

CHAPTER 8

NEW BEGINNINGS: 1926–1927

*“What nobler employment, or more valuable to the state, than that of the man who instructs the rising generation.”*

~ Marcus Cicero

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Michigan State College  
of Agriculture and Applied Science  
Office of the Secretary  
East Lansing, Mich.

Herman H. Halladay

August 9, 1927

Mr. Leonard Falcone  
515 S. Fifth Ave.  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

My dear Mr. Falcone:

Referring to our conversation relative to the band, I wish to state that it is my understanding that you are willing to take charge of the two bands and render such instructions as may be necessary to carry them along in good shape and that you are willing to

accept the position at a salary of \$200 per month for ten months beginning September 1st. Also that this in no way will interfere with your giving private lessons, providing it does not interfere with your college work.

Of course, all details in connection with the handling of the band and matters pertaining to the reorganization will have to be worked out with Mr. Richards when he comes to campus, September 1st.

Will you kindly acknowledge receipt of this letter?

Very sincerely yours,  
H. H. Halladay  
Secretary

HHH:EM

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Michigan State College  
Of Agriculture and Applied Science  
Office of the Secretary  
East Lansing, Mich.

Herman H. Halladay

August 15, 1927

Mr. Leonard Falcone  
515 S. Fifth Ave.  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

My dear Mr. Falcone:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of August 12th, accepting the appointment as Director of the Band.

I am delighted to think that you have accepted and assure you of every cooperation to make your stay here both pleasant and successful.

Very sincerely yours,

H. H. Halladay  
Secretary<sup>1</sup>

HHH:EM<sup>1</sup>



WHEN IN 1926 NICHOLAS FALCONE WAS APPOINTED assistant director to Director of Bands Norman Larson at the University of Michigan, he was asked to organize and direct the new “University Reserve Band,” a group of freshmen and some sophomores who were unable to make the top group. He formed the second string Reserve Band in October of that year<sup>2</sup> and early the following spring asked his brother to guest conduct and play a solo. Leonard did, and on March 24, 1927, the day after the concert, the student newspaper *The Michigan Daily*, published this review:

*The Varsity Band and Soloist Astound Concert Audience  
Falcone and Men Give High Class Program*

*The band being composed of freshmen, Mr. (Nicholas) Falcone nevertheless has succeeded in whipping together a band which responded instantly to his finished conducting . . . Leonard Falcone, brother of the director, playing a trombone solo, the ‘Rondo Caprice’ by Herbert L. Clarke, astounded the large audience with the richness and depth of his tone, and marvelous technique he has at his command. The band setting of the three Michigan songs. . . were Leonard Falcone arrangements for tenor with band accompaniment. The songs were well sung by Frank Ryan, tenor, with Leonard Falcone conducting.*

**Joe Dobos:** *Nick knew all the best players in town and all students in School of Music. He had a nice little band. When they had the concert, that so-called “second band,” the Reserve Band, outplayed the U of M band—which was well noted by newspapers. In one of the numbers, Nicholas took a march that he wrote for the students who regularly attended shows at the Wuerth Theater and made a band arrangement out of it. It was written for 7 instruments originally, but he expanded it for band. He had Leonard write the baritone part and he called it “M Men March” and he dedicated it to Robert Campbell, at the time the mayor of Ann Arbor, University of Michigan’s treasurer, and also the faculty advisor or business manager of University of Michigan bands. He was in the audience that night and was impressed with the band’s playing a piece of music dedicated to him—and of course at heart he was a politician, and it had a favorable review from the newspaper.*<sup>3</sup>

Neither the concert nor the review could have hurt either man’s chances for a bright future, and as fate would have it, some few months after Leonard’s appearance with his brother’s band, Herman Halladay, secretary of Michigan State College, called Robert Campbell (“Uncle Bob,” to the men of the Varsity and Reserve Bands) to ask him for a recommendation for an important position that had just opened up at State: Director of Bands. Ironically, Norman Larson had just left his position as the Varsity Band Director at U of M, and Campbell himself had been considering candidates to succeed him. He had seen and heard enough of the Falcone brothers to know who to recommend, all right.

