

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: A Marvelous Park for a Moondance

By Michelle Johnson

Now that the 2018 Concerts in the Park series is in full swing (speaking of swing check out August 8th performers the Borealis Big Band) it is a great time to look back on the history of music in the park.

Simply put, music in the park is as old as the park itself. Whether it was the 12th Battalion Band striking up a tune during the 1800s or the 'Big Bands' of the late 1940s and 1950s when summer arrived, you could count on music flowing from Town Park. Since 1970, the Concerts in the Park series, formerly Music in the Park, has been a regular feature during the summer months.

The Town's Recreation Commission, a precursor to the current Recreation Division, organized the first concert, which took place on Sunday, July 26 from 7-9 pm. It featured the Shan Clifford Group who were described by attendee Adrian Peetoom as being 'professionals, with a nice beat, a sense of harmony, square with just enough ragged corners to get the feet tapping, the heart pumping and the head thinking of younger days' (Aurora Banner, July 29, 1970). The concerts became a regular event during the summer months and took place on Sunday evenings up until 2003 when they were moved to Wednesdays.

Of course, to have a concert there needs to be a performance venue. Throughout Town Park's history a combination of permanent and temporary pavilions, platforms, bandstands, and band shells have been built so that musicians 'and speakers' had an adequate stage.

The current placement of the band shell can be traced to 1892, when Council made the decision to change its location from the east side of the park to the west side 'specifically 200 feet from the north-west corner. While the exact distance from the corner has changed, the location of the permanent band shells has remained the same.

The first permanent band shell was gifted to the Town from the Aurora Lions Club in 1950. It was funded through a lengthy fundraising campaign that took place over three years. Construction of the band shell occurred in two phases: the first was the stage portion completed in 1950, and the second was the dramatic parabolic roof completed in 1962.

In 2001, Council approved the Town Park Redevelopment Master Plan, which called for the building of a new band shell. The old structure, which saw the beginning of the Concerts in the Park, was removed and the distinctive parabolic roof relegated only to photos and memories.

The new band shell opened in 2003. If you look closely within the brickwork of the current stage, you will find one brick that offers a remembrance of the old structure. The Town continues to organize the Concerts in the Park series and since its inception, the Town Park band shell has hosted a range of musical selections including country, folk, blues, soul, rock, pop and, of course, swing.