

Ladies of the Lakes - the women's bands of Michigan 1875-1925

Gavin Holman, 30 March 2022

The number of bands in the United States grew rapidly from the 1850's. This was partly due to the invention of new brass instruments, enabled by better manufacturing techniques, and partly the result of an expansion and industrialization of cities and towns. The Civil War helped to maintain the musical momentum through regimental bands, many of which were wholesale enlistments of existing town bands, who typically returned to civilian duties at a later date. These early bands were almost exclusively composed of men, although there were a few female instrumentalists.

The instrumentation of these early bands consisted largely of brass instruments, with the occasional woodwind flute, piccolo or clarinet, with various percussion instruments – usually side drum, bass drum and cymbals. Most bands were founded with whatever players and instruments were available, and it would not be until they were more established that they could be more selective in their instrumental make ups. Whereas in Britain the 'standard' brass bands, consisting wholly of brass instruments, rapidly became an accepted norm in the second half of the 19th century, the early band movement in the United States was decentralized and bands generally used a mix of brass and woodwind instruments.

Books, articles and dissertations on the general history of bands in Michigan and of the ladies' bands of the wider U.S.A. are included, for reference, in the *Brass Band Bibliography*,¹ and resources for further research into the history of brass bands are available in an earlier document.² Much of the remaining history of such bands can now only be gleaned from the occasional surviving contemporary document, or the more numerous references to bands in newspaper reports of the time.

The earliest exclusively female bands to appear were those associated with family musical groups in the 1850s and 1860s. Non-familial "women's bands" and "ladies' bands" started to appear in towns across the country in the mid-1870s. Most of these bands were exclusively female, but a few had occasional men as additional players. However, it was rare to find a named female leader or band director. Where the conductor is recorded, they were usually male, and similarly any tutors that were associated with the bands were men also. In many cases the quality of musicianship of the players was equal to or surpassed that of their male counterparts—at least as far as can be inferred from reviews—and, despite their novelty and femininity, which were probably major factors in their engagement, their musical performances were often greatly appreciated and lauded by their audiences.

Some of the ladies' bands were professional or semi-professional, appearing on stage, touring with vaudeville troupes, or engaging in concert tours around the country. The majority of the bands, however, were local to one town or county and provided the same entertainment services as their male town band equivalents.

Ladies' bands were, as far as can be seen, on average equal to or better than the more numerous male bands in their musical abilities. They generally received admiring plaudits

¹ Holman, Gavin – *The Brass Band Bibliography*, 14th edition – July 2021 [academia.edu]

² Holman, Gavin - *Researching the History of Brass Bands - a guide to the resources available* - February 2018 [academia.edu]

on their performance and deportment. The few negative comments found tend to be largely joking rather than misogynistic, and general rather than specific. For example:

*“The enterprising individual who is organising a brass band of twenty women in Cincinnati, says if they learn half as many ‘airs’ as they put on, the experiment cannot fail to be a success.”*³

*“A California town has a female brass band and, somehow, these players can sit and blow, and blow, for hours at a stretch, and not once get out of breath as a male band would.”*⁴

*“Visitor (in Ruralville): this is a very pleasant and home-like place, and I do not understand why so many families have moved away from it in the past few months, as you say. – Native: You haven’t heard our young ladies’ brass band yet.”*⁵

A report of a ladies’ brass band being formed in Brooklyn, New York - *“soulful damsels who can wrestle with the French horn are in demand. Strong lunged maidens who can breathe harmoniously through the tuba are badly wanted, and muscular matrons who can bang the bass drum and sound the cymbals can count on an engagement ... Sure women who thus dare to risk the inevitable distortion of the face produced by those whose fate it is to make brazen music must be remarkable exceptions to their sex”*.⁶

My earlier research on town and cornet bands documented over 8,700 groups in the United States, including some 400 ladies’ bands.⁷ These were unevenly distributed between the states, mainly due to the differences in the numbers of musical groups in existence, but also due to the availability of reference sources for the information. For example, the states of Indiana, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Iowa all had around 20 ladies’ bands recorded, while Kansas was significantly higher, with 68 – for which there was a wider set of information sources used in my research.

When we compare the number of known ladies’ bands to their male counterparts, on a state by state basis, their proportions range from 21% (Kansas) and 14% (Michigan) down to zero. The overall numbers of ladies’ bands are a small proportion of the total I have recorded making up approximately 5% of the total number of bands in the nation in the period studied. Michigan had nearly three times the number of ladies’ bands than would be expected. There is no clear explanation why some states supported significantly higher proportions of female bands than others, whether this is related to social, economic, geographical or other factors. The same can be posed for male bands during the 19th century, where the apparent paucity of such ensembles in some states compared to others is an intriguing question awaiting further study.

Michigan musicians

The state of Michigan is fairly representative of the number and spread of women’s bands, particularly among those of the Midwest, where the majority of these bands were located.

