

## Theodore Steinmetz

Nominated by the North Wood County Historical Society

Theodore A. Steinmetz was famous throughout the state and regarded as the father of the Red Arrow Division Band. He had organized the band and carried it through two wars for this country. Even when he had long been gone from the city, he was still proudly proclaimed as a son of Marshfield.

Theodore Steinmetz, better known as Steinie, was born in Marshfield on December 22, 1880, the son of Michael and Anna (Doll) Steinmetz. Helping at his father's mercantile store on the corner of Central and Arnold Street (site of today's St. Vincent DePaul Thrift Store), young Steinmetz witnessed, and helped shape, some of Marshfield's early growth and development.



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Steinmetz began his musical career at an early age. When Ferdinand Hirzy organized a Marshfield Juvenile Band in May 1891, Steinmetz joined. He played the cornet. Likewise, he was a member of the Badger State Band when it formed in 1895. When the band mustered into the Wisconsin National Guard as the Second Regiment Band on July 6, 1899, young Steinmetz' name was among those who first enlisted.

He remained with the band until May 1903 when the talented young musician secured a place in the Military Academy Band at West Point. The academy band then was composed of between 50 and 60 pieces with an orchestra of about the same number. Steinmetz played clarinet in the band, and violin in the orchestra. Finding the academy not what he expected it would be, Steinmetz obtained a discharge and returned to Marshfield later that year.

Back home in October, Steinmetz resumed his work in the Second Regiment Band and Orchestra. He played clarinet in the band, and harp in the orchestra. The following year, Steinmetz, then only 24 years old, was named the band's director.

That same year, Steinmetz organized a band comprised of local youngsters who practiced upstairs in the Steinmetz store. There were several objectives to the new group, not the least of which was to furnish graduates for the Second Regiment Band. Another was to develop youthful talent and build up a second band that might furnish musical entertainment for public celebrations, fairs and other events where two bands might be needed.

Two years later, Steinmetz and fellow musician Albert Paulson applied for a patent on a new idea which would revolutionize the manufacture of cornets and similar valve instruments. The cornet at that time had fourteen turns to the tubing. The new design did away with all but three turns and at the same time improved the tone, made it less of an effort to play, and simplified the valve action. Competition from a leading instrument firm brought an end to this venture, and Steinie's talent was again devoted to composing and directing the band.

In 1915, under the supervision of Steinmetz, a Boy Scout Band composed of thirty-three members was organized in town, allowing Marshfield to boast of the only such band in Wisconsin. The January 27, 1915, Marshfield Times, reported, "The Band is to be known as the 'Wisconsin State Boy Scout Band.' It is the first band of its kind to be organized in the state, there being only five others of a similar nature in the United States at the present time."

Steinmetz's responsibilities as director of the Second regiment band led him into extensive military service starting in 1916. When the Mexico border trouble arose that year, the band and its director accompanied the Second Regiment to the Nation's southern border.

Upon America's entry into World War I the unit became part of the 127th Regiment of the 32nd Division and trained at Waco, Texas in 1917, preparing for duty overseas. Steinie's inspiration for the "32nd Division March" came there when he saw two teams composed of men from Wisconsin and Michigan in action on the gridiron. Designed to give the Red Arrow Division a march which would rally them on common ground, the march contains strains from both "On Wisconsin" and "Michigan, My Michigan."

The division went overseas and gained fame as "Les Terribles" for its combat record against the Germans. While in France, Steinmetz composed another march, "Lafayette, We Are Here." It was Steinie's band which led the division across the Rhine and into defeated Germany to the tune of "Ach, du Lieber Augustine."

When the war ended, the director returned to Marshfield, but did not take up the baton for the local musical organization. Instead, he went to Eau Claire, where he became bandmaster of the 105th Cavalry Band. While generally active in military bands, he concentrated on giving musical training to youngsters, and in the process organized two of the largest boys' bands in the world one at Ashland which numbered 256 pieces, and another at St. Cloud. which boasted 422 children.

He also served at Park Falls, Hartford, and Memphis, and before retiring to the Wisconsin Veteran's Home at King, he led four bands at Portage.

Among Steinmetz' marches is "America on Guard," official march of the Wisconsin Bandmasters Association. In celebration of Wisconsin's 100th anniversary in 1948, Steinie's '32nd Division March" was chosen by the Centennial Committee on Music as one of the ten "Wisconsin Songs That Live."

Steinie's last public appearance in Marshfield was in the Spring of 1951 when he appeared at the annual Military Banquet held at the Armory to lead the Civil Air Patrol Band in the "32nd Division March."

Theodore Steinmetz died on October 7, 1951, at King, Waupaca County, but his music lives on through his compositions, and Marshfield's rich tradition of "Concerts in the Park."