means to take on the Magnolia Band as a new expenditure. While lunchtime concerts continued along with the annual trip through Eastern Texas and Western Louisiana, Magnolia's corporate publications referred less and less to the ensemble even as those references became more and more nostalgic in tone. Dhossche now shared his time between the Magnolia Band, the Beaumont Symphony Orchestra, and Beaumont High School. The band still managed to travel to Galveston for a concert in March 1930 and on a May 1930 tour through Dallas to Abilene, likely their final tour.⁴⁹ By the summer of 1931 the band seems to have been relegated to local performances in Beaumont even as Dhossche's commitments to Beaumont High School increased.

Details of the band's activities from 1931 on are difficult to find, as the refinery discontinued their *Magpetco* newsletter at about the same time, also apparently for financial reasons. The corporate structure changed as well, as cutbacks in the *Magnolia Oil News* connected with Socony's (Magnolia's parent

corporation) merger with Vacuum Oil (based in New York state), relegated the Magnolia subsidiary to a very small piece of a new nationwide corporation. The last datable performance of the group that could be located was for the dedication of the Jefferson County Courthouse on January 17, 1932, at which they only played the national and Texas state anthems.⁵⁰ A short blurb in the newspaper flatly mentioned that the band's "dissolution has been announced" with the remark that their radio programs had very little advertising, that their programs were high-quality band music for those who possessed a "little higher level of musical intelligence than that possessed by dance-made flappers," and that the "depression casualty . . . is much to be regretted."⁵¹

When the Magnolia Band finally disbanded without fanfare sometime in early 1932, Dhossche had already been working full-time at Beaumont High School for many years. He would continue there until 1938, when he accepted a position at San Antonio Technical High School. A tribute concert was played for him by his former students and colleagues on August 25, 1938 in Beaumont, honoring his thirteen years as a high-school band director in town and his six state championships, but only a very brief mention of his previous work for the Magnolia Band.⁵² He would, over the course of his career, be elected a member of the American Bandmasters Association as well as the Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame.

The ultimate demise of the Magnolia Band and the company's disinvestment in musical activities generally, together with Dhossche's transition to Beaumont High School, provides a telling moment in the history of the industrial band movement and the development of bands in the interwar era generally. Professional bands in the guise of the Sousa Band were no longer economically viable, and semi-professional industrial bands no longer had the corporate backing necessary to pay a trained director or core bandsmen. In need of a steady paycheck and already invested in their local communities, these professionals persevered to form high school and collegiate bands in cities and towns across the nation, and in the process transformed the American music education system into the band-centric shape that they still have to the present. ★

Notes

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Magnolia Oil News, for which I am also grateful. Finally, Renee Dhossche-Blaschke, the daughter of the second director of the Magnolia Band, R. A. Dhossche, was also very helpful and communicative with information on her father and his time with the band.

- 1 A catalog of industrial bands with brief notes on many of them appears in Kenneth S. Clark, *Music in Industry* (New York City: National Bureau for the Advancement of Music, 1929).
- 2 James T. Madeja, "The Anglo-Canadian Concert Band: A Unique Episode in the History of the Band Movement in North America,"