³ *Boston Evening Transcript* (Massachusetts) - 19 January 1872

⁴ *Omaha Daily Bee* (Nebraska) - 26 August 1875

⁵ *Wilmington Messenger* (North Carolina) - 19 February 1897

⁶ *Cardiff Times* - 24 September 1887

⁷ Holman, Gavin - *Brass Bands & Cornet Bands of the U.S.A. - a historical directory* - January 2021 [academia.edu]; idem, *Women and Brass: the female brass bands of the 19th and 20th centuries* - April 2018 [academia.edu]

Over the fifty years between 1875 and 1925, I have now identified 51 female bands residing in the state though, of course, there were others that visited from neighbouring areas or on tours to perform in Michigan. This amounts to around 12% of the total number of bands in the state, a higher proportion than all other states aside from Kansas. Again, this difference may be partially due to the greater depth of my investigation on such bands in Michigan.

Michigan seems an ideal case study in many ways: a mixture of rural and urban, well away from the Western frontier but also situated outside of the east coast, and a state with a major industrial center in Detroit.

The earliest known women's band in Michigan was the Grand Haven Ladies' Band, founded in early 1876 by John Luikens.⁸ Luikens was an engineer by trade; the bandswomen included four of his daughters, the youngest being only ten years old. These were Maria (16), Sarah (15), Jane (13), and Louise (10). With four daughters and no sons, it is perhaps unsurprising that he founded a girls' band.

In 1879 that the next ladies' band appeared at Caro, a small town in the north-eastern part of the state.⁹ This seems to have been the start of a larger trend, as over the course of the 1880s at least 24 other ladies' bands were founded in the state.

What was it that spurred the formation of ladies' bands in the 1880s? It was a combination of factors, including a general increase in the number of male or town bands and the increasing availability of relatively cheap instruments. Instructors, primarily male, were also increasingly common for the founding and training of bands. At the same time, examples of other women performing with brass instruments, and their increasing presence as professional ensembles that toured or played for Chautauquas certainly played a role. There was also a realisation that capitalising on their femininity could be a significant attraction alongside of their musical capability. By the same token women experienced a widening social and cultural environment in post-Civil war America, and bands serve as a tangible example of that slow but steady progress towards independence.

Unfortunately, we know very little about how or why particular bands were formed—that is rarely documented, even for the more numerous male/town bands. From what little can be determined, they were usually the idea of one or two people, who then gathered support in the community, sometimes using the example of other bands to bemoan the lack in their own area. If they were lucky, a sponsor or benefactor—anything from an individual to a group of businessmen or the chamber of commerce—helped with the formation of the band, but regardless it was normally an exercise in raising funds, attracting members, finding a tutor, buying instruments, music, and uniforms—activities which can take from a few weeks to a year or more.

The longevity of bands in the 1880s was quite variable. Some lasted a matter of weeks, almost foundering before they got going, while others lasted a decade or two. Michigan ladies' bands seem to have had a lifetime of several years on average, which is very limited compared to their male counterparts. There is a natural ebb and flow in the life of any band, and sometimes the 'ebb' is sufficiently strong for the band to fold, whether it be due to finances, lack of members, departure of the leader, or other reasons. For the ladies' bands, the additional complication of members becoming married, having children, and entering into domestic life. High turnover, in tandem with the likelihood of losing a key figure, presented a hazard to every ladies' band's existence, with no equivalent among male bands.

⁸ *The True Northerner* (Paw Paw) – 28 July 1876

⁹ *The Times Herald* (Port Huron) – 1 August 1879

For example, the Grand Ledge Ladies' Band, from just west of Lansing, performed for five years, from 1886 to 1891, before disbanding "because the boys keep marrying off the members."¹⁰ Other bands are recorded as having disbanded, with reasons being given - "just for the winter" or "until new members can be found" for example.

The longest lasting band is that of the House of David Ladies' Band, based at Benton Harbor, which existed from at least 1908 into the late 1920s.¹¹ This band was associated with the Israelite House of David, a religious commune which established a colony there in 1903. Music was an important part of the community life, and their estate soon became a tourist attraction, with the various bands, miniature trains, ice creams, baseball matches and many other activities and events. The colony supported several bands and musical ensembles, including that of the men and a children's band. One possible reason for the demise of the ladies' band was an increasing number of accusations in the 1920s of sexual assaults on young girls in the colony by the leader, Benjamin F. Purnell. This ultimately led to a split in the House of David and the conviction of Purnell on fraud (only) charges.



Figure 1: Israelite House of David Ladies' Band, Eden Springs, Benton Harbor, c. 1910

Members of the bands

Details of the individuals in bands is often difficult to obtain. It is rare for the names of players to be recorded, if there is any mention of a name, it is more often than not that of the musical director or leader. This lack of information is not specific to ladies' bands, it also applies to bands generally, and particularly during the 19th century—though it has to be said that 20th-century reporting is not much better in this respect. The leaders, musical directors, and teachers/tutors of the bands, where they are identified, are usually male, and often given the honorific "Professor."

