[tape slipping]

Side 1, November 21, 1974

EO: . . . a couple of things we had discussed, I asked you earlier about why, why it seems that the ancient corps down in the Bridgeport area were of such a high caliber.

AK: It was because I. I figure they were of such high caliber because they had such good drummers down there or rudimentally drummers such as Eddie Dempsey, broke out in later years, we broke out with Sanders meeting with him and playing Bob Saunders with them occasionally, and then the type of Jimmy Gomperts, Art Church, and some of the better drummers in Bridgeport that we know of that they swung over to ancient because they were rudimental drummers, and the rudimental drummers at that time were no good for modern corps. So I think that the ancient, the ancient style reflects back to the good drummers they produce in Bridgeport.

EO: You think that--

TK: After Ed Dempsey.

EO: You think that relates also to the fact, as a reason that they such good fifers down there?

TK: Well, I think the fifers come after the drummers because I don't think the fifers were there unless they had the background of drums. I think the drums come first and then the fifers come in the picture.

EO: That might well be the difference between ancient and nonancient corps anyway.

TK: Yes.

EO: The position of the drum in the corps. Now, I also asked on the tape that went out about how you first became interested in ancients, and you said it was through your contact with Mattatuck.

TK: The contact with Mattatuck Drum Corps was made through the director, Charlie Miller, on account of some research they were having on the brass mills of Waterbury, and he was a blacksmith for some of the older brass mills, and he knew I was interested in researching. I'd help him out, and he helped me out, and even to this date I can say to you, Ed, our research is still going on today, I can truthfully say to you that we've accomplished more in the last month of research on Wilcox than he did in sixty years when he looked for his grave from anywheres from the Long Island Sound to Brattleboro, Vermont, or Bennington. He could never locate his grave, now we've located it.

EO: Tell me a little more of Charlie Miller.

TK: He was a blacksmith by trade, a handyman, blacksmith by trade, and he worked for the silver shop for years, and he later went to work for American Brass Company, and he worked for both these people, and he helped to build the old corduroy road that brought the wood into the brass mills in Waterbury, and he was repairing their wagons. That's how he was working at the brass companies, bringing all their wood for the furnaces when they had the [unintelligible] they used to anneal their brass with wood, and Charlie used to repair the wagons. And that's the name in Waterbury, Plank Road was a corduroy road made with the trees and planks to bring the lumber in from the east end of East Farms and so on, from Cheshire and East Farms he used to bring the lumber in, he used to repair the wagons. He being a blacksmith, he used to fix the wagons, so he knew a lot about the brass business. And that is where the research came into the picture, the brass mills.

EO: He was evidently quite a character from what I hear about him, colloquially.

TK: Oh, boy, he was a, he was a pip, he was. He was twice as thick and twice as many, in other words, he either liked you or he didn't like you. He'd give you his shirt if he liked you, if he didn't like you he'd disregard you. He'd have nothing to do with you. But, he made drummers in his day.

EO: Mmm.

TK: Because you see, he was the only-- to me, at my age, he was the only one that was really active with the Wolcott Drum Band which is a part, was a part of the Mattatuck Band. In other words, the Wolcott Band in those days reflects back to Revolutionary War days, when they had the regimental drum corps and they were in the king's militia at the time. If I'm not wrong in saying that they were in the Third Army of the Revolution, and in the king's militia. And then when they were in the king's militia, they formed, they got away from the regimental drum corps and started the Wolcott Drum Band. As the Wolcott Drum band reflected down to fellows that I knew, the drummers at that time, Art Harrison and Charlie Temple, and Charlie Miller were pals all their life, and they branched in and continued it when Waterbury changed their name to Mattatuck, they picked up the name Mattatuck instead of Wolcott, because Wolcott and Waterbury and the surrounding territory were part of Farmingbury Parish that Hooker left Boston for Plymouth and came down through the Farmington and settled in Farmington, and some settlers broke away from Farmington and came to Wolcott, there was no Waterbury at that time, and when the Indians called us Mattatuck then they changed their name to the Mattatuck from the Wolcott Drum Band. He was one of the ones, he was one of the ones that picked up by rote now, not by note, by rote, in other words, "rote" means "from father to son." And he, the ones that took lessons in the Wolcott Drum Band which we can't locate who they were, but they either, we say, either went over to take lessons from Wilcox in

Cromwell, and when the drum corps from Moodus claims that they had their own style and nobody could copy it, I can still show you in black-and-white that Percival, one of the beginners of the Moodus Drum Corps--

EO: Hezekiah Percival.

