

ITHACA

Saxophone Instruction in American Music Schools before 1940

Author(s): Joseph M. Murphy

Source: *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Sep., 1996), pp. 1-12

Published by: [Ithaca College](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40214916>

Accessed: 19/11/2013 22:15

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Ithaca College is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Saxophone Instruction in American Music Schools before 1940

JOSEPH M. MURPHY

The saxophone, which Antoine “Adolphe” Sax invented in 1840 in Paris, first appeared in America in 1853, in New York City. This was an isolated appearance by the saxophone, as the next documented saxophone performance in the United States did not occur until the 1860s. Professional bands were integral to the American musical culture from approximately 1860–1930. Fortunately for the saxophone, two of the most important bands (Gilmore’s 1870–1892 and Sousa’s 1892–1932) not only used the French military band model of instrumentation which included saxophones but regularly featured saxophone soloists.¹

The first saxophone instruction in an American music school took place in 1882 in both New York and Boston. (See Figure 1.) From its inception in 1874 until 1902, the Grand Conservatory in New York City included a school for brass, in which teachers gave lessons on the saxophone. Both of the early instructors at the Grand Conservatory were saxophone performers in professional bands. H. A. Hall was a celebrated soloist with the New York 69th Regiment. Steffano Porpora was a member of the Sousa, Innes, and Pryor bands during his long career. He also performed with the Metropolitan and Manhattan Opera House Orchestras. In December 1908 Porpora became the first saxophonist to be recorded on

¹This article draws heavily from Joseph M. Murphy, “Early Saxophone instruction in American Educational Institutions” (D.M.A. diss., Northwestern University, 1994).

Figure 1

Saxophone Teaching Institutions Prior to 1940

<i>East</i>	<i>West</i>
New York	Salt Lake City
1882 Grand Conservatory	1913 Gustave Schuster Music School
1923 Institute of Musical Art	
1920s Institute of Modern Music	Eugene, Oregon
1936 Downtown Music School	1914 University of Oregon
1940 Manhattan School of Music	1920s International Music Studios
1940 New York College of Music	
	Lincoln, Nebraska
Boston	1921 University of Nebraska
1882 New England Conservatory	
1920 Boston Conservatory	Denver, Colorado
1924 Longy School of Music	1922 Wolcott Conservatory
1928 National Associated Schools	1927 Denver College of Music
Philadelphia	Los Angeles
1902 Broad Street Academy	1920s Thompson-d'Ippolito School
1902 National Conservatory of Music	1930 Hollywood School of Music
1920s Henton-Knecht Conservatory	1934 University of Southern California
1924 Philadelphia Musical Academy	
1925 Philadelphia Conservatory of Music	Houston, Texas
	1920s Drescher Saxophone School
Other	
1900 Ithaca (NY) Conservatory	
1920 Peabody Conservatory	
1928 Crane Institute of Music	
1935 Navy School of Music	

Figure 1 (continued)

Saxophone Teaching Institutions Prior to 1940

<i>Midwest</i>		Indiana	
		1912	Metropolitan School of Music (Indianapolis)
Chicago		1914	Valparaiso University
1896	Conn National School of Music	1924	Indianapolis College of Music
1914	University of Chicago	1927	National Conservatory (Gary)
1915	Bush Conservatory	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	
1916	American Musical College	1918	Wisconsin College of Music
1919	Chicago Musical College	1926	Wisconsin Conservatory
1920s	Vandercook School of Music	Missouri	
1920s	Newland School of Music	1920s	Modern School of Saxophone (St. Louis)
1920s	Tom Brown Band School	1930	Kansas City/Horner Conservatory
1920s	Jaros School of Music	Iowa	
1920s	Sherwood School of Music	1930	Drake University (Des Moines)
1927	Chicago Piano College	1935	University of Iowa
Ohio		Michigan	
1890	Dana Musical Institute (Warren)	1930	Detroit Conservatory
1930	Cincinnati College of Music		
1930	Cincinnati Conservatory		

Columbia's double-faced discs. He was the saxophone instructor at the Grand Conservatory from 1898–1902.²

Saxophone instruction in Boston began at the New England Conservatory of Music 1882 in the department of band instruments. The two saxophone teachers at the New England Conservatory prior to 1900 were William Rietzel and Eustach Strasser. Rietzel (sometimes spelled Rutzel) was a violist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1881–1894 and was a conductor for the Pops concerts in 1887. He taught saxophone at the New England Conservatory from 1882–89.