¹⁰ *Owosso Times* - 18 September 1891

¹¹ Howard, Keith & Meldrim, Tom - *Israelite House of David Musical Traditions* - [israelitehouseof david.com]

When players' names are recorded it is usually only on a single occasion – perhaps a competition, special event, annual meeting, or similar – that gave cause for their names to be published. It is much rarer for there to be further lists of players' names for a particular band. One such example of this is the Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band, which was founded in 1881, disbanding in 1895 when a number of the members departed. We have three lists of its fifteen or so members, one from a newspaper report in 1883, and two others which were annotations to undated photographs of the band.¹² Only one of the ladies appears in all three lists: [Clara] Nell Jennings (1859-1917), who was employed as a printer. Six members appear twice: Flora Maria Topping (1865-1943), Lillian Earl, Etta Reeson, Mame Hassler, [Elizabeth] Mary Jennings (1854-1934), and Sarah Rudolph (1858-). The latter was the daughter of a potash manufacturer. Turnover of players in bands is common – very few go more than a year or two without some change in personnel. This is particularly true for bands with young people, and these ladies, aged from around 16 to 27, would also be moving on to make their various ways in life leaving the band behind. Attempts to delve deeper into the lives of these named players have proved in vain – the historical records (so far) have not given any further clues to them.



Figure 2: Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band – from the left: Grace Colwall, Hattie Imlet, Oda Rudolph, Nell Jennings, Mary Joyce, Nell Piper, Vera Dalgen, Mary Jennings, Nettie Johnson (1866-), Sara Rudolph (1858-), Nell Kellogg, Mame Hassler, Etta Reeson, and Cora Lewis (1866-)

Most of the ladies' bands were associated with, and resided in, one location—effectively the female equivalent of the male/town bands—and were named after their home town. A few took the name of their leader, e.g. Gierk's Ladies Band (Richmond) and the Hart Ladies' Band (Oceana County).¹³ Two exceptions to these were the House of David Ladies' Band mentioned earlier— associated with the religious colony—and the Hamilton Carhartt &

¹² *Detroit Free Press* – 6 June 1883

¹³ Brubaker, Mike - *Gierk's Ladies Band of Richmond, Michigan* - [temposenzatempo] - 6 May 2010

Company Ladies' Band (Detroit), which was the only example of an women's industrial band in Michigan.

This band was formed in early 1900, with some 25 players directed by George M. White. It was sponsored by Hamilton Carhatt and his company, which manufactured working clothing in Detroit. It is notable also for the splendid bandwagon that was provided by Hamilton Carhartt for his ladies from the outset. Despite the success of the band for its first two years, there is no mention of it beyond 1902.¹⁴ This band also had the only female musical director explicitly identified among Michigan ladies' bands. Anna Beyer was reported as being their director in 1901.¹⁵ Sadly, further attempts to find out more about her have been to no avail. There were several women with her name, living in and near Detroit in 1900, but no indications in the census data, from their details, or those of their families, which could identify her. No further mention of her has been found.

An earlier report gave the Carhatt band's director as George M. White, in 1900 when the band was founded.¹⁶ White had been a farmer, when he married his wife, Lydia, in Essex, Ontario, in 1890, but he subsequently became a professional musician, returning to Detroit where he was given the task of organising the Carhartt Band. He was still recorded as being a professional band leader in Los Angeles in the 1910 U.S. census. His story is fairly typical of the 'professors of music' who tutored and led bands, and which are evident and documented in the historical record, unlike those of their female counterparts.



Figure 3: Hamilton Carhartt Ladies' Band, 1901

The Hamilton Carhatt Band's members in 1901 were:

Lucy Russell (1883-1938), Rosie Reinke (1884-1957), Mae St. Thomas, Laura Malo (1884-1956), Minnie Jones, Grace Demsky (1885-, employed as a tailoress), Anna Beyer (director), Minnie Frahm (1883-1949, employed as a dressmaker), Margaret Wolcott (1885-1974, employed as a machine operator), Mary Frahm (1885-, employed as a lithographer), Hazel Bertram (1885-), Louise Schoenberg, Ida Berhardt (1879-1962), Gertie Reinke (1886-1963), Louise Stamm, Gustie Teschke, Tillie Reinke (1883-, employed as a tailoress), Anna Reinke (1882-, employed as a tailoress), Emma Pahl (1885-, employed as a tailoress), Margaret Russell (1883-1927), and Clara Zizka (1885-).

¹⁴ *Detroit Free Press* – 26 December 1901

¹⁵ *Detroit Free Press* – 22 December 1901

¹⁶ *Detroit Free Press* – 7 April 1901

Most of these players were in their late teens, with a few in their early twenties when they were in the band. Three members of Fenton Ladies' Band are known to have been around 21 and 29 in one of its photographs, in 1887.

Competitions

Band competitions were frequent during this time period, and female bands occasionally participated. However, these were generally confined to a "special class" or given honorary awards for their performances instead of directly competing with their male counterparts. A friendly contest was held at the band picnic organised by Johnson's Lapeer Band at Lapeer on August 11, 1881. Together with Johnson's Band, the other participants were the Bay City Knights Templar Band, the North Branch Band, the Hadley Band, and the Caro Young Ladies' Cornet Band. All the bands united in a joint concert in the evening.¹⁷

The 1883 Michigan State Band Association Tournament in Detroit included 21 bands and 383 musicians.¹⁸ The solo contests were held that evening at Whitney's Opera House, and the proceedings were opened by an overture by the Caro Ladies' Band. The following day the bands marched through the city, the Caro Ladies Band (15 players), the Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band (15 players), and the Jackson Ladies' Brass Band (26 players), surrounded by the other bands.¹⁹ A joint concert of the ladies' bands was held in the Whitney Opera House in the evening, with the Caro Band opening with an overture and playing two further pieces, as also did the Fenton Band, both playing encores due to the great applause received. Generally speaking, these ladies' bands played the same repertoire as their male counterparts. The members of the three bands were:

Caro - Professor A. Corazzie (leader), Misses L. Hawley, N. Rogers, E. Kimball, I. Franklin, H. Franklin, M. Townsend, M. Parmlee, G. McPherson, F. Sprague, E. Mackinzie, N. Piper, and Mr H.B. Corazzie.