- Journal of Band Research* 26, no. 1 (1990): 1–13; Joseph Resendes, “Herbert L. Clarke and the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company Band,” *Canadian Winds* 16, no. 1 (2017): 37–40; Ed Terziano, *The Little Town Band That Grew and Grew* (Huntsville, ON: Forester Press, 1986).
- 3 From the report filed by the band’s director, Harry Philp, as recorded in Clark, *Music in Industry*, 283.
 - 4 A recording of Simon discussing the founding of the ARMCO Band and his time there was issued on LP under the title of *Salute to the ARMCO Band*. It can be found online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK6wmtxurM0>. For a detailed study of the ensemble see Christopher L. Chaffee, “Music as Advertising: The Story of the ARMCO Band,” DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, College Conservatory of Music. 2003.
 - 5 Clark, *Music in Industry*, 5–7.
 - 6 Sources in this paragraph and the next for Sousa’s performance are taken variously from: “John Philip Sousa Directs Magnolia Band,” *Magpetco*, February 1924, 9–11 and “John Philip Sousa to Lead Magnolia Band at Noonday Concert at Oil Refinery,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 22, 1924, 1 and 9.
 - 7 Images from “John Philip Sousa Directs Magnolia Band,” *Magpetco*, February 1924, 10–11. The original photos/negatives are no longer extant. Special thanks to the Tyrrell Historical Library in Beaumont, Texas, for scanning the publication.
 - 8 “L. K. [sic] King Compliments the Magnolia Band,” *Magnolia Oil News*, November 1924, 13. Note the reversal of Karl L. King’s initials, repeated in the text of the news release. Unfortunately, the “unsolicited letter” itself is not extant.
 - 9 Cloud’s educational background is unknown, but he does not seem to have gone to dental school. According to the 1920 US Census he was working as a “dental stenographer” in Houston when Magnolia hired him. Under “occupation” for his 1917 World War I registration card, however, he wrote “musician.” His obituary (“Harry Cloud,” *Galveston Daily News*, August 28, 1987) listed him as a veteran of bands in both the US Army and Marines. I have not been able to corroborate that he was ever in the Marines; if he was, it would have been in the 1930s given I have not been able to find records for his activities in that decade.
 - 10 See for example “Our Dance,” *Magpetco* (April 1921), 18, regarding a dance in which music was provided by the “Victor Novelty Jazz Band” and not the Magnolia Orchestra.
 - 11 Harry Cloud, “Dental Dope,” *Magpetco* (April 1921), 24. A joke he told is recorded in “Personal Not Private,” *Magpetco* (October 1921), 23: “My hair is looking beautiful since I begun [sic] brushing it once a day. It stands up so nice and straight—just like a porcupine’s bristles.” “Dr. Harry Cloud Leaves on Vacation” *Magpetco* (August 1923), 29 also makes an oblique reference to his attempts to tell “funny stories” to the local Green Grass Club.
 - 12 “Magnolia Smoker Furnishes a Delightful Evening for Employees,” *Magpetco* (December 1921), 10. “Monthly smokers” seems to have been 1920s-era slang for an evening community social gathering.
 - 13 *Magpetco* (March 1922), 12. There are two pages of photos, showing the band seated on park benches in working clothes playing for a substantial crowd of predominantly male refinery workers in a small park near the refinery’s office building without a bandstand (as they later would have).
 - 14 “The Power of Music,” *Magpetco* (May 1922), 4–5.
 - 15 “Let Your Boy Learn Music,” *Magpetco* (June 1922), 4.
 - 16 “The Band” *Magpetco* (February 1923), 14.
 - 17 “Saxophone Sextet Organized,” *Magpetco* (April 1924), 17.
 - 18 “Magnolia Band Makes a Hit with Texas Rotarians,” *Magpetco* (April 1923), 22.
 - 19 Image from *Magpetco* (December 1923), 14. The original photos/negatives are no longer extant. Special thanks to the Tyrrell Historical Library in Beaumont, Texas, for scanning the publication.
 - 20 “The Cartoonist Sees Our Band,” *Magpetco*, February 1924, 52–53.
 - 21 The 1929 list of bandsmen accompanies their photo in the *Magnolia Oil News*, November 1929, 12.
 - 22 *Bryan Daily Eagle*, May 24, 1929.
 - 23 “Sparks Names Music Teacher,” *Nevada State Journal* (September 29, 1943), 7. This source briefly gives information about his time in Palo Alto. His residence in Arizona comes from his World War II registration card (1942).
 - 24 “Harry Cloud,” *Galveston Daily News* (August 28, 1987), 4.
 - 25 The information presented on Dhossche is gleaned from his biography as printed in “Two Fall Faculty Members Elected,” *Sul Ross Skyline* (June 12, 1940), 1; correspondence with his daughter Renee Dhossche-Blaschke; and his formal biography for his induction into the Texas Bandmasters’ Hall of Fame: https://www.pbmalph.org/pbmhalloffamebio.php?HOF_Number=117. Note that his website bio, written by Blaschke in 1997, has a number of inaccuracies dealing with his life through 1940 corrected here based on newspaper sources from the period.
 - 26 Dhossche’s daughter (interview with the author) noted with pride that he was a well-respected flutist in New York City who played with a variety of ensembles, including the Metropolitan Opera.
 - 27 “Band News,” *Magpetco* (January 1927), 25.
 - 28 “Magnolia Band Plays Concert at Wiess Park,” *Magpetco* (June 1923), 10.
 - 29 Marches ended in tonic in earlier decades when a *da capo* repetition was used, but this practice was long since ended by the 1920s.
 - 30 The use of local works and ensembles was typical of Sousa, who saw it as an effective way to promote ticket sales and his public image. “Sousa Will Play San Jacinto March,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 20, 1924, 8; “Sousa Band Draws Crowd,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 23, 1924, 2.
 - 31 Various newspapers reported on the march as “newly composed”: *Vernon Record* (September 23, 1924) and *McKinney Courier-Gazette* (September 30, 1924).
 - 32 It does not have a copyright listing or place of publication listed at all, let alone for Magnolia Petroleum, for instance. Similarly the inside cover does not include a blurb about Magnolia products as was the case for the *Magnolia Blossom*.
 - 33 In an interview his daughter noted that she had in her possession a couple of his compositions, but was unable to locate them for examination.
 - 34 The family played public recitals on occasion both in Beaumont and while they lived in San Antonio. A report on a 1937 recital in Lubbock, where Dhossche participated as an instructor for summer band camps, can be found in the *Lubbock Sunday Avalanche Journal* (June 13, 1937).
 - 35 “Radio Broadcasting,” *Magnolia Oil News* (January 1924), 7; “Our Band Broadcasts Again,” *Magpetco*, January 1924, 5. The two sources differ on the total quantity of lubricant offered in the contest.
 - 36 “The Magnolia Club of Dallas Entertained by the Magnolia Artists of Beaumont,” *Magpetco*, December 1923, 27–8; *Magnolia Oil News*, May 1924, 29–30.
 - 37 A photo of the band playing at the Texas State Fair appeared in the December 1923 issue of the *Magnolia Oil News*, 4.
 - 38 “Magnolia—KFDM was Pioneer in Field of Radio,” *Beaumont Sunday Enterprise*, ca. October 1955 (exact date unknown, taken from a clipping held at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, ExxonMobil Archive Box 2.207/E89, Folder 3). Additional articles on the transmission are in the *Magnolia Oil News*, November 1924, 11.
 - 39 “Our Band Broadcasts Again,” *Magpetco*, January 1924, 5.
 - 40 “Where Our ‘Broadcast’ New Year’s Night was Received,” *Magpetco*, January 1924, 22–25.
 - 41 “Magnolia Band Goes to Louisiana State Fair,” *Magnolia Oil News*, December 1925, 10.
 - 42 “People of Beaumont Appreciate Magnolia Band,” *Magnolia Oil News*, September 1924, 11.
 - 43 Their radio concerts were similar in repertoire choices, and a listener in Guatemala wrote in appreciatively that the music “had some class to it, no jazz.” *Magnolia Oil News*, June 1925, 20.

