

Brief History of the North Carolina Central University Marching Band and Band Directors

North Carolina College at Durham's first marching band was organized by Dr. Stephen Junius Wright (1910-1996), during the 1938-39 academic school year. The first band is believed to have numbered only about twenty-five students.

Dr. Wright, an accomplished musician who had begun his professional life as a high school music teacher in Centreville, Md., and later served as a high school principal in Upper Marlboro, Md., had become an assistant professor of education at North Carolina College in Durham, **a post he secured, he always maintained, because the college (now North Carolina Central) wanted him to start a band.**

Born in Dillon, South Carolina, he spent most of his early years in North Carolina. In 1926, at the age of 15, he enrolled at Hampton Institute in Virginia. Hampton had been attended by many of his relatives, including his father, a physician, who died when Stephen Wright was five years old. He received his BS degree from Hampton in 1934, his MA from Howard University in 1939 and his Ph.D. from New York University in 1943. He subsequently served as President of Bluefield State College, 1953-1957, and President of Fisk University, 1957-1966.

Prior to Wright's formal organization of a band at North Carolina College, Miss Carolyn Glover had organized ensembles every year, beginning in 1933. This group consisted of students who owned their instruments and were music lovers. They usually played for receptions and campus cultural programs and events.

In the first fifty years of operation, North Carolina College had only four directors: Mr. Wesley Howard, Dr. Joseph Mitchell, Mr. Hershel McGinnis and Mr. Richard Jones. Under Jones, the college band enjoyed great success. Aside from their halftime performances at all of the college's football games and other campus events, the band made many outside appearances, including the 1960 North Carolina Governor's Inauguration and the much talked about performance on October 29, 1961, before more than 56,000 fans during the halftime of the New York Giants-Dallas Cowboys game at Yankee Stadium.

In spring 1962, RCA-Victor Recording Company recorded the band and college choir in High Fidelity. The North Carolina College Alumni Association distributed the record.

From its humble beginning, the band grew from 25 to 120 pieces under the direction of Richard Jones and won national acclaim as a precision marching group and a well-balanced musical organization.

Following the tenure of Mr. Richard Jones, succeeding directors continued the band's tradition of excellence. NCCU Alumnus Dr. Joseph Mitchell became director and served the university for five years. Mr. Willie Williams followed Mitchell as director. After his tenure, Joseph Mitchell became acting band director for one year until Dr. Jerry Head joined the faculty. For eight years another alumnus, Mr. Xavier Cason, served as director. His successor was Ms. Robyn Reaves, the first female band director in the CIAA. Further attestation to the excellence of the band is that for several years, under the direction of Jorim E. Reid, the band was invited to perform at the Honda Battle of the Bands Showcase in Atlanta, GA. for six appearances. The band was invited to march in the 122nd Rose Parade in Pasadena, California on January, 1st 2011.

North Carolina Central University (Sound Machine) Marching Band Directors:

1938 Stephen Wright – Organized the first formal band

1944-1956 Wesley I. Howard

1956-1957 Joseph T. Mitchell

1957-1958 Herschel McGinnis

1958-1967 Richard H. L. Jones

1967-1972 Joseph T. Mitchell

1972-1976 Willie Williams

1976-1977 Dr. Joseph T. Mitchell

1977-1989 Dr. Jerry Head

1989-1997 Xavier Cason

1997-2001 Robyn L. Reaves

2001- 2014 Jorim E. Reid

2014- Thurmond D. Hollins