Eustach Strasser (b. 1847) came to Philadelphia from Bavaria in 1868. "In 1868, for the first time I played solo Saxophone with the Mendelssohn Quintet in Philadelphia in a concert hall on the site now occupied by the Wanamaker's store."³ Strasser claimed to have copyrighted "The First Saxophone Quartette" in 1869, although no evidence exists in the Library of Congress to support this. Strasser joined Gilmore's 26th Regiment Band in 1875 and moved to Boston in 1878. He played clarinet with the Boston Symphony Orchestra for many years and taught saxophone at the New England Conservatory from 1886–87. He appeared in testimonial advertising for Buescher, Conn, and Bettoney saxophones.

In addition to the Grand Conservatory and the New England Conservatory of Music, three more music institutions taught saxophone prior to 1900. The Ithaca Conservatory of Music opened in 1892. Band leader Patrick Conway began his affiliation with the Conservatory in 1896. He conducted the Ithaca Town Band, later called the Conway Band. Edwin C. Tichenor, saxophonist in Conway's Band since 1896, taught cello and saxophone at the Conservatory. The exact year in which Tichenor began

²*The American Musician and Art Journal* 11 (October 27, 1888): 22; *The World's Largest Manufacturers of Band and Orchestral Instruments* (Elkhart, IN: C. G. Conn, Ltd., n.d. [1919]), 33; and Harry Gee, *Saxophone Soloists and Their Music, 1844–1985* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 16.

³F. E. Burgstaller, "Sixty Years a Saxophone Soloist," *True Tone Musical Journal* (Buescher Band Instrument Company, October 1927): 3.

saxophone instruction is unclear but catalogs indicate the institutions offered instruction around 1900.⁴

The Dana Musical Institute, founded in 1869, had a curriculum which included military band training instruction for professional band aspirants. Though archives are incomplete for the early years, the earliest mention of saxophone instruction is by Aaron Traxler, who graduated in 1898 after three years of study, with saxophone as his primary instrument. Documents at the Dana Musical Institute list J. D. Cook as the school's woodwind instructor for over fifty years. Cook was a member of the Chautauqua (NY) Orchestra and Roger's Band in Goshen, Indiana, probably on clarinet.⁵

In 1896 the C. G. Conn Company opened its Conservatory of Military Band Music in Elkhart, Indiana, with E. A. Lefebre as saxophone and clarinet instructor. Lefebre (1834–1911), dubbed the Saxophone King during the 1870–1890s, was born of French parents in Holland. During tours to London and Leipzig in 1871, he won praise from Gounod and Wagner. That same year he came to the United States to accompany Madame Parepa-Rosa. During the trip Lefebre met Gilmore. His first concert with Gilmore was on November 18, 1873. In 1884 Lefebre became a United States citizen. Constantly active in saxophone quartets in addition to his band work, he organized the New York Saxophone Quartet Club in 1879. In 1901 he was a member of the Conn-sponsored "Wonder Saxophone Quartet." In 1907 Lefebre's quartet toured to Alaska and the Philippines. Among his many students were Kathryn Thompson, Aaron Traxler, J. Paul Wait, A. J. Prochaska, and Homer Dickinson. It is not clear if they enrolled at the Conn school, or if they studied privately with Lefebre. Of the five institutions which taught saxophone prior to 1900, three still in existence teach saxophone: Dana School of Music of

⁴*Catalog*, 1896 (Ithaca, NY: The Ithaca Conservatory and Affiliated Schools, 1896).

⁵"Who's Who of D. M. I.," *Yearbook* (Warren, OH: Dana Musical Institute, 1929): n.p.

Youngstown State University, Ithaca College School of Music, and the New England Conservatory.⁶

Between the years 1919 and 1925 American companies manufactured and sold over one half million saxophones. Between the years 1921 and 1924 the saxophone outsold all other instruments. By 1930 over a million saxophones existed throughout the world. Martin Kirvin wrote that

There have since been similar crazes (accordions, and banjos, for example, are cyclically popular) and it is not unusual for one instrument to be a “best seller.” But for sheer volume, still, no one instrument has yet attained the mass appeal of the saxophone during the 1920s.⁷

From approximately 1913 until the start of the Depression in 1929 several institutions were teaching young saxophonists in huge numbers. These included the Henton-Knecht Conservatory in Philadelphia. In 1924 this institution claimed to be teaching over two-hundred students, “most wrestling with the possibilities of the saxophone.”⁸ The [Kathryn] Thompson-[Lewis J.] d’Ippolito School of Saxophone in Los Angeles enrolled over one hundred saxophonists. The Gustave Schuster School of Music in Salt Lake City also enrolled over one hundred saxophonists.⁹