An August 6, 1927, *Ann Arbor News* article about the selections tells what happened next, and suggests that though the appointments for the top band positions at the two schools came separately, they were publically announced simultaneously—or nearly so. Nicholas, it states, “was officially named last June<sup>4\*</sup> to succeed Norman Larson as head of the local Varsity band, (though) the appointment was not made public until today. Leonard Falcone, however, was not appointed to lead the Michigan State band until recently.”<sup>5</sup>

So it was that in an indelible moment that defines a life, Leonard, 28 years old, accepted the job as Director of Bands at Michigan State College, and with his future unreeling before him as dramatically as a D.W. Griffith movie, began preparing to throw a very large rock into the rising pond of the small regional agricultural school.<sup>6\*</sup>

Before Leonard Falcone arrived on the Michigan State campus, he must have been aware that great things were in the works. By 1928, the new science and arts curriculum that had been introduced in 1921 had resulted in nearly doubling the school's enrollment to 2,813 in less than a decade, and the off campus extension service had increased its budget seven times over and grown from 4 to 55 agents. More, 1,375 acres of new off-campus lands had been acquired, and the college farm had doubled in size thanks to the annexation of six adjacent farms and the three hours' daily manual labor students were expected to contribute to the school in garden or field work—labor which for many years translated into clearing forested areas so that the gardens and fields could be planted in the first place.<sup>7</sup> Another change came to the school in the form of college President Kenyon Butterfield, whose term lasted a mere four years (1924–1928). A native of a small farming community of Lapeer, Michigan, his deep interest in the sociological problems of the farmer led him to devote much of his life's work to helping them adjust to the economic, social, and religious trends of the times. Under his leadership, MAC offered an increasing number of courses to uplift and enhance mankind, and in short order was able to develop entire departments geared toward the various disciplines of the humanities.

This focus resulted in some very good news for teachers and students of music, who learned in 1928 that the board of trustees had agreed that MSC should distinguish itself as a place where young men of talent could come to study music. One of America's finest harpsichordists, Lewis Richards, who had studied piano at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels, and later played at the White House for President Hoover and his guests (among whom was the UK's Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald) was chosen to create a top caliber music conservatory to train students in music as an avocation, preparation for teaching, or concert stage; to do it, Richards joined with the Lansing Conservatory to form the Michigan State Institute of Music and Allied

Arts and selected as faculty twenty one world class musicians, including Leonard Falcone, Michael Press, chair of the violin department at the Moscow Imperial Conservatory of Music, Alexander Schuster, formerly assistant conductor and principal cellist of the Schlesischen Orchestra of Breslau, and Arthur Farwell,<sup>8\*</sup> noted Indianist composer and well known conductor of massed choral performances such as the “Canticle of Praise,” played across America on Armistice Sundays. It was a renowned staff in which the Lansing community took genuine pride, comprised of virtuoso teachers who were to offer unprecedented opportunities to both college and non-college local area students. To encourage these outstanding musicians to join the staff, State allowed them to use campus buildings to teach private lessons to the Institute students, and supplement their faculty salaries with a share of the private lesson fees these pupils brought in.<sup>9</sup> It was a decision that would come to haunt them in the future.

Yet other than perhaps these few facts, by his own admission Leonard knew very little about the school he had just agreed to work for as “Teacher of Wind Instruments” and “Director of the Michigan State College Military Band.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, it’s possible that the first time he saw the newly named (in 1925) “Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science” was when, in late August, 1927, he traveled on the rutted gravel roads leading to campus, past bucolic cow-dotted pastures and fields of sun drenched Michigan corn marching unceasingly to the horizon. Nearly there, he crossed over the Red Cedar at the vibrating steel bridge at Farm Lane, passed the dairies and barnyards north of the river, and reported for work at the Armory, a place that up until his arrival had served the combined functions of drill hall, gymnasium, and ballroom, and whose pool in the adjoining Bath House had been floored over to make a band practice room.<sup>11</sup> Though the familiar sight of young men in raccoon coats or yellow slickers or plus-fours, and bob-haired coed “flappers” in short skirts and four-buckled shoes would have been recognizable enough to him,<sup>12</sup> the MSC campus was surely something of a surprise the first time he laid eyes on it. It was less developed, its facilities less utilizable, and in a setting considerably more rural than the sophisticated University of Michigan’s in Ann Arbor. What he saw then, of course, was much different from what the

