



William D. Kleyla, 1919 - 1992

Born September 10, 1919, Bill Kleyla grew up in the small farming town of Windfall, Indiana. He was the son of Willard and Gladys Kleyla and had two sisters, Annabel and Jennie Margaret. At an early age Bill began to play the clarinet and became very proficient. He was able to spend one summer at the National Music Camp at Interlochen Michigan. Following graduation from high school he entered college at Indiana University as a music major.

Bill met with great success at IU where he became principal clarinet, feature twirler and drum major of the Marching Hundred. (He always said he was the shortest drum major in the history of IU!) The highlight of Bill's life was marrying his high school sweetheart on his birthday at IU. Following graduation, Bill returned to his hometown to take over the band, a position he held for one year before moving on to New Castle.

Bill was drafted into the Army in 1943 and had to resign his job at New Castle. During his Army career he was first assigned to become a glider pilot, which was not a very safe position. When the higher ups found out what a fine clarinetist he was he was immediately assigned to a band.

Upon return from the Army New Castle had saved his job and he went back as band director. Following his success at New Castle he became the band director at Frankfort High School. He immediately took the band to new heights performing on the local radio station and playing as the featured music organization at the Indiana State Teacher's conference in 1948.

From 1949 till 1953 Bill decided he wanted to return to the Tipton till plains, as he referred to them and try his hand at farming. After four years it became obvious that he needed to return to his life's work and he applied for various band jobs.

In 1953 he became the band director at Indianapolis Manual High School where he led the band until his retirement in 1973. He met with great success at Manual taking the marching band to 19 consecutive superior ratings in the ISMA marching contest. The band also won several Grand Sweepstakes awards as the best marching band in ISMA. His concert bands were outstanding also garnering a superior rating in Class A every year.

In those days, the finest football marching band in Indianapolis was recognized by the (Indianapolis) Downtown Kiwanis Club based upon recommendations from the sports writers of the three major newspapers. Manual was the recipient every year until the club finally decided there was no reason to pick a winner anymore. The band placed in the top five at the Indiana State Fair on three occasions. (They only participated four times.) Dr Charles Henzie, who was the director of the Manual Band from 1936-46 and director of the Butler University Marching Band from 1946-66 once said about Bill Kleyla's band: "their marching is so precise it's like one person marching with mirrors on the field".

During his career at Manual the sports writers often included comments about the Manual Band in the reporting of the games. The pep band he developed was noted on several occasions for its role in developing school spirit. The band became so well known that the University of Minnesota Marching Band stopped at Manual to perform a half-time show on their way to IU. His twirling background came in useful when he developed an outstanding twirling team that won several awards.

When there was a road to open, a performance to light the "World's largest Christmas tree," dedicating the Indiana State Teacher's Association building, opening a hospital or any important civic function the Manual Band was always called upon. The downtown Businessmen's Association funded a band recognition day every May and brought in Guest conductors such as Meredith Willson, Paul Lavelle, and others. Each band from the city high schools would perform a number, but the Manual Band was always featured and sat at the top of the stairs at Monument Circle.

He served on IMEA numerous planning committees, was a member of the "500" Festival band selection committee and was involved with the All-City High School Band. He was asked by the great trumpet player Rafael Mendez to direct the All-City Band in the solos Mendez was performing.

Always looking for something new the band was the first in Indiana to do a circle drill and sunburst copying the Casper Troopers. His final activity at Manual was hosting the University of Michigan Symphony Band in a Mother's Day concert.

Bill's students adored and respected him. Several said that if he lined the band up in from of a cliff they would all march over a rank at a time on his command. His philosophy of being the best transferred to his students and student teachers, many of whom went on to be very successful in various careers. In the band field they included Don Hoffman, Dr Lissa May and Dr Daniel Bolin, all members of the Gamma Chapter Hall of Fame.

By the time of his retirement Bill had received recognition from the Mayor of Indianapolis, the Southside Businessmen's Association and Phi Beta Mu where he served as President of the Gamma Chapter and was a charter member. Bill received letters from Senators, business leaders and fellow musicians congratulating him on his outstand work.

The letter he was proudest of is a 1943 letter from Louis Armstrong who had heard two of Bill's students and was so impressed that he congratulated Bill on his teaching and work with young musicians.

In 1973, he laid down the baton and moved to Daytona Beach, Florida where he bought a small hotel on the beach. In 1980 he started a sporting goods store which became a licensed product store, again ahead of its time.

Bill passed away July 2, 1992. He was survived by his wife Frances (since deceased), his son William C, daughter-in-law Karen and two grandchildren, Brandon and Alexis.