
by Gena Pruitt

In the archives of the Beacon Historical Society in New York's Hudson Valley, a newspaper article dated July 7, 1934, refers to the Chanler Drum and Bugle Corps as being "one of the oldest and best known musical organizations in Southern Dutchess (County)." That was in 1934, when the corps was approaching its 31st birthday.

Sixty-nine years later, that statement would still hold true with one "tiny" footnote: Chanler Drum and Bugle Corps is the oldest continuously active drum and bugle corps in the world. In October 2003, Chanler's marks its centennial -- the first drum and bugle corps ever to reach the age of 100.

The story of Chanler's is one of sheer dedication and perseverance, of loyalty and friendship, and of a commitment to the ideology of drum corps in its purest and simplest form. These qualities and this ideology are personified in the corps' leader of 34 years, Augustine Arquilla (pictured below). "Augie," as he is widely and affectionately known, has been a member of Chanler's since 1933 -- an extraordinary and historical achievement in itself. And although health problems have prevented him from marching with the corps the past few years, Arquilla, in all of his 70



Chanler's



(Above) Augustine Arquilla (photo by Gina Pruitt); Chanler's, 1910 (photo from the collection of the Beacon Historical Society).

years as a member of Chanler's, has never missed a single parade. Not one.

To meet this remarkably humble group, one would hardly suspect being in the presence of such drum corps history, a history that notes, among other things, Chanler's being one of the first drum corps to introduce military-style G bugles as performance instruments at the turn of the 20th century.

A formidable force on the parade and regional competition circuit for most of its

existence, participating in such events as the Yale Bowl, Barnum Festival and the 1959 Orange Bowl Parade, Chanler's is today a small, close-knit and unpretentious family outfit, whose membership hasn't varied much over the past 10 to 15 years and who have simply and quietly marched their corps and their native Hudson Valley into drum corps history.

The lifeblood of today's Chanler's is the Arquilla Family of Beacon, NY. Augie, his son, Gary, and his brother, Vincent, have been members of Chanler's most of their lives. Augie's wife, Marion -- a daughter of another Beacon drum corps family, the MacDonalds -- served as the corps' "mom" for many years, mending uniforms, carrying water, providing first aid, until she passed away unexpectedly in 1995. Augie's brother, Joseph, retired from the corps after 20 years and his sister, Anna, spent 15 years as a member of Beacon's all-girl corps.

Several of Chanler's current members have been with the corps for more than 30 years, longer than many drum corps have even existed: Vince Arquilla Sr. (soprano), 58 years; Al Taylor (bass drum), 45 years; Gary Arquilla (soprano), 42 years; Dennis Ciccarelli (snare), 34 years; Brian Morgan (baritone), 32 years; Jeff Morgan (baritone), 30 years; and Vince Travis (baritone), 30 years.

There is a strong sense of family within this group, which takes its amazing historical achievement in stride. To them, they simply "do drum corps."

Chanler's history actually begins with that of the St. Luke's Cadet Corps, a drill team that performed early marching and maneuvering exhibitions. Several members broke away and organized the Chanler Bugle, Fife and Drum Corps on October 3, 1903, at the home of Ernest Shriver in the Village of Matteawan, NY. This was 10 years before Matteawan and Fishkill Landing merged to become the City of Beacon, making Chanler's 10 years older than its own hometown.

The corps was named after its first benefactor, Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler, a descendant of John Jacob Astor, who donated \$50 to the group to purchase instruments. Chanler served as New York State lieutenant governor from 1907-1908 and continued to support the group by donating the Lewis S. Chanler

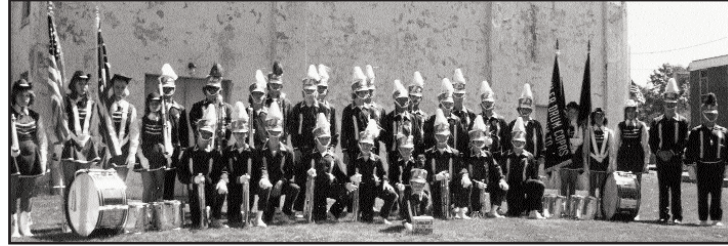
Trophy, presented at drum corps contests sponsored by his namesake corps.

In Chanler's early days, the drum corps activity was a preeminent source of entertainment and recreation throughout the Hudson Valley. Indeed, some drum corps enthusiasts consider the Hudson Valley -- specifically, Beacon, NY -- the birthplace of the American drum corps scene. Whether or not a matter of opinion, what holds true is that the drum and bugle corps activity flourished throughout the valley in the early

20th century. Beacon itself was home to at least six corps at once.