university grounds look like today. The president and the deans lived in wood houses, and the only structures on the south side of the Red Cedar (a location previously forbidden to female students because it was considered too wild and dangerous)<sup>13</sup> were the stadium, which had been built in 1923, just four years before his arrival, and Demonstration Hall, which was under construction. Then, as now, buildings clustered around Circle Drive, which was a dirt road, but a street car track looped the place where Campbell Hall was later to stand, and picnic grounds were spread invitingly on the spot claimed in 1931 by Mary Mayo Hall. There were barns and fields on a slope just south of Kedzie Hall, which were replaced in 1938 by a band shell, where for twenty one years the young Leonard Falcone would conduct enormously popular open air concerts—until the shell met its demise in 1959, a sacrifice to its replacements, Ernst Bessey Hall and a parking ramp. The occasional bare bulbs hanging from campus trees served then as outdoor electrical lighting,<sup>14</sup> but they would soon enough make way for streetlamps. Even the Armory (1886) and Bath House (1902), the site of his own rehearsal and office space near the newly built Beaumont Tower,<sup>15\*</sup> would be eventually demolished in 1939 and replaced by the music building so well known to his future students.

**Leonard Falcone:** *There was no auditorium on campus when I first came. The only place to play was a little theater, which no longer exists, located on the third floor of the Home Economics Building. And that served for recitals and concerts. Back then, the band had to play in the women's gym or the ROTC building—the Armory. It (the Armory) was later torn down, you see, and then the music building was built on top of it. A very small place. And they played basketball there, everything. It held about 400 people at the very most. When the women's gym was built (1918), they moved the concerts over there. Then Demonstration Hall was finished the year I came here (1927), and so we played our concerts in Demonstration Hall . . . There was a terrific echo in there . . . At that time, they had a sawdust floor for the horses to prance around. They built a temporary wooden platform for the band, and we played there . . . especially for the*

*yearly Farmer's Week, which was a big thing in those days. And then occasionally we would go over to the People's Church. We would have the stage extended. We played two or three concerts in there.*

*So you see, we had no place. When they built the auditorium (begun in 1937), it was a lifesaver for us.<sup>16</sup>*

It wasn't just the campus that was new to him when he arrived in September of 1927; the school's culture and traditions were new, too, and many of them were in a state of flux. A MAC cow named Belle Sarcastic, who had held the world record for eleven years for producing 23,190 pounds of milk and 722 pounds of fat in 1897 and had borne a St. Louis Exposition Grand Champion steer, Sarcastic Lad, remained the college's unofficial mascot, but the school's name had been changed from "Michigan Agricultural College" (MAC) to "Michigan State College" (MSC) just the year before. The athletic teams, "The Spartans," were just settling into being called that name after a contest to change it from "The Aggies" ended with the winning name "The Michigan Staters" being chosen, and then overturned a week later by sportswriter George Alderton of the *Lansing State Journal*, who thought it too long and, on his own volition, selected "Spartans" from the losing entries. People liked it, and it stuck. With the new names for the school and its sports teams came other changes, among them the adoption of "Block-S" as the athletic award letter, and an edit of the words to the school song from "Their specialty is farming/But those farmers play football," to "Their specialty is winning/ And those Spartans play football."<sup>17\*</sup> The new ritual of "Lantern Night," a procession of coeds meandering through campus on a mild May evening and passing their lanterns to members of the junior, sophomore, or freshman class below them<sup>18</sup> had begun in 1926, and then, of course, there were the traditions of the band, a group that unbeknownst to the young Leonard Falcone was soon to give him the most worrisome challenge of his young life.