

HISTORY MAKER

BERNARD JACOB PFOHL

Born: Sept. 13, 1866, Salem

Died: Dec. 5, 1960, Winston-Salem

Known as: The dedicated, longtime director of the Home Church Band, Salem Band and Easter Band, as a founding member of the Wachovia Historical Society and an officer with Duke Power Company.

For more than half a century, Bernard Pfohl led three instrumental bands intrinsic to the musical identity of local Moravian congregations, Salem and, later, Winston-Salem. A traditionalist at heart, he was open to change, even radical change, if it served the success of the bands.

Widely-known and well-respected in his lifetime as the office manager for Duke Power and its predecessor iterations, he was, perhaps, better known for his work with the bands, especially the Easter Band that played for the Moravian Sunrise Service in God's Acre. During his tenure, it grew from a dozen musicians to more than 500.

"Pfohl ... was a significant force behind the perpetuation of the Moravian instrumental music tradition in North Carolina as well as a contributor to the band movement in the United States in the 10th century," Donna Rothrock said in her successful 1991 PhD dissertation

The eldest of bookkeeper Christian Thomas and Margaret Siewers Pfohl's six children, he attended Salem Boys' School until he went to work with his father in the F&H Fries Cotton and Woolen Mills and their power company at 14 to help support the family. He learned accounting and meticulous recordkeeping from his father there. He became office manager and stayed in that position through acquisitions and growth until his retirement at 91 when it was Duke Power Co.

His strong sense of community dedication led him to volunteer with the Salem Rough and Ready Fire Company and to help organize and run the Wachovia Historical Society and Kiwanis Club of Winston.

Home Church organized a brass band for boys in 1879 that supported church services, festivals, and birthday, anniversary and death announcements. Pfohl was recruited to play trombone. He also played with the Easter Band from 1880 on and joined the Salem Band in 1886. By 1905 he was director of all three organizations into the 1940s and held emeritus status until his death.

With minimal formal musical education, he arranged the music for the bands, conducted, handled the logistics for rehearsals and performances, studied acoustics and taught generations of upcoming instrumentalists. As the Easter Band grew with musicians from multiple congregations, he broke them into two and later four groups, staged at different locations on the service's route to and through the cemetery.



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B. J. Pfohl, left, and Austin Burke at practice for the 1947 Easter Sunrise Service. Pfohl, the Moravian Band director for many years, was succeeded by Burke.

Pfohl expanded the Salem band's repertoire to include patriotic, popular, dance and marching tunes to attract both larger audiences and more members. After World War I, he created the Vesper Services in order to "unite old and young ... to keep purpose and interest before members." When public school music programs were cut during the Depression, he opened participation to non-Moravians so music students could maintain their skills.

The Easter Service was broadcast on regional radio beginning in 1936 and reached a national and international audience a few years later. In 1943, he broke long-standing tradition allowing females to participate. In 1957, he published a history called "The Salem Band."

Rothrock credited his "assertive leadership and dedication to the church, its music and its customs" with a strong and lasting influence on the musical traditions across Forsyth.