



## **History of the Willard High School Marching Band**

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In the school year of 1951-52, music teacher Willard Gulley, had no idea that his starting a marching band would change Willard High School forever. With 37 band members and four majorettes, he started a tradition that has grown into a nationally recognized marching band. Since the beginning of Willard High School in 1921-1922, there has been an instrumental music program. Playing for school functions (open house, basketball games, district and state contests, baccalaureate and graduation), Willard has always had a concert band. Until the late fifties, Willard also had an orchestra. From 1922 through 1951, all music (vocal and instrumental) and all grades (1-12) were taught by one teacher. In 1952, music was split between two teachers vocal and instrumental; they taught all grades. It wasn't until 1958 that they split vocal music-elementary and junior high/high school. Then in 1961, the District added a junior high music teacher who taught both vocal and instrumental music. In 1966, the junior high band was again handled by the high school band director. In 1971, Glen Ennes took over as Director of Bands with approximately 50 members in the ensemble. The total band averaged 70 members until 1975 when it hit high of 93 (with 70 band, 17 flags, 4 twirlers and a drum major). After 1975, the band maintained membership between 80-110 members.

In 1988, Chris Church took over as Director of Bands after serving four years as Assistant Director of Bands. At the beginning of his tenure as Director of Bands, the high school program had 88 members. Over the past 34 years, the band has grown to average 220 members per year. Upon Mr. Church's retirement at the end of the 2014 school year, Victoria (Wollard) Meraz was named as Director of Bands after serving 23 years as Assistant Director of Bands. Since 1951, there have been 14 Head Directors: Willard Gulley (1951-1952), Dean Smith (1952-1958), Lloyd Herrick (1958-1960), James Vawter (1960-1963), Larry Jones (1963-1964), Brian Kirk (1964-1966), Mr. Stansberry (1966-1968), Charles Morrow (1968-1970), Glen Ennes (1970-1979), Charles Loeber (1979-1982), John Phillips (1982-1984), Ronda King (1984-1988), Chris Church (1988-2014), and Victoria (Wollard) Meraz (2014-Present).

There have also been 19 Assistant Directors: Jim O'Neal (1974-1978), Charles Loeber (1978-1979), John Phillips (1979-1982), Rex Stone (1982), Chris Church (1982-1988), David Nace (1988-1991), Victoria (Wollard) Meraz (1991-2014), Chris Curtis (1995-2000), John Paul Chapman (2000-2016), Chris Kauffmann (2010-2012), Melissia Goff (2012-2013), Aaron Scriven (2013-2020), Molly Meyer (2014-2019), Shane Batchelor (2016-2019), Jeremy Megginson (2019-2020), Tyler Curtis (2019-Present), Jonathan Capps (2020-Present), Clayton Carter (2020-Present), and Levi Meadows (2022-Present). Five of these directors are Willard graduates-David Nace ('80), Victoria (Wollard) Meraz ('86), Christopher Kauffmann ('05), Melissia Goff ('89), and Clayton Carter ('14).

The facilities at Willard High School have changed a lot over the years as well. The first high school had an auditorium with theatre seats for concerts and plays. From 1951 to 1968, the band met in an old army barracks referred to as the music building. In 1969, the band and choir moved to a new building behind the boys' gym. The band stayed there until January 1992, when they moved to the room which currently houses the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade bands. With the opening of the new high school in 2006, the high school band moved to its current location.

In 1950-51, Willard Gulley, a graduate from SMS with a BS in Music Education, decided that Willard needed a marching band. So for the first time the concert (stationary) band learned to march and play at the same time. The band added twirlers and a drum majorette with the help of Mrs. Gulley. Willard began its long standing tradition of marching band as a parade only band. However having graduated from SMS, Mr. Gulley and the Willard Marching Band was asked to march at a homecoming football game with other schools. The band's first field performance entailed forming the words "Welcome Alums" with other invited bands. Willard was one of the E's. Even though at the time Willard did not have football, this proved to be the beginning of a long tradition of performing on a football field. From 1951 to 1971, Willard only had a drum major and twirlers.

From 1951 to 1968, the band usually marched in 4-5 parades per year. With the start of football in 1968, the Willard High School Band found itself in a new era. 1968 would be the beginning of the field show marching band and would prove to be the beginning of what we do today. In 1988, Mr. Church felt the band needed a slogan or phrase that would exemplify the philosophy of the program, what they wanted to be and where they were going. The marching band went from being known as the Marching Tigers to adopting the paragon – "The Cutting Edge". This moniker has been the focus of our students and staff for over 30 years. This ideal is not motivated by winning, but rather on striving to be our best. It concentrates our efforts towards the journey, rather than the destination.

Since its inception, the Willard Band Program has grown to serve 650+ band members. The program currently offers 18 Instrumental Ensembles for students in grades 6-12. "The Cutting Edge" draws 220+ members annually from the high school student body. In its rich history, the Willard Marching Band has received many accolades, recognitions and awards. The Willard Marching Band has traveled extensively throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. The band's travels have taken them to Wyoming, Texas, Tennessee, Florida, Washington D.C., Montreal, Quebec City, Honolulu, Holland, Belgium, and Germany. Over the years the Willard Band has had the honor of playing for Presidents Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George Herbert Walker Bush, Bill Clinton, and George Walker Bush. In 1981, the Willard High School Marching Band received the prestigious invitation to march in President Ronald Reagan's Inaugural Parade in Washington D.C. For over 40 years, the Willard Concert Bands (5 total), and Jazz Bands (4 total), have consistently received Honor I Ratings at District, State, and Regional Music Festivals. The Winter Ensembles provide additional performing avenues for percussionists and color guard members in both the high school and middle school. Please visit the band website [willardband.org](http://willardband.org) for more information on the Willard Band Program.