Fenton - Eugene B. Shepherd (leader), Misses Lizzie M. Jennings, Lillian Earl, Winnie L. Smith, Flora Topping, Mabel White, Ida Trophagen, C. Nellie Jennings, Zulla Richardson, Hattie Fowler, C. Belle Jennings, Maggie Guest, and Maude Topping, and Mrs E.C. Foote and Mrs C. Tinker.

Jackson - Professor Mills, C.W. Fowler, N. Schwemfurth, Emma McClary, Addie Putmun, Walter Spaulding, A.M. Yocum, Mollie Harris, A.C. Tinker and wife, Etta Tinker, Ella Tinker, C.L. Howe, Minnie Whitney, James Moloney, M. Crittenden, Louis Lucker, Lizzie Lucker, F.B. Russell, Nellie Emerson, C. Sustzer, Mrs Addison, Mamie Wycoff, S. Cornell, Anna White, Dora Carroll, and A. Cooper.



Member of Caro Ladies' Cornet Band

In the special prizes class of the Tournament, the Fenton Band played an introductory overture and the "Elmore Quickstep," winning first prize (an \$80 cornet). The Caro Band played a medley of popular airs and the fantasia "Fairies' Moonlight Revels," which was

¹⁷ *Detroit Free Press* – 12 August 1881

¹⁸ Hash, Phillip M. "Tournaments of the Michigan State Band Association: 1877-1884," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* (April 2017): 34–57.

¹⁹ *Detroit Free Press*, 6 June 1883

played without the aid of their leader, taking the second prize (a \$75 cornet). The Jackson Ladies' Band was barred from contesting against the other ladies' bands due to the presence of five men in the band, but it did play an overture of national airs, as an exhibition, and also provided music between the acts of the comedy "Flashes," at the Detroit Opera House on the two evenings before the competition. Details of the five men who caused the band's disqualification are somewhat limited, but we can surmise from the list of names that one was the father and husband of the two Tinker ladies, and another possibly the brother of Lizzie Lucker. The only other definite male was James Moloney, with no known link to any other player.

The following year, 1884, was the last year the Association organised a band tournament. This time it was held at East Saginaw on 3 June, with the Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band again winning first prize in their class. The Saint John Ladies' Band, which was founded in 1882, also took part.²⁰ The Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band also took first prize in the Fireman's Tournament at Ridgetown, Ontario, in June 1887.²¹ Given their succession of wins, they seem to have been the best ladies' band in the state in terms of quality of performances. A fifth ladies' band is known to have competed in later band tournaments: the Lenox Girls' Brass Band. This was active in the early 1890s, with leader Theodore Miller (b. 1842), a hardware merchant, and the members included his two daughters Nellie (b. 1870) and Anna (b. 1874). It was a leading attraction in the town, winning several prizes across Michigan and Canada.

Aside from the band competitions, which were rare events for the ladies' bands, most of the playing engagements they undertook were similar to those of the male/town bands. These encompassed the whole range of local performances at church socials, weddings, fairs, funerals, lectures, reunions, demonstrations, processions, and parades—particularly supporting local temperance, fraternal and religious societies. They played music at the opening of new buildings, for political rallies, accompanied parties on excursions by train, and boat, provided entertainment for the many Independence Day celebrations each July, and attended Chautauqua gatherings to provide musical and cultural education.

Some of the bands fulfilled longer engagements, playing short seasons at various resorts or places of entertainment. The South Haven Ladies' Marine Band accepted a position to give several performances at Benton Harbor in 1895.²² The Caro Young Ladies' Cornet Band was engaged to perform for a season at the Princess Roller-skating Rink at Caro, from February 1885.²³ The Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band fulfilled a two-week engagement at Cheltenham Beach on Chicago's South Shore, in August 1886.²⁴

Appearances are everything

From the evidence of contemporary photographs and reports, it is clear the appearance of the ladies in these bands was equally as important as their musical performances. As with their male counterparts, being dressed in uniforms, faced with braid and with caps on the head, gave them an air of professionalism which was not available to the non-uniformed ensembles. There were some ladies' bands that dressed in their 'street' clothes, but most adopted some form of uniform, with dress jackets, formal skirts, and caps. Some of these were formalised versions of existing outdoor suits for women, while others adopted a more

