

The Weekly

Thursday, June 23, 2016

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R.B. Hall celebration returns to Bangor after nearly 20 years



The Bangor Band, pictured here during a 2015 performance, will host Maine's R.B. Hall Day on June 25 this year at Peakes Auditorium at Bangor High School.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BANGOR BAND

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Reported by Emily Burnham

THE WEEKLY QUESTION

"What was your first car?"



"A 1979 Subaru Loyale."
ANDREA BEAULIEU, HAMPDEN



"A Jeep Grand Cherokee."
ANNA ZMISTOWSKI, VEAZIE



"An 87 Subaru Loyale GL."
BEN HOLT, GLENBURN



"A 63 Chevrolet Impala."
MICHAEL HOLT, CARMEL



"1982 Nissan Sentra station wagon hatchback."
NOAH FLESHER, MONROE



"HA 1990 Buick Riviera. The geezer-mobile."
SCOTT HELMKE, BANGOR

EMILY BURNHAM
OF THE WEEKLY STAFF

Though he may not be a household name in this day and age, 19th century march composer and bandleader R.B. (Robert Browne) Hall has an international reputation, and an important place in the history of Bangor and in Maine in general. So much so, that the last Saturday of June in Maine each year is designated R.B. Hall Day, and is celebrated with a yearly gathering of community bands, in a different town each year.

This year's R.B. Hall will be organized by the Bangor Band and celebrated in Bangor for the first time in nearly 20 years. This year's event is set for Saturday, June 25, at Peakes Auditorium at Bangor High School, and will feature 11 bands in total.

Hall for much of the 1880s

conducted the Bangor Band and wrote a number of marches dedicated to the Queen City. And yet, many folks have no idea who he was. So who was he?

R.B. Hall was born in Bowdoinham in 1858, and died in Portland in 1907. He was a lifelong Mainer and almost never left the state — but the hundreds of marches he composed in his 50 years put him in league with the other major march composers of the era.

"He may not be as formative as John Philip Sousa, but he's certainly a major composer," said Lori Wingo, president of the Bangor Band. "And he's incredibly popular in the U.K. The British love him. His marches are still played regularly. People sometimes think he's English, but he's not. He's a Mainer."

During his years in Bangor, Hall conducted the Bangor

Band — which, by the 1880s, was in danger of disbanding.

"He singlehandedly saved the Bangor Band way back in the 1880s, from going the way that so many other community bands went after the Civil War," said Wingo. "After the war these guys needed something to do, so they formed drill teams and military-style bands. But after 20 years or so, the interest started to wane and a lot of these bands started to die out."

Hall made sure the Band kept going — and considering this year the Bangor Band celebrates its 157th consecutive year, he was pretty successful at it.

There are lots of stories about Hall and the Bangor Band that survive to this day. The Band gave Hall a gold-plated cornet inscribed to him from the "grateful citizens

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