The Henton-Knecht Conservatory had a business affiliation with the Conn Corporation and employed several saxophone teacher/performers. All

⁶*Conn Musical Truth* (Elkhart, IN) 3, (September 1896); *C. G. Conn’s Truth* 4 n.d. [1897]: 5; Gee, *Saxophone Soloists and Their Music*, 160–161; Conn National School of Music *Catalog* (Elkhart, IN: C. G. Conn, Ltd., 1924), 16; and *True-Tone Musical Journal* 9 (1914): n.p. These publications, like many issued by instrument manufacturers were somewhat irregular, often not including dates or pages.

⁷Martin Kirvin, “A Century of Wind Instrument Manufacturing in the United States” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Iowa, 1961), 122.

⁸Edward Barroll, “The Saxophonist,” *Jacob’s Band Monthly* 9 (June–July 1924): 50.

⁹H. W. Schwartz, *The Story of Musical Instruments* (Elkhart, IN: Conn Band Instrument Division, 1938), 139.; Jaap Kool, *Das Saxophone*, translated by Lawrence Gwozdz, cited in Lawrence Gwozdz, “Comprehensive Performance Project in Saxophone Literature with essay consisting of translation of Jaap Kool” (D.M.A. Diss., University of Iowa, 1984), foreword; “Where Saxophonists are Made,” *True Tone* 17 (May 1927): 4–5; and *Musical Truth* 14 (1924): 5.

of the following saxophonists taught at the Henton-Knecht Conservatory: Harvey Benham of the Philadelphia Plaza Band, Municipal Band, Victor Band, and the Cape May Orchestra; Louis Giroux, a member of the "Philadelphians"; H. Benne Henton, a well known soloist with Sousa and Conway; and Al Knecht, who performed with Sousa's band.¹⁰

Unfortunately, aside from manufacturer's advertisements, very little documentation exists regarding saxophone teacher and performer Kathryn Thompson. She appeared first in Buescher advertising and later in Conn publications. These testimonial advertisements show many photographs of Thompson's students, most quite young. Thompson was a soloist with the Navassar Ladies Band. She directed the Southern California Saxophone Band which performed often on KHT radio in Los Angeles. Thompson wrote three method books and composed four solos.¹¹

In 1913 Gustave Schuster founded a music school in Salt Lake City. His wife, Inez, who had studied clarinet and saxophone in New York City, also taught at her husband's school. In 1920 Schuster organized a saxophone band of thirty-five members. The band grew to forty members in 1922. In April 1924 Schuster claimed to have one hundred saxophonists enrolled in his music school. In the collection of Schuster's papers at the University of Oregon are hundreds of newspaper clippings devoted to Schuster's school concerts. Judging from photographs in Conn advertisements, the repertoire performed, and the performance venues (junior high schools), Schuster's school serviced many of the city's adolescent musicians. Harry Lewis also taught at the Schuster School of Music and was a member of the Buescher True Tone Quartet.¹²

Prior to the 1940s most American music instruction took place in conservatories rather than in universities. Of the fifty-five institutions which offered saxophone instruction before 1940, only seven were university-affiliated. Of the forty institutions which began saxophone instruction between 1940 and 1960, eleven had no university affiliation.

¹⁰*Conn Musical Truth* (Elkhart, IN) 16 (February 1926): 7; and 13 (1923): 26.

¹¹Gee, *Saxophone Soloists and Their Music*, 160.

¹²*Musical Truth* 14 (1924): 5.

Three American universities first offered saxophone instruction in 1914: Valparaiso (Indiana) University, the University of Oregon, and the University of Chicago.

The first mention of a band at Valparaiso is in the 1883 catalog, listing J. G. Pearson as the director. The college orchestra began in 1892. Photographs from around 1900 show a saxophone in the band. Around 1907, Mr. L. C. Austin became the band director. Under his direction the band included a saxophone sextet. Austin also played the cello part on alto saxophone in the school orchestra.¹³

In 1886, the school of music at the University of Oregon became one of the first in the western United States to award a bachelor of music degree. In that same year the University established a chair of music. The University formed a band in 1914. From its inception the band included saxophones. Albert Perfect was the band director and instructor of wind instruments. He was not a saxophone performer, but the catalog shows that he taught the saxophone.¹⁴

J. Beach Cragun was the director of bands at the University of Chicago from 1914 until 1923. At that time he was also the saxophone teacher. Cragun was a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory and the New England Conservatory of Music. He wrote several saxophone method books during the 1920s and a concerto for saxophone (1925). One of his students at the University of Chicago, Norman Bates, also published a method book, *Thirty Questions and Answers About the Saxophone* (1933). Cragun also operated his own music school for a short time in Chicago, c. 1925–27.¹⁵

Of the fifty-five institutions that taught saxophone before 1940, few have offered saxophone instruction up to the present without interruption. Schools of music rarely hired specialists to teach each of the instruments.