²⁰ *Detroit Free Press* – 4 June 1884

²¹ *The Times Herald* (Port Huron) – 11 June 1887

²² *The Weekly Palladium* (Benton Harbor) – 21 June 1895

²³ *Detroit Free Press* – 26 February 1885

²⁴ *Livingston County Daily Press and Argus* – 26 August 1886

military look, with zouave-style outfits. Descriptions of ladies' bands' uniforms exist for some of the bands outside Michigan:

- *“A green broadcloth with black braid across the front of the jackets fastened with ‘frogs’; on the shoulders were epaulets trimmed with black fringe and on the green mortarboard caps were black braid and black tassels; the skirts of the uniforms were short, reaching just to the tops of the high shoes”* [Onalaska Ladies' Brass Band, Wisconsin, c. 1886]
- *“A pretty and piquant costume, uniform as to color and cut, uniting the feminine and military, a sort of mitigated vivandière dress.”* [Holcomb and Robertson's Young Ladies' Cornet Band, 1884]
- *A black polonaise with white silk epaulettes, white military braid chevrons on the cuffs, handkerchief pocket on left breast, white silk cord and tassel about the waist, black cashmere skirt, trimmed lightly down the front with white military braid, black Derby hat with white pompom.* [Euterpe Ladies' Cornet Band, Chicago, 1881]

The figures in this essay show the different styles of uniform typical of these bands. The Williamston Girls' Band (figure 5) wore the same style of dress, to which a hat was added when performing outside. The military-style jackets and caps of the Kalkaska Ladies' Cornet Band (figure 6) and Caro Ladies' Band (figure 4) present stark contrasts, with braiding and epaulettes. The uniforms of the Israelite House of David Ladies' Band (figure 1) and Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band (figure 2) lie somewhere in between: formal uniforms likely purchased but not in the strictest military style.



Figure 5: Williamston Girls' Band, 1909

Anecdotes and Stories

While we have very few details of the activities of these bands given the nature of newspaper reports at the time, when things went wrong suddenly the press took a stronger interest. The result is the survival of a variety of oddities and anecdotes, some of which can be more telling than others.

In a story worthy of Meredith Willson's *The Music Man*, the Bay City Ladies' Band was founded in 1883 or earlier, by leader Frank Lawrence. However, in early 1884, he skipped out of town with all the funds of the band, leaving the members deeply in debt. As with most such bands, much of their work would be to raise funds to purchase instruments and uniforms, often contracting with suppliers to deliver the items and then pay off the balances over time. The theft of the band's money would have severely impacted them, and it probably caused the demise of the band.²⁵



Figure 6: Kalkaska Ladies' Cornet Band, c. 1906

The Charlotte Ladies' Band was active in August 1884, when it took part in the military and veterans reunion parades and entertainment at Camp Mason near Battle Creek. Following the exertion of the parade, the band took up station at the Guard Mount, where three of the ladies were "overcome" likely with heat exhaustion. They were sent to the hospital where the camp surgeon soon brought them to a state of health, and they returned to resume their musical duties.²⁶

The Grand Ledge Ladies' Band performed in August 1886 at a prohibition demonstration at Owosso. Unfortunately, the bus (a dray fitted with seats) being used to transport the band overturned, throwing the band into a ditch. This injured most of them and damaged the instruments. The bus driver later went to Grand Ledge and offered \$100 in settlement, which was accepted by the band.²⁷ Whether this money was used to repair the instruments or purchase new ones is not known.

²⁵ *The Times* (Harbor Beach) – 13 March 1884

²⁶ *Detroit Free Press*, 22 August 1884

²⁷ *Detroit Free Press*, 3 September 1886

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the tales of woe, the story of the ladies' bands of Michigan is one of ambition, innovation, and musicianship. Despite their relatively short lives as organisations, they clearly made an impact in their local communities and on their appreciative audiences. The state of Michigan, bordering the Great Lakes, and with its close connections to Canada, was home to probably at least 500 town and cornet bands during this period, of which 51 were women's bands.

There are, no doubt, several more ladies' bands to be discovered in the archives and annals of the history of the state of Michigan, and this applies equally to the other states. It is a pity that so little evidence remains of these pioneering women, who banded together and 'discoursed sweet music' for a few years in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Further details of the activities of the known Michigan ladies' bands are listed in the directory below.

Directory of the ladies' bands of Michigan, 1875-1925

Adrian School for Girls Young Ladies' Band

The various houses of the State legislature held parties on Washington's birthday, 21 February 1905. The House Committee engaged the Young Ladies' Band from the School for Girls at Adrian. ²⁸

Albion Ladies' Brass Band

The Albion Ladies' Brass Band was formed in the autumn of 1883, and consisted of 12 women, a man tuba player and a man director. They practiced in rooms over what was, in 1938, the Wochholz and Gress grocery on South Superior street. There was a noticeable lack of talking and tobacco smoke at rehearsals.²⁹ Referring to one of their concerts, it was reported that *"Although they did not attempt difficult music, it was, nevertheless, good music and executed with creditable precision in point of time, harmony and expression. Their instruments glistened like burnished gold. Their playing was subdued and not disagreeably harsh and noisy, as is too often the case with bands playing indoors. It was not strictly a band concert, but a concert given by the band."* In one of their concerts, in November 1883, the band netted \$50. The bass drum player was a widow with nine children.³⁰