- 44 The Dallas band was featured prominently and regularly in the monthly *Magnolia Oil News* beginning in 1925, undoubtedly because this publication was a company-wide newsletter published in Dallas. The *Magpetco* was the local newsletter published in Beaumont for refinery employees.
- 45 *Magnolia Oil News*, March 1925, 6.
- 46 W. Brock Brentlinger, "The Contribution of the Fine Arts to the Culture of Beaumont (1860–1930)," *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record* 11 and 12 (1981–82), vol. 12, 26.
- 47 *San Antonio Light* (April 16, 1948), 1.
- 48 Brentlinger, "Contribution of Beaumont (1860–1930)," vol. 12, 26.
- 49 "Stirring Music of Band Draws Large Crowd to Concert," *Galveston Daily News* (March 3, 1930), 1 and 3; "Magnolia Refinery Band Makes Big Hit in Dallas and Abilene," *Magnolia Oil News*, July 1930, 5.
- 50 "Dedication of Courthouse Is Set Today," *Port Arthur News* (January 17, 1932), 1.
- 51 These quotes are from clippings in Renee Dhossche-Blashke's scrapbook entitled "The Magnolia Band;" unfortunately there is no date or place of publication attached to it. The last mention of the band in the present tense in corporate publications is to lunchtime concerts in "Magnolia's Beaumont Refinery," *Magnolia Oil News* (August 1931), 17–20. There are newspaper references in June 1931 (*Galveston Daily News*, June 7, 1931, page 10) about attempting to have the band play for the opening of a new bridge across the Sabine River, but no indication that the group actually played for the event could be found.
- 52 "Band to Play: Farewell Dhossche Concert Is Set Tonight," *Port Arthur News* (August 25, 1938), 9.