In the 1920s, Chanler's was referred to as "Southern Dutchess' outstanding musical organization." In the 1930s, drum and bugle corps competitions were a much-lauded mainstay in the valley and the "seldom-defeated" Chanler's was at its forefront.

Chanler's usually took top honors at drum corps venues throughout the New York



Chanler's, 1977 (photo by Reed Itho from the collection of Jeff Morgan).

tri-state region that included adjudication in music, drilling, appearance, execution, best overall score and the pre-era-of-political-correctness category of "most men in line."

Chanler's anniversary celebrations routinely included a parade, a drum corps contest and a dance. In 1934, the festivities included a masquerade ball. In 1937, Chanler's anniversary ball was attended by almost 900 guests.

With the advent of World War II, the 1940s proved to be a particularly trying time for Chanler's. Most of the corps' members were called into service and the roster dwindled down to two members, Arquilla and fellow drummer Harry Rose. The two immediately recruited 14 new members and kept the corps alive until the others returned home.

Chanler's nearly lost everything, with creditors threatening to seize its assets, including its trophies. At one point, Arquilla and Rose mortgaged their homes to keep Chanler's going.

Over Chanler's 100-year history, only Arquilla and Rose actually carried the title of director. Rose held the position from 1958 until his death in 1969. Arquilla was appointed director after Rose's passing.

"Back in the early days, the drum major was in charge," says Arquilla. "We never had a director until we did the Orange Bowl Parade."

Chanler's first drum major was Walter Prine, followed by Charlie Moshier, Harry Johnson, Ray Herring, James Baxter, Bobby Branson and Rose. Arquilla recalled how Rose's brother, Ray, met with Orange Bowl Parade organizers in 1958 and found that all musical units had to have a director. Chanler's -- the only drum and bugle corps in the parade -- did not have one. When asked to identify the director, Ray Rose, off the top of his head, stated that his drum major brother, Harry, was Chanler's director. And so it was.

Astonishingly, most of Chanler's history can be told firsthand by Augie Arquilla. He joined Chanler's as a snare drummer in 1933 at age 15. At the time, his uncle, Joseph

Pomarico, was president of the Dutchess Fire, Drum and Bugle Corps, which had been organized in 1884. Augie's cousin, Joe Pennucci, was associated with Chanler's.

"They used to fight over who would get me," Arquilla recalls.

He decided to try Chanler's, but ended up sitting out for three weeks before anyone would hear him play. Chanler's had an all-adult membership that was not keen on recruiting teenagers. Arquilla was about to switch to Dutchess when Chanler's drum major finally said, "OK, let's see what the kid can do." The major, impressed with Arquilla's prowess, turned to Pennucci and said, "This kid is terrific! Where've you been hiding him all this time?" Arquilla joined Chanler's and the rest is, quite literally, history.

Arquilla's first outing with Chanler's was an American Legion parade in New York City. The parade was so huge that Chanler's lined up at noon on Saturday and did not step off until 4:00 Sunday morning. Augie remembers that it was his job to check on members who had slipped off to bars, making sure they kept sober enough to march. One of his duties in later years was taking attendance. History would prove that he was indeed the best man for the job. Arquilla also recalls the not-so-glamorous job of quartermastering.

"Back then, we'd alternate uniforms every parade -- white pants with green stripes, then green pants with white stripes. My job was to collect uniforms after each parade and have them cleaned before the next one. I also had to clean the shoes, put them in boxes and tie each box up with string. Everyone would be off having a good time and I'd be there hours later with their sweaty uniforms." Eighty-five-year-old Arquilla continues with a laugh, "And here I am . . . still hanging around."

Arquilla has practically "done it all" in drum corps. He worked his way up the ranks from snare drum corporal to drum sergeant to master drum sergeant. He also served as corps president, treasurer, secretary, assistant business manager, business manager and trustee and has been on Chanler's board of trustees and nomination board.

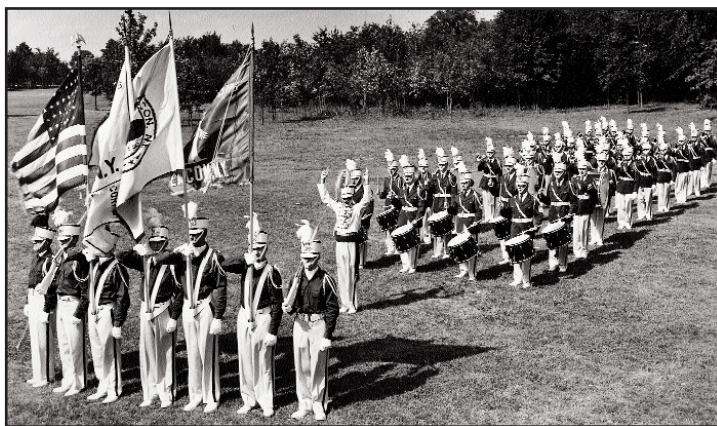
He became director and drum major in



Chanler's, 1990s (photo from the collection of Augustine Arquilla).