TK: --he took lessons or went to--we don't think the same Wilcox left Cromwell, you had to go to him for lessons. Well, the Moodus and the Mattatuck at the same time.

EO: Who taught Miller, Levi Atkins, wasn't he Miller's--

TK: Well, Atkins was one of the older ones, from the old days. He before my time.

EO: I've often heard a lot of stories about him. I guess he was quite a colorful old guy.

TK: Well, one of the last things he did when he, when he couldn't be active in the drum corps, the last things he did, he said to me that I wish I would impress upon the boys that if they would stop drinking their damn beer, I'd buy 'em a coffee urn.

EO: [chuckle]

TK: He wasn't a prohibitionist where you did dry--

EO: He wasn't dry. [chuckle]--

TK: He was a dry, he was on the dry side.

EO: So that's kind of unique. He and you are two drys I heard about on the same day which isn't good. There aren't too many around. [chuckle] Were there many ancients in the Meriden area?

TK: The younger element. I don't think there was too many old ones because if I can recall in my younger days, the Silver City was very, very active, and they were a modern corps, a modern drilling corps, and the nearest ancient that I knew of in Meriden was either Southington or Marion.

EO: There was something in Marion?

TK: Yeah, there was one in Marion, and there was one in Southington. And this Fox, Louvane Fox, that came to Mattatuck-- that was from Southington Drum Corps man.

EO: I see.

TK: And in my, my beginning of the days I can recall a corps in Southington that the name was Shanley's Advance.

EO: I've heard of them. Were they modern?

TK: Well, both. Both. They were both.

EO: There's a picture of Shanley in that.

TK: Yeah, he was the president of the Association for a little while. 1921. Gee, I was really active then in '21. Shanley's Advance from Southington, I remember them, but there was an ancient corps there, there was an ancient corps in Milldale.

EO: I have a picture of them.

TK: Yeah, Milldale. And there was the West Ends, West Ends, and then there was another drum corps.

EO: Where were the West Ends, in Southington?

TK: Meriden. Meriden. They were more modern than ancient. But there was one corps over there, I can't recall their name now, but there was another corps over there. Can't think of their name, there was a corps over there that played ancient, they were the younger element. They were--it was only a year since--after--First World War.

EO: A bunch of kids.

TK: Yeah, they were a bunch of kids.

EO: What were the old time New York corps like?

TK: In what way, Ed?

EO: Well, compared to the style of playing up in Connecticut, say. What, what interested you most when you went down and saw some New York or Jersey corps in contests. Did they impress you as being different, or being as good, or--

TK: No, I think over the years we always produced better drum corps than Jersey did. I really think so. Although you know that when you say "good" you figure they were either a flash in the pan because some New Jersey corps are still going.

EO: I know, I know.

TK: So, they got to be good to continue or they wouldn't have no drum corps.

EO: Well, I didn't mean-- I really didn't mean good as far as playing, but were they interesting in any way, anything stick out in your memory about any of these corps. You know, the style of playing, the tunes they played, or the type of instruments, the type of uniforms.

TK: No, I think the Jersey corps and the martial music in the Unions, they were all modern. They were all modern.

EO: Did you hear any of the Jersey corps use quicksteps at all in the fife?

TK: Yes, the, the Fifth. The Ex-Fifth of Patterson always used jigs and quicksteps, although they had bugles and they played in unison with bugles, but they were the only drum corps in their day that I know that played, that played B flat fifes with standard bugles, and that meant playing in four sharps, and they could play.

EO: They were a very good corps, then.

TK: Very, exceptionally good corps, very exceptionally good corps. And enough to play off with as far as the world championship.

EO: Who was "us," which corps are we talking about.

TK: The Loyal Order of Moose in Waterbury. The Loyal Order of Moose in Waterbury.

EO: When was the contest?

TK: Date I wouldn't even remember.

EO: Well, where was it held, then.

TK: Dexter Park in Brooklyn.

