

SUN-GAZETTE

Williamsport Women

Lillian May Westfall Reider: A Noted Educator



PHOTO PROVIDED Shown in this photo provided by the Lycoming County Historical Society is a picture of the Williamsport High School faculty in the 1927 yearbook.

Lillian Reider (1864-1959) deserves much of the credit for the early development of the public school music program in Williamsport. It became her mission to interest local students in music, and in the process of doing so she established the first band and orchestra for the school system.

Reider was the daughter of Ezra Billing Westfall and Mary Ann Binsley Westfall. Most of her growing-up years were spent in Williamsport. Her musical degree was from Cornell University; however, she was a lifelong student and supplemented her education with additional training whenever possible. At the age of 30, she married Edwin Stanton Reider, who received his degree from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and is listed in the 1920 Pennsylvania State University Bulletin as a teaching assistant. The couple had a son, Ezra Westfall Reider.

In the Beginning

The 1927 Williamsport High School yearbook pictures Reider as a music faculty member who –along with Kathryn Riggle — directed the Glee Club. It was the largest organization in the high school, with a membership of 165 voices. Before being admitted, students had to undergo a voice test, read notes and use musical expression. The group sang music from various operas, oratorios and masses, though the yearbook states that the compositions could be on the “*lighter side*.” From this larger group, Reider formed the Girls’ Octet, the Double Male Quartet, and the Colored Boys’ Double Quartet.

A Sun-Gazette article from Dec. 1, 1950, titled “*WHS Musical Pioneer at Band Celebration*,” reports on a speech Reider made as an honored guest at the high school band’s 25th anniversary celebration. At the age of 85, she recalled her career as music supervisor, remembering that when officials were preparing to dedicate the new high school on West Third Street in 1914, they requested that she provide music. She enlisted two dozen student instrumentalists and “*whipped them into shape*” for the ceremony. The rest is musical history. In the beginning, she directed both the band and the orchestra. The musical groups held practice sessions in Trinity House because teachers believed that rehearsals would make too much noise in the school. Band members wore cherry and white paper hats and dark trousers.

Reider emphasized the important role that the parent-teacher association played in the development of the music curriculum. With her allocated yearly budget of \$75 dollars, she could not possibly provide instruments

and music for her emerging programs. Although community leaders donated money and the American Legion Band and Tetequa Band furnished some instruments, it was the parents who took responsibility not only for providing the needed funding but also for paying the band director's salary in the early years. Reider also credited the association with raising funds for a \$10,000 Moeller organ for the high school, though she was not above asking elementary school children to contribute their pennies in addition.

The Lillian M.

Reider Male Chorus

Soon after Reider's retirement in 1935 at the age of 70, she organized the Lillian M. Reider Male Chorus, made up of graduates of the local high school from 1922 to 1935. The group met at Leo's Dining Room to rehearse and was often cited in the newspaper as providing entertainment for community events. During National Music Week in 1937, this chorus sang over the radio (WRAK) and performed for the Rotarians, the Sightless Club, the YMCA and the children at Cochran School. At times, the men would dress for the occasion –for example, wearing sailor middies while singing sea chanteys.

After World War II, Reider reorganized "*her boys*" when they returned from the armed services. At her 80th birthday celebration, held at the Women's Club, this chorus led the 300 guests in a group sing.

Serving the Community

Reider served her profession and the community. She was president of the National Musical Educators' Club and the Susquehanna Valley In-and-About Music Club and was a charter member of the Williamsport Music Club. She also was on the board of the Mothers' Assistance Fund.

Reider was responsible for other musical innovations. Under her direction, school children would travel to the high school each year for memory testing on musical masterpieces, and afterwards would wear their achievement pins proudly. Her violin program, started in the elementary

schools, ensured that there would be qualified musicians in the high school orchestra. In 1923, elementary school children joined with the high school Glee Club to sing during National Music Week, with everyone clad in white standing on bleachers.

In later years, Reider lived at 612 W. Third Street, though she divided her time between Williamsport and her son's home in West Dennis, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. She had devoted most of her life to her first love — music —and she wanted the general public to be aware of the quality of the music programs in the Williamsport schools. To that end, her students gave the gift of music to the community by performing at many civic events. As a clipping from a 1946 Sun-Gazette article honoring her concluded, *“the city paid deserved tribute to one who has served so well, for so many years.”*

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