Alpena Young Ladies' Cornet Band

This was active in July 1884, when it gave a concert at the Opera House, Alpena, which was a great hit with the audience. The members of the band were: Lizzie Hawley, Eb Cornet; Jessie Smith, Bb Cornet (and soloist); Mamie Wyckoff, 1st Eb Alto; Flora Leach, 2nd Eb Alto; Matie Beeson, 1st Trombone Tenor; Minnie Whitney (aged 14, who also played violin solos), 2nd Bb Tenor; Nellie Jennings, Baritone; Nellie Piper, Tuba; Flora Sprague, Tenor Drum, Emma McKenzie, Bass Drum.³¹

Bancroft Ladies' Cornet Band

Active in 1888 to 1890, conductor Henry Williams. The band received its new instruments in September 1888. To raise funds, they held a social at Mrs George Converse's in February 1889, at which they received \$9. By December 1889, the band had played at many church socials, lectures and weddings, and were extolling their forthcoming concert at the end of the year. In January 1890 they held a social at the home of Roger Sherman. By April 1890 they felt a need to reorganise, and held a meeting at John Wayer's house on 11 April, to discuss the issue. There were also some vacancies for horn players at this time.³²

Battle Creek Ladies' Band

Active in 1884.

²⁸ Detroit Free Press, 22 February 1905

²⁹ Battle Creek Enquirer, 29 May 1938

³⁰ The Times Herald (Port Huron), 12 January 1884

³¹ Alpena Argus, 23 July 1884

³² Owosso Times, 4 April 1890

Bay City Ladies' Band

This band was active in 1883, led by Frank Lawrence. Unfortunately, in early 1884, he skipped out of town with all the funds of the band, leaving the members deeply in debt.³³

Bellevue Ladies' Band

This band was active in 1884, when it performed at the Good Templars' picnic party at Pine Lake, Ingham County, on 8 July 1884. The audience rated the band compared favourably with any one of the amateur bands of the state.³⁴

Brown City Ladies' Cornet Band

Founded in summer 1889, with instructor Professor Casey. It was reported to be preparing for its summer engagements in early June 1891. During the winter of 1891/92 the band was tutored by Professor J.O. Grinnell. They gave a concert in Gaige's Hall on 1 April 1892, where some of the other participants were unable to attend, so the band filled the gaps with extra selections of their own.³⁵ The band was still active in 1893.

Cadillac Ladies' Band

This was formed in early summer 1886, and they were hoping to receive their new silver-plated instruments in September 1886.³⁶

Caro Young Ladies' Cornet Band

This band was formed some time before July 1879, when its existence was reported. Its first recorded performance was at Oxford on 3 July 1880. The following year, the band took part in a band picnic at Lapeer, on 11 August 1881. This was hosted by Johnson's Lapeer Band, and also included the Bay City Knights Templar Band, the North Branch Band, and the Hadley Band, all of which enjoyed a friendly contest during the day and a joint concert in the evening.³⁷

In May 1882 the Band appeared on the balcony of C.R. Mabley's establishment, entertaining the thousands in the street below; they attended the reunion of the Army of the Potomac in June; provided musical entertainment for town of Caro on 4 July; took a two-week concert and pleasure tour to Petoskey, the Traverse, Mackinaw, Cheboygan, and Alpena, in August; accompanied a grand excursion from Vassar to Port Huron on 1 September – when it was noted that the band *“has won golden opinions throughout the state, both for its excellent music and its high social standard of*



³³ The Time (Harbor Beach), 13 March 1884

³⁴ Owosso Times, 18 July 1884

³⁵ Weekly Expositor (Brockway Centre), 8 April 1892

³⁶ Detroit Free Press, 23 August 1886

³⁷ Detroit Free Press, 29 July 1881

*membership*³⁸ and the band also played on the steamer “Omar D. Conger” to an audience of hundreds; it performed at the Washtenaw county agricultural fair later in September 1882.

The Michigan State Band Association Tournament began on 5 June 1883 in Detroit. It included 21 bands and 383 musicians. The solo contests were held that evening at Whitney’s Opera House, and the proceedings were opened by an overture by the Caro Ladies’ Band. The following day the bands marched through the city, the 15 Caro ladies surrounded by the other bands – which included two other ladies’ bands (Fenton and Jackson). A joint concert of the ladies’ bands was held in the Whitney Opera House in the evening, with the Caro Band opening with an overture and playing two further pieces as an encore due to the great applause received.³⁹ The members of the Band were:

Professor A. Corazzie (leader), Misses L. Hawley, N. Rogers, E. Kimball, I. Franklin, H. Franklin, M. Townsend, M. Parmlee, G. McPherson, F. Sprague, E. Mackinzie, N. Piper, and Mr H.B. Corazzie.

In the special prizes class of the Tournament, the Caro Ladies’ Band played a medley of popular airs and the fantasie “*Fairies’ Moonlight Revels*”, which was played without the aid of their leader. They took the second prize – a \$75 cornet. Before departing for Caro, the following day, they gave a free concert at the offices of the Detroit Free Press.