EO: In Brooklyn.

TK: Yeah, Dexter Park in Brooklyn.

EO: Who won? [chuckle]

TK: Everybody won in those days

[laughter]

EO: It's still the same, isn't it?

TK: [chuckle]

EO: Who ran the Dexter Park thing, the Reickert Post?

TK: I don't remember who it was, Ed, it's so far--

EO: Because I remember, I remember reading that Reickert Post sponsored a lot of contests

TK: Yeah, yeah.

EO: What were the--what were the contests down in New York like, were they, were they much the same as Connecticut or were the rules different?

TK: Yes. The New York State Association had rules that we had to live up to, when they came up here they had to live up to our rules. And there was always a lot of dissention about the rules, they wanted to play, because I found out that even New York, even today, has got the same idea, "we're it." But they were never "it" as far as I'm concerned, because I was from Connecticut.

RO: [chuckle]

AK: Although the [unintelligible] were all in New York, but I still say, under the circumstances, I'd say that they were "it" and we had the same thing, and they didn't add the other two words to it, [unintelligible] we were "it," too.

EO: Were the rules very much different than the Connecticut rules?

TK: Quite a bit, yeah. Some of the things that they did down there, being military, and being the stuff that they played, Ed, it seemed that you'd have to play not only your rudiments on your drum but you had to play scales on your fife which they never did here for years. They never had the elements of the music to go in the contest and produce. In other words, you'd have to play some of your, your fife music in your "Three Camps" before you could enter a contest in New York. Up here you never did. All you did was walk in and play and walk out. Now, down there you had to play part of your "Three Camps" as your judges picked, the same as your rudiments. You go to a contest up here and the drummers would be told that we draw this morning for the contest and it'll be, you'd have to play your single roll, you'll have to play your seven-stroke roll, and you'd have to play paradiddles before you could play your stand piece. They never did that in New York. But you'd have to, on the fife, you'd have to play your rudiments, in other words your "Three Camps."

EO: Mmmmm.

TK: Being military, in other words.

EO: Well, I think later on New York started to lean more towards the Connecticut style of--

TK: There's only one thing that I found out down there, that they always went by their book. And their book wasn't our book. Up here, Strube was the book up here. And their book down there was Bruce and Emmett.

EO: I wanted to ask you about that. New York used Bruce and Emmett in the old days.

TK: All the time.

EO: I read that in Doc, one of Doc [Weel's] articles.

TK: All the time.

EO: He said that in New York and New Jersey and Massachusetts used Bruce and Emmett--no, I think he said New York and Massachusetts used Bruce and Emmett, New Jersey and Connecticut used Strube's. How do you relate one to the other, did you find one was a better system to be judged by than the other?

TK: No, not necessarily. Everybody, everybody that I know of who has ever wrote music never wrote it the same. You see, now, most of your pieces you'll find out, most of your pieces and your rudiments you'll find out will start with the left hand and actually finish with the left hand. In a lot of pieces you'll find they start with the left hand and finish with the left hand. The idea, the idea of that is that no two writers wrote the same thing, and you, if you just went off on your flam, your accent or your flam, you want to go by the New York rules. You had to finish the way they wanted to finish, not the way you wanted to finish. So that was a lot of disagreement we had on that. The two systems were not the same.

EO: Mmm. This, this is the early days we're talking about.

TK: Yeah, the early days.

EO: I notice Fancher was down there quite often. He seemed to wend down there often, just about as many times as he wanted to appear. Judging from those articles in the *Fifer and Drummer*.

TK: Yeah.

EO: So, I guess he did very well regardless of where he went. How did, how did, how did the Strube book get so popular in Connecticut?

TK: Well, in the first place, the, some of the fellows here were taught the Strube system, and naturally they got so interested in it that they copied the book, and they paid a fellow by the name of Doyle, the printer, to make up the cuts and print the book at a cost to the Connecticut Association of about $3,000. So they figured that Strube was it, as long as they paid for it they were going to stay Strube.

EO: Do you remember any particularly good National Guard drum corps?

TK: Not too many, Ed, not too many. I'd say the National Guard drum corps, you remember the Fifth of Baltimore was a National Guard drum corps.

EO: Were they a good corps?

