OUR MARINE BAND CELEBRATES

Wednesday, July 11, Marks the 136th Anniversary of This Famous Musical Organization, Which Was First a Group of "32 Fifes and Drums"—Oldest and Most Colorful of Bands, and Its History Is Closely Interwoven With That of the Nation's Capital.

The Marine Band posed before the Library of Congress in 1830. In center, Taylor Branson, the leader, and at his left Arthur Wiscamb, second leader.

By Colonel H. C. Reisinger

The United States Marine Band, the oldest and most colorful of America's military musical organizations, celebrates its 136th anniversary Wednesday, July 11. Since the founding of Washington City, the band's history has been interwoven with that of the Nation's Capital. It has occupied a unique position in the hearts and affection of the residents and is as favorably known by the thousands who annually make the pilgrimage to Washington.

Although it has been, for so many years, a feature of Washington life, the Marine Band was not born in this city. It first saw the light of day in Philadelphia, July 11, 1798, when the Congress reorganized the Marine Corps. Bands of the Continental Army consisted of fifes and drums only. With this background, Congress first authorized the Marine Corps to possess a band a drum major, a fife major and 32 fifes and drums.

Col. Burrows, newly appointed commandant of the Marine Corps, was evidently a man of some musical taste. He desired something capable of rendering more ambitious musical programs than was possible to the fife and the drum. In this desire the Marine Band had its real beginning. To realize his ambition Col. Burrows converted some of the "32 fifes and drums" into horns, clarinets, oboes and basses, and so the Marine Band, in the modern acceptance of the word, came into being.

At this time there were great doings along the Potomac near the old city of George Town. The rivalry of states and cities had caused the selection of a virgin field for the new National Capital. The Commonwealths of Maryland and Virginia had ceded land acceptable for the site of a new city to be called Washington, in honor of the First President. The corner stone of the new Capitol had been laid and work begun. Maj. L'Enfant, in hip boots, was trudging through the swamps and marshes, running his surveyor's lines where streets and avenues were to be constructed.

In the year 1800 the various branches of the Federal Government were transferred from Philadelphia to the new city. On July 12 of that year headquarters Marine Corps, with its band, received orders to Washington. Part of the Marines came by sea. The remainder, with the headquarters and band, marched overland. Conestoga wagons carried the supplies and the band instruments, while the perspiring musicians toiled through the dust and often lent a shoulder when the loads were too heavy for the horses. They were two weeks on the road. If they had looked forward to any of the comforts to which they were used in Philadelphia, they were doomed to disappointment when they reached Washington. Hardy a street was anything more than a country road. The Marines marched down the dusty trail which bore the ambitious name of Pennsylvania Avenue. It was bordered on the north by a few scattered houses and by wooded swamps to the south. They clamped wearily past the President's house, not to be completed until some six months later, and came to rest on a hill overlooking the Potomac River where now stands the United States Naval Hospital. There they made their first camp in tents and huts.

Col. Burrows was an energetic officer, active socially and officially. No sooner had he settled his Marines in camp than he turned his attention to alleviating the harassing and discouraging conditions which confronted the officials of the Government and their families in the "Wilderness City." Soon the Marines, with their band, became much in evidence. Parades and reviews and open-air concerts were in full swing by August, 1800. These Marine Band open-air concerts are still a feature of the Nation's Capital.

With the increase of population there came a demand for church services, but