The Caro Ladies Band performed at the 1883 Independence Day celebrations at East Saginaw; played at the opening of the new Princess roller-skating rink in Detroit in November 1884; were engaged to play for a season at the Princess Rink in February 1885; they were invited to lead a grand procession of the labour organisations in Detroit on Labor Day, 1887. This may have been one of the last appearances of the Band, as there was a report in July 1888 of some ‘*talk of organizing a ladies’ band in Caro*’.

Carsonville Ladies’ Band

Founded in early summer 1894, with eleven members. Their new instruments had all been received by the beginning of July 1894.

Charlevoix Ladies’ Brass Band

This band was active in 1883, serenading Senator Buttars on his return from Lansing in June. In August 1883 it was reported to be delighting the citizens and making frequent trips to surrounding towns to perform.

Charlotte Ladies’ Band

This Band was active in August 1884, when it took part in the military and veterans reunion parades and entertainment at ‘Camp Mason’, Battle Creek. Having taken part in the procession, the Band were situated at the Guard Mount, and three of the ladies were overcome. They were sent to the hospital where Dr. Milton Chase, the camp surgeon, soon brought them to a state of health, and they returned to resume their musical duties.⁴⁰

³⁸ Times Herald (Port Huron), 30 August 1882

³⁹ Detroit Free Press, 6 June 1883

⁴⁰ Detroit Free Press, 22 August 1884

Cheboygan Ladies' Brass Band

This was founded in July 1888 and was made up of the McCallum sisters and other ladies. A report in January 1889 noted that they had gained considerable proficiency and hope a public opportunity to hear them would be soon.⁴¹

Coopersville Ladies' Band

This band was active in October 1891, when it performed for the new Congressman at a reception in the town.⁴²



Coopersville Ladies' Band

Detroit Ladies' Band

Founded in autumn 1886. In January 1887 they just needed two more young ladies to complete the roster, and they were engaged in efforts to buy a new set of instruments.⁴³ The members of the band were:

Miss Carrie Lewis (president), Annie Phillips (vice-president), Alice Hagadorne (secretary), Minnie Watterson (treasurer), Professor Jacox (tutor), L. Senbury, Ida Pepin, Ella Hagadorne, Lillie Pepin, and Mrs Jacox.

Detroit Women's Cornet Band

This band was active in 1904 when, together with the Schumann male quartet, they provided music during the Detroit Retail Grocers' Pure Food Show, held at the Light Guard Armory in October 1904.⁴⁴

Escanaba Ladies' Band

Founded in March 1927, with twenty girls, directed by Joseph Greenfield, leader of the Escanaba City Band. It was still active in 1930.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Cheboygan Democrat, 31 January 1889

⁴² Detroit Free Press, 22 October 1891

⁴³ Detroit Free Press, 25 January 1887

⁴⁴ Detroit Free Press, 2 October 1904

⁴⁵ Escanaba Daily Press, 19 March 1957



Escanaba Ladies' Band, c. 1928

Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band

This band was founded in 1881. It had achieved a good standard of performance when it took part in the Michigan State Band Association Tournament in June 1883. This comprised 21 bands and 383 musicians. On 6 June, the bands marched through the city, the 15 Fenton ladies surrounded by the other bands – which included two other ladies' bands (Caro and Jackson). A joint concert of the ladies' bands was held in the Whitney Opera House in the evening, with the Fenton Band performing an overture and two other pieces. In the contest the Band played an introductory overture and the “*Elmore Quickstep*”, and won first prize, an \$80 cornet. Members at this time were:

Eugene B. Shepherd (leader), Misses Lizzie M. Jennings, Lillian Earl, Winnie L. Smith, Flora Topping, Mabel White, Ida Trophagen, C. Nellie Jennings, Zulla Richardson, Hattie Fowler, C. Belle Jennings, Maggie Guest, and Maude Topping, and Mrs E.C. Foote and Mrs C. Tinker.

The Band later performed at the Pontiac Fair Grounds for a whole roast ox dinner, with the Pontiac Cornet Band as a supporting act, on 27 June 1883.⁴⁶

1884 saw the Band invited to give a concert for the Owosso High School at the Opera House, in May; it attended the State Band Tournament at East Saginaw on 4 June and took first prize once more; gave a concert at the Colwell Hall, Fenton later in June. The Band travelled to Fremont Ohio, in October 1885 to perform. On 28 August 1886 the Band provided ‘the best of prohibition music’ at a Prohibition mass meeting in Owosso, having just fulfilled a two-week engagement at Cheltenham Beach, Chicago.⁴⁷

The Band took first prize in the Fireman’s Tournament at Ridgetown, Ontario, in June 1887; provided music for the Fenton Fair in October 1887. The Owosso I.O.O.F. lodge members made a trip to Essex Center in Detroit, on 1 July 1889, and were joined on the train by the

⁴⁶ Pontiac Bill Poster, 20 June 1883

⁴⁷ Owosso Times, 20 August 1886

Fenton Ladies' Band at Fenton, causing some of the younger Oddfellows to 'smooth their raven locks and have their interest wander materially from the exciting game of pedro.'⁴⁸



Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band



Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band – from the left: Flora Trophagen, Eva Reeson, Maud Hirst, Sarah Rudolph, Mame Hassler, Flora Topping, Flora Davis, E.C. Forty, Mary Jennings, Susie Van Oaken, Lillian Earl, Etta Reeson, Ella Freeman, and Nell Jennings

The Fenton Fair, in October 1889, also used the Ladies' Band. Independence Day in Fenton, 1890 saw the Ladies' Band performing and marching with the Oak Grove Band and the Ayres Martial Band. Flora Davis was a member of the Band in July 1890. The Band attended the Grand Army of the Republic Parade, at Detroit, in August 1891, coming in for cheers and

⁴⁸ Owosso Times, 5 July 1889

applause for their playing and natty costumes. From 17 October 1891 the Band started out on a 3,000 mile concert tour of the southern states.⁴⁹

The last two recorded engagements for the Band were leading the Columbus Day children's march at Fenton, in October 1892; and a regular series of engagements at Long Lake, entertaining visitors on moonlight excursions, in August 1894. The Band disbanded in August 1895, following the departure of a number of its leading members.



Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band – from the left: Grace Colwall, Hattie Imlet, Oda Rudolph, Nell Jennings, Mary Joyce, Nell Pipur, Vera Dalgen, Mary Jennings, Nettie Johnson, Sara Rudolph, Nell Kellogg, Mame Hassler, Etta Reeson, and Cora Lewis

Fenton Ladies' Military Band

This successor to the Fenton Ladies' Cornet Band was founded around June 1898. It appeared at the Free Street Fair in Howell, from 27 to 30 September 1898, where they occupied the stand of honour at the centre of the town, 'furnishing sweet music'. The Band led the queen's float in the fair's opening parade.⁵⁰

Flushing Ladies' Cornet Band

This band was active in 1884 and 1885, and it operated at the same time as the men's Flushing Cornet Band.

Frankfort Girls' Band

This band was active in 1917 and into the 1920's. It consisted of ten girls playing kazoo or zobo instruments. Also known as the Faux Girls' Band of Frankfort.

⁴⁹ Owosso Times, 23 October 1891

⁵⁰ Livingston County Daily Press and Argus, 28 September 1898



Faux Girls' Band, Frankfort, 1917

Gierk's Ladies' Band (Richmond)

This band was from the town of Richmond and was known to be active between 1913 and 1915.



Gierk's Ladies' Band

Grand Haven Ladies' Band

Founded in 1876, by John Lucans. The band included four of his daughters, the youngest being just ten years old.⁵¹

⁵¹ The True Northerner (Paw Paw), 28 July 1876

Grand Ledge Ladies' Band

This band's first appearance was at the Central Michigan Soldiers and Sailors Reunion at Owosso, in August 1886, when they played for the various exercises being undertaken. Later in the month they performed at a prohibition demonstration at Owosso. Unfortunately, the bus (a dray fitted with seats) being used to transport the Band from the depot, overturned by the Catholic church, throwing the Band into the ditch, injuring most of them and damaging the instruments. The driver later went to Grand Ledge and offered \$100 in settlement, which was accepted by the Band.⁵² They did recover, however, and repaired their instruments. The Band provided music at Portland on 4 July 1887; and once again attended the Central Michigan Soldiers' Reunion, this year at Ionia, in August 1887. The Band disbanded in September 1891, the reason given being "*because the boys keep marrying off the members.*"⁵³

Hadley Ladies' Band

This band was active in 1891, when it accompanied the Lapeer County Veteran Battalion to Detroit, in August 1891 – the ladies being quartered at 12 Waterloo Street for the visit.⁵⁴

Hamilton Carhatt & Company Ladies' Band (Detroit)

This band was formed in early 1900, with some 25 players directed by George M. White. It was sponsored by Hamilton Carhatt and his company, which manufactured working clothing in Detroit. An early engagement for the Band was at the reception for the employees of the Boyer Machine Company when they arrived in the town, in October 1900. They gave a concert of twelve selections for the Detroit Grays at the Armory in December 1900, and held their first annual concert at the Harmonie Hall on 8 January 1901.



Hamilton Carhatt Band member

Further engagements in 1901 included the Frontier Club on 4 February; a benefit for a disabled fireman, John Black, at the Light Guard Armory, on 10 April; a patriotic concert at the Armory in late April, together with the Letter Carriers' Association Band and the Newsboys Band;⁵⁵ a concert for the Epworth League at the Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church on 26 April; the opening of the Y.M.C.A. boat house on 23 May; at Clark Park on 4 July; for the Detroit Bicentenary celebrations, took part in the pageant parade on 25 July and on the steamer Sappho on 26 July; entertained the crowds at the unveiling of the tablet commemorating the fire of 1805, on 15 August. The members of the Band in 1901 were:

Lucy Russel, Rosie Reinke, Mae St. Thomas, Laura Malo, Minnie Jones, Grace Demsky, Anna Beyer (director), Minnie Frahm, Margaret Wolcott, Mary Frahm, Hazel Bertram, Louise Schoenberg, Ida Berhardt, Gertie Reinke, Louise Stamm, Gustie Teschke, Tillie Reinke, Anna Reinke, