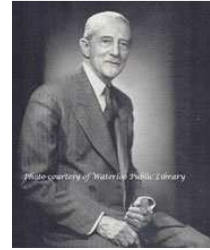


Charles Frederick Thiele



Charles Frederick (C.F.) Thiele was playing in brass bands across the United States after the First World War when he noticed an advertisement in *Billboard* magazine: “Bandmaster wanted for small town in Ontario, Canada.”

The young man who had grown up in New York City traveled to Waterloo in 1919, warning his family that they would need to learn French if he got the job. Thiele arrived to discover that half the residents in this small town spoke German.

Thiele took the job with the Waterloo Musical Society Band, telling his family that they would stay for just one year.

One year turned into thirty-five years.

Thiele remained in Waterloo until his death in 1954, becoming known as “one of the greatest, if not the greatest” brass band leaders of the twentieth century. “As a conductor, he radiated enthusiasm. The larger the audience, the better the band played under his baton.”

Thiele was born in a poor neighbourhood on the lower east side of New York. He grew up wanting to be a musician and was first introduced to the world of music at a free music clinic for the impoverished. As a teenager, Thiele learned the cornet and eventually formed a small band to play one-night stands. Before settling in Waterloo he was the director of several New York bands and organized the Thiele Concert Party which included his wife Louise and daughter Carolyn. They performed at band festivals and toured on the Lyceum and Chautauqua vaudeville circuits.

His arrival to Waterloo in 1919 was a modest one; arriving on the train and staying at the City Hotel run by Albert Hergott. His daughter, Carolyn Bender, remembers the family would go for walks down Erb and William Streets, surprised by how quickly they were in the country. Bender recalls how their new Waterloo friends were surprised by the late hours the family kept. But as a family music group, the Thieles were accustomed to evening performances. After the performances the family would have a meal at a hotel, and then play cards or practice their instruments. “We carried a box of pennies around with us for bets,” remembers Bender. The family eventually lived in a house on the corner of Regina and Dupont Streets.

In 1932 he organized the Waterloo Band Festival in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Waterloo Musical Society. The festival became an annual event known as Canada’s foremost band competition with up to sixty bands from across North America. Thiele also brought in a host of professionals like cornet virtuosos Leona May Smith of Radio City Music Hall in New York, and Walter Smith of Boston, to play. Crowds of 50,000 flocked to Waterloo Park for the event.

While Thiele's career as a musician blossomed he also found success as an entrepreneur. He founded the Waterloo Music Company and the Waterloo Metal Stampings Company for the manufacture of music stands, drums and hardware. He is also remembered for launching the Waterloo Music Camp known as "Bandberg" near Bamberg in 1949, complete with nine cabins large enough to hold seventy students.

A few months before he died, C.F. Thiele participated in his last band festival. Too weak to march, Thiele rode in full dress in a convertible at the head of the band he had led for thirty years. "He could stage a show at the snap of his fingers," recalls his daughter.

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library.