¹³"Music Department Special," *Valparaiso University Herald*, 27 November 1908, n.p.

¹⁴Virginia Ruth Mounteney, "The History of the Bachelor's Degree in the Field of Music in the United States" (Mus.A.D. diss., Boston University, 1961), 220.

¹⁵Gee, *Saxophone Soloists and Their Music*, 84; A. C. E. Schonemann, "Bands of the Middle West," *Jacobs' Band Monthly* 6 (June 1921): 23–24; and "Cragun School of Music," *Jacobs' Band Monthly* 11 (May 1926): 54.

In several cases saxophone teaching stopped when someone who did not play the saxophone replaced the woodwind teacher. Most saxophone teachers also taught clarinet or, less often, flute. At the Ithaca Conservatory, Edwin C. Tichenor taught saxophone and cello. At the Wolcott Conservatory of Music in Denver, Nicholas H. Campiglia taught saxophone, clarinet [sic], and harp. In some cases the brass teacher taught saxophone, e.g. Frank Losey at his own school and W. E. Beckhart and Anthony Ciccone at Chicago Musical College.¹⁶

Despite this practice of music instructors teaching several instruments, the first teachers of saxophone were saxophone performers, not clarinetists whose only contact with the saxophone was through teaching. As the saxophone gained in popularity and more institutions began offering saxophone instruction, the practice of not hiring specialists on each instrument meant that some saxophone teachers were not saxophone performers. In 1923 *Jacob's Band Monthly* reported a scarcity of teachers in the West, saying:

On account of other interests, the other day a saxophone player in a western city of 800,000 quit teaching a half a dozen bright students. Trying to dispose of a half a dozen lively rattlesnakes would have been easier than turning over his pupils. No one would take them. "Full up," "schedule full," "no room for more," "not doing any teaching now," "more than I can handle."¹⁷

The overwhelming majority (thirty-four of fifty-five) of institutions teaching the saxophone began saxophone instruction between 1913 and 1928. In Chicago alone at least ten musical institutions offered saxophone instruction during these fifteen years. Not only were numerous institutions offering saxophone instruction, but many of the saxophone teachers were also professional saxophonists.

The Chicago Musical College (established in 1867) has the distinction of being the institution with the longest span of uninterrupted offerings of

¹⁶*Catalog* (Denver, CO: Wolcott Conservatory of Music, 1922); *Catalog* (Erie, PA: Erie Conservatory of Music, 1913–14); and *Catalogs* (Chicago: Chicago Conservatory of Music, 1932 and 1934).

¹⁷*Jacob's Band Monthly* 8 (August 1923): 74.

saxophone instruction, more than seventy years. The College began offering saxophone instruction in 1919. The catalog offers no biographical information on the teacher, L. Lubalin, and she or he appears in no music journals. However, the following year Joseph P. Burns, a soloist on station KYW in Chicago, began teaching at the College. According to the 1926–27 catalog,

Joseph P. Burns, a player of the clarinet and saxophone of national reputation, has been soloist with the Chicago Marine Band for five years, with the National Symphony Orchestra two years, and has also appeared with the St. Louis Orchestra and other leading organizations of this country. Mr. Burns is noted as having more professional saxophone [sic] pupils to his credit than any other teacher in America. He is a splendid musician and a veritable credit to the institution as a member of its faculty.¹⁸

Other saxophone performers—teachers at the Chicago Musical College included Anthony Ciccone, saxophonist with the Biese Orchestra (the United States Patent Office also granted Ciccone three wind instrument patents related to pads); Lawrence “Bud” Freeman, a well know jazz performer in Chicago (with Ray Noble, Tommy Dorsey, and Benny Goodman) and New York (Ben Pollack); and Eddie Copland, a former member of Sousa’s band.¹⁹

Other Chicago musical institutions which employed saxophone teacher-performers included the Bush Conservatory, established in 1886. After playing first clarinet with Sousa, John Carney taught saxophone and clarinet at the Conservatory and played saxophone with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. F. Schoepp taught saxophone at Bush and was a member of the Innes band.²⁰

¹⁸*Catalog* (Chicago: Chicago Musical College, 1926–27), 77.

¹⁹*The World’s Largest Manufacturers*, 19; Paul Bro, “The Development of the American-Made Saxophone” (D.M.A. Diss., Northwestern University, 1992), 172; Nat Hentoff, “Bud Freeman,” *International Musician* 63 (October 1964): 10–11; and *Holton Talent Test* (Elkhorn, WI: Frank Holton & Company, 1924), 13.

²⁰*Musical Truth* 13 (April 1923): 5; and 15 (September 1925): n.p.

In 1923, C. G. Conn, Ltd. opened both its Conn Service School of Music and the National Conservatory of Music. The Conn-Chicago Store announced:

Mr. J. D. Henderson, president of the Conn-Chicago Company, has inaugurated a plan which is unique and effective, forming a foundation for a structure which may develop to large proportions. He has organized one of the largest faculties of world famous soloists for the instruction of band and orchestra instruments of any school in the United States, including, among others, several celebrated artists, formerly with Sousa's band whose eminence but few have attained.²¹

Arthur Davis, a former saxophonist with Sousa, taught at the Conn Service School of Music. Howard Grantham, another Sousa alumnus, also taught at the Conn Service School of Music (1923). Grantham also performed as soloist with the Orchestral Troubadours of the Chautauqua Central Six (1920). A. J. Prochaska taught at the Conn National School of Music and was a member of the Sousa, Innes, and Conway bands at various times. Prochaska also performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.²²

The American Conservatory of Music, established in 1886, began saxophone instruction in 1916. Paul Biese was the instructor until 1919. As a performer he led his own Biese Orchestra and, in 1921 became the director of the Columbia recording studios in New York. When Biese stopped teaching at the American Conservatory, Frank Borstadt took over teaching the saxophone. Borstadt had been teaching flute at the American Conservatory since 1913. When Borstadt stopped teaching at the Conservatory in 1924, saxophone instruction ceased. It resumed in 1969, with Kenneth Jandes as instructor.²³

The saxophone's association with jazz began around 1915 and by the early 1920s the saxophone was fully incorporated into the world of jazz. It is difficult to determine whether the saxophone's association with jazz

²¹*Musical Truth* 15 (September 1925): n.p.

²²*World's Largest Manufacturers of Band and Orchestra Instruments*, 30; and "Sax Artists in Symphony or Jazz," *Musical Truth* 23 (Fall 1932): 9.

²³*World's Largest Manufacturers of Band and Orchestra Instruments*, 25.

ultimately hurt or helped its acceptance into the university curriculum, but initially the saxophone came under assault. In the swing era (1930s), saxophonists either had no time, interest, or opportunity to teach their art. The first accredited jazz courses in a university curriculum began in 1947 at North Texas State University.²⁴

The Depression had significant negative impact on the saxophone craze and on music schools, particularly those not associated with universities. Many saxophone teaching institutions closed in the late 1920s and 1930s including Schuster School of Music, Henton/ Knecht Conservatory, Conn National Conservatory, Tom Brown Band School, Newlan School of Music, Thompson-d'Ippolito School of Music, Losey Military Band School, Bush Conservatory, and the Denver College of Music.²⁵

Saxophone instruction in American musical institutions began in 1882 as a direct result of the professional and military band movement. The tremendous growth of school bands (elementary through college and university) of the 1920s also promoted models of instrumentation which included saxophones. The saxophone craze of the 1920s was a boon to saxophone instruction all over the country, especially in commercial ventures not associated with higher education institutions. Saxophone instruction in colleges and universities began in 1914 at Valparaiso University, the University of Oregon, and the University of Chicago. The Depression and increased accreditation demands more acutely affected the independent music schools. By 1940, most music (and saxophone) instruction was in institutions of higher education. The veterans returning from World War II with their substantial benefits would increase this operation dramatically.

—Mansfield (Pennsylvania) University

²⁴Jerry T. Haynie, "The Changing Role of the Band in American Colleges and Universities 1900–1968" (Ph.D. Diss., Peabody Conservatory, 1971), 185.

²⁵Gustave Schuster Collection, Special Collections, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR; and *Erie County (PA) Business Directory* (Erie, PA: Erie County Historical Society, 1920).