1969 and also served as drum line instructor. Outside of Chanler's, Augie was the youngest president of the Hudson Valley Drum Corps Association, served as a parade judge and was a member of the All-American Drum and Bugle Corps. In 1961, Augie -- under William Welch -- helped form the Queen Village Queens All-Girl Drum and Bugle Corps of Warwick, NY.

Arquilla never forgot the break he was given as a teenager and has always welcomed young people into Chanler's. "Kids today



Chanler's, 1958 (photo from the collection of Augustine Arquilla).

don't know what they're missing," he says with regard to the general lack of knowledge about or interest in drum corps in the region nowadays.

Former member Greg Morgan recalls how Arquilla gave him his first break in drum corps. "As a 'husky' nine-year-old, I approached Augie to join the corps to play snare drum. At that time, I lacked the knowledge of how to hold a stick, much less how to hit a drum. Without blinking an eye, Augie handed me sticks, a sling and a drum. He taught me and allowed me to play with

much more experienced players.

"Given the glaring looks from my towering co-members that first year, I could only imagine the quality of my playing. But Augie had nothing but encouragement for me. I eventually moved on from my hometown corps to march six years in the New York Skyliners and arrange and instruct for two drum and bugle corps and two competitive marching bands.

"Although this is not the most noteworthy of drum corps careers, I feel I have contributed to the activity. This, I think, is a tribute to Augie. And I have no one more to thank. He has got to be the biggest unknown

legend in the activity."

What inspires Arquilla to keep going after 70 years? "It hasn't been easy," he admits. "There were many times when I felt like giving up when we couldn't find a place to practice or when membership was low."

After all that Arquilla has given of himself to keep the corps alive, it would be far more difficult for him to let it go. And besides, he genuinely loves it.

"I'd do it all over again if I could," he says. "I loved every minute of it . . . I still do."

Don't let his age fool you. The man can still play a drum. At a recent rehearsal, with a cane propped against his chair, Arquilla -- without missing a beat -- accompanied his beloved corps on snare through their familiar street beat and entire repertoire. "Not bad for an 85-year-old guy, huh?" he laughed.

It is not only Arquilla's devotion to his corps, but also his corps' devotion to him that has kept Chanler's alive all of these years. There are strong feelings of genuine love,

admiration and respect felt for this man, not only by Chanler's members, but also by many others in the Hudson Valley drum corps community.

And Arquilla's greatest gift that the community may be yet to come. Plans are in the works to form two reunion corps to celebrate Chanler's incredible milestone and to honor Arquilla and the true spirit of drum corps he has exuded these past 70 years: a Chanler alumni corps and the Hudson Valley Drum and

Bugle Reunion Corps. These corps may spark a rebirth in the Hudson Valley, which was once a veritable mecca of corps activity, but which now only claims a handful of parade corps north of Westchester County.

If anyone could ultimately be responsible for keeping drum corps alive in the Hudson Valley, it would have to be Augie Arquilla.

What better way to celebrate the history of drum corps in the Hudson Valley than by honoring the man and the corps who have made drum corps history?

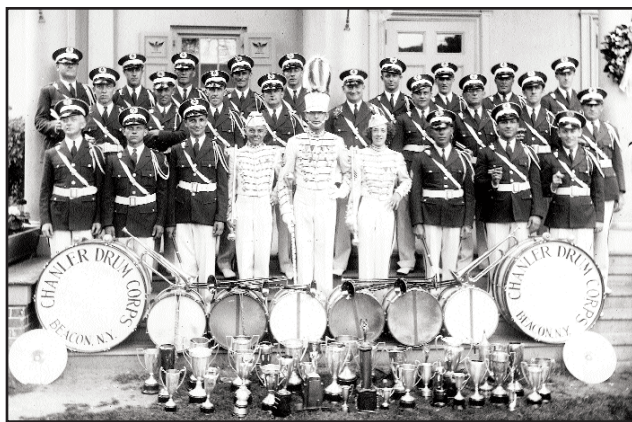


Eugena "Gena" Pruitt joined Chanler's in 1976 as a second soprano and later became an assistant brass instructor. She joined 20th Century Ltd. in 1993 where she currently plays soprano and baritone, and is

on the staff.

She is on the reunion organizing committee for Chanler's and the Hudson Valley corps.

Outside of drum corps, she is an aspiring screenwriter. She studied filmmaking at New York Institute of Technology and New York University and has worked for Fox TV's "Good Day New York" and Universal Studios in Hollywood, CA.



Chanler's, 1939 (photo from the collection of Augustine Arquilla).