TK: They were a very good corps in their day, and naturally the Soistmans being in it, not only Buck, I mean--

EO: The whole family--

TK: --the father and the uncles were all Ex-Fifth and Fifth Regiment members.

EO: How about, how about the fifers?

TK: Not so hot. Even when they came up here we had to help them to play.

EO: Well, I remember when they come up, you're not referring, you referring to the time they come up to the Foot Guard?

TK: The Centennial, yeah, the Centennial. Here comes the Foot Guard, and the poor guys couldn't even play "My Maryland." The drummers could beat it, but the fifers, so that's the first time I met Buck, and he would say, "Shorty, would you please come over and help us to play. We're going to play our state song, 'My Maryland.'" [chuckle]

EO: I remember that time. He had, he told me--the information I have on a tape from Buck is that they used the Bruce and Emmett book, and the fifers fifed the whole book at 120, which is a pretty damn difficult thing to do.

TK: Yeah, it was fast, yes.

EO: And I was wondering if the fife line was really up to that in the old days.

TK: I can recall on one of the Centennial [Grays], [unintelligible] he was a National Guard drum corps, the Worcester Continentals was a National Guard drum corps, and the Fifth from Baltimore was a National Guard drum corps, and I met, one time met one

that had a band and a drum corps combined from Savannah, Georgia. We met them one time at Valley Forge, and these are the National Guard corps now. Nationally, I'd say VAC is still a National Guard drum corps as far as I'm concerned.

EO: VCA, yeah.

TK: They were, they were actually a National Guard fife and drum corps.

EO: Yeah, that's the style that Jack used to refer to as "regimental." I guess that's as good a term as any to describe it.

TK: Yeah, yeah.

EO: How about he GAR corps? How many of them do you remember?

TK: Not too many, but enough. Enough of GAR corps to say that some of the GAR drum corps were only composed of one drummer or one drummer two fifers, or two drummers and one fifer, that was about their limit in late years, because they couldn't march, but there wasn't too many of them around.

EO: You recall any of the old GAR men that had been good players? Any, any particular-

TK: No, no. No, none of 'em were good.

EO: What was the, did any of them used two-stick bass drums in the GAR?

TK: No, they didn't. They were only snare drum and fife.

EO: Just snare and fifes.

TK: There was no bass drum in there at all. Nationally, the corps had about twelve men. They had a bass drum, Ed, but when you get down to 2-3 men, they don't need a bass drum.

EO: In most of the areas of the country where there is still a little vestige of fifing and drumming, like out in the mid west, it seems as though the big influence had been the GAR. But I guess that probably--

TK: That's the only influence they had, the GAR.

EO: Yeah, it probably didn't make that much of influence here because of the fact that the fifing, the fifing and drumming had been going that long.

TK: Well, see, the fifing and drumming went out of the military after the Spanish, Spanish War. Then it went down hill. And then it was only, it was only because we had picked it up and pushed the thing along to pioneer it and keep it going. But, fife and drum corps as far as military was concerned when out of the picture during the Spanish-American War. And that's 1898.

EO: Yeah. So then, I'd, probably the GAR didn't have any influence on drum corps styles in Connecticut.

TK: No, not at all. Not that I know of. Never, never.

EO: What do you recall about New Haven and Branford area corps, corps like, well, you mentioned Montrose before, and Captain T with the treasury. Did you hear that? Do you know Captain T? He ran off with the Montrose treasury by about 1912. [chuckle]

TK: He's still director of the Foot Guard Band.

EO: Is that right? Yeah?

TK: Yeah, he's still the director of the Foot Guard band. But, as I say, we had, we had the Lancraft corps down to Quinnipiac, as they spoke about it the other night. They were down the Usher House. They used to have an old fish store, in other words, they used to practice at a fish store. But Lancraft, Montrose, the Irish-Americans of New Haven, and there was a Highland Heights School that was very good, and the Sturtze brothers, both of 'em, his brother taught at the Highland Heights School, and-

EO: How about Bunnell's? That's before your time, I'm sure.

TK: Bunnell's was before me.

EO: You must have heard about them.

TK: Oh yeah, sure. I heard a lot about 'em because I knew Alex Smith personally. Yeah, I knew of Bunnell's, but I never heard them play. Down in Branford, actually in North Branford, there's that corps that Redigan, Redigan Fulton and [ ]wolf Keneally played with the North Branford Drum Corps. They were ancient. They're the ones that won the world championship in drumming down in, group drumming in the World's Fair.

EO: How about the Short Beach corps? I have a picture of a junior corps at Short Beach at about the 20s, and they are all in civilian clothes.

TK: It's hard to say, because if I can recall, the fellow came to me at the time, used to run a-- he was in, I think it was Orange River, they used to call it Orange River. He, he sold fish down there, and he made a set of fifes for the corps, and the first one that I knew that played with this drum corps in Short Beach was a drummer by the name of Cele Sullivan.

EO: I've heard of her.

TK: Yeah, she played with them. But he made the first fifes. That's the only contact I had with them down there.

EO: How about the Redmen, the New Haven Redmen.

TK: I don't remember anything about the Redmen.

EO: The only thing I--I remember somebody telling they were the same group that were the Irish-American Club, and when they played at the Democratic parades they went out as the Irish-Americans, and they changed their shirt or something and would go out as the Redmen for the Republicans. [chuckle]

TK: [chuckle]

EO: How about Stony Creek? How far back do you remember them?

TK: Stony Creek goes back quite a ways. I should say Stony Creek--they must be around 1912.

EO: They maintain an 1886 date, but I just, I was wondering how far back you remember them.

TK: Well, back in '12, as I say. when we were really active at that time, naturally, say, say 1912 when they were very, very interested and active, in other words.

EO: Mmm-hmm. Has the Mattatuck style changed any since you first--

TK: Not at all they don't change anything, they won't change anything. You take a hundred and--they won't, they won't, they won't make no changes. They still stay on Wilcox. They still stay on Wilcox.

EO: The style and sticking and everything is the same.

TK: The same thing, just the same. Rubby-dub-dubs. They won't change nothing. See Stony Creek got [unintelligible] 107, Ed.

EO: Yeah, that's the date, I think those are the dates when they first affiliated with the Association.

TK: Well, well.

EO: Of course, like so many of these other corps, they started and they stopped, they started--

TK: Yeah, yeah.

EO: Nobody likes to talk about those things. [both talking at once]

TK: Continuously, the continuing with Mattatuck drum corps, Ed, was that I told you we got down to three men in the, the First World War, because most of them were in the service.

EO: But you say Mattatuck's the style and everything is all the same.

TK: The style is just the same, they keep, keep pushing it down their throat.

EO: How about the old East Hampton Corps, how far back do you remember them?

TK: Not too long, Ed. Not too long. It was after the First World War that I first come across the East Hampton corps. Joe Emerson and his group.

EO: Yeah.

TK: I think it was after the First World War that I come across them, and that's after '18, after '18. They're older than that, there's no doubt about it.

EO: Yeah. I think they went back to the '70s or something like that.

TK: Yeah.

EO: And their instructor was Dan Burns, at first, [unintelligible] instructor.

TK: Well, Burns, Burns was with the Moodus corps.

EO: Yeah, he was with Moodus, yeah. They stole him from Moodus.

TK: Yeah, he was from Moodus.

RO: They gave him a job at a silk mill and got him over, got him teaching them.

TK: Yeah. Yeah.

EO: I hate to say he was quite a drinker. Very prone to the DTs

[chuckle]

EO: He's the one I mention that hearing somewhat about him going to, making a pilgrimage to Brown's house, he was so up on the Brown tradition and Brown lore.

TK: Yeah.

EO: I read a mention of it, and it's in a article, probably about East Hampton. I am going to have to find out where that is.

TK: The Brown home?

EO: No, the article that this, that this--

TK: Oh, I thought you meant the Brown home, the location of the Brown home is on the Torrington and Litchfield road.

EO: The house is still there.

TK: No, no, nothing, there's only the foundation of it, no, no. That's where you get the "John Brown's Body" from.

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EO: Hmmm. Yeah, the old publications also make reference to groups such as "field bands," "field music," "martial bands." They used these terms instead of using "drum corps." Now, do these terms denote a special kind of corps, or was it just, just an also-ran kind--

TK: To me, "field bands" and "field drum corps" has meant martial music.

EO: And "martial music"--

TK: Martial music, military.

EO: And martial music, and how does "martial music" differ from "drum corps," regular drum corps. Is it terminology--

TK: Terminology being connected with military. That's the New York corps, they were all that way years ago when we first knew them, we were all in military corps.

EO: Did they, did they call themselves "martial music" down in New York?

TK; Yes, "martial music." Even union called themselves "marching music musicians."

EO: Because years later, when I started in drum corps, they were just known as "drum corps." The term "martial music" I had never heard.

TK: No, the "martial music" was connected, the union even used the name "martial music." In New Jersey both in New York. They were military, naturally.

EO: Did any of the Connecticut Association corps use two-stick rudimental bass drums?

TK: Well, here and there you would if you had a fire department you might, you might see some nut banging a bass drum with two mallets. Some of the, some of the judging to that done in the fireman's parade you'd see the drummer, the bass drummer and no fife, or probably one bugler and a bass drum trying to get along. [laughter].

EO: But there weren't any, there weren't any corps who knew what they were doing, playing rudimental bass drum.

TK: No, no, there was no rudimental, just banging away for a parade.

EO: How do you account for the different styles of bass drumming defined within the ancients, like the slow, primitive styles of Moodus and Mattatuck and the more sophisticated style of, say, Lancraft or Stony Creek?

TK: In late years if you will notice, the bass drummers are no more [tightener] the bass drummers than they used to. Ray Brodeur had a element way of playing the bass drum on a soft head which he claims that I can see back where he claims where a drummer could never use a drum until he could play on a pillow. And he practice on a pillow. Not a pad, a pillow. And if he could get his beats in on a pillow, that's why you'll have no bound on an ancient, on a real ancient corps. I don't mean a new, modern ancient corps. I mean they use the rebound by having tight heads. But there's no bound to the sticks of an old ancient corps, it was just an accent, banging at your head. In other words, in other words, when they were playing this way, that Ray got the idea that practicing on a pillow , you should practice a bass drum, and they all, they said they don't break as many heads, they last longer, but they haven't got that bass drum effect, to me.

EO: Hmmm. Well, one old bass drummer that always impressed me was George Cook, and George played a very good bass drum. He was, if he were alive today he'd still be right up there.

TK: George to me used a tight head.

EO: Yes, he did.

TK: He used a tight head all the time.

EO: And he told me he always played that way, and he dated back to Bunnell. He played with Alex Smith. And another thing I've always been curious about is the use of wooden bass drum beaters as opposed to the padded ones. I asked George, and he said he always played with wood. And he said his first pad was made by Alex Smith, so that dates back to the late 1800s. And, again, I've been curious as to where they wooden mallets worked in, or had they been around--

TK: The wooden mallet naturally, where would they get chamois or padding years ago, the same as they did the exotic wood to make these fifes, when I tell you they got a fife that's ancient. In other words, and it's--if it isn't made out of boxwood or domestic wood, they'd never have a fife, because where did they get the exotic woods to make a fife? In other words, naturally, the easiest way for a farmer would be to [unintelligible] instead of whittling them out. They used glass to scrape it off, make handles for the eggbeaters like this, they used to take the--the old ladies used to take the shell of an egg to darn a sock. Well, it's the same thing making a stick. I've seen 'em whittle 'em out of solid pieces of wood, and they always advocated years ago to use applewood, but not the limbs, the trunk for making beaters out of applewood. And I know that later when they got machines, actually they turned 'em, but it was, to me, it was all whittle over the years. These monkey bands in the Civil War when they got the single-beating bass drums and they called it a monkey band--they used padded beaters then. But that was only since the Civil War. Before that they had to make their own beaters, had to make their own fifes. Burned the holes in 'em.

EO: It's funny you mentioned scraping them down with glass, because Kenny Lemley has got a favorite pair of drumsticks that his father made on the back porch when he was playing with the Warner Brothers Grenadiers. The morning of the parade he scraped them down with glass. The heads are gone, but his father fit two fiber tips into the sticks and turned them back out.

TK: They're the same, they're the same.

EO: [chuckle] You feel that the, probably the wooden mallets predated the padded ones only because of practicability, nothing else.

TK: Yeah, yeah. Even if you look back, Ed, if you look back in history, martial music and music for playing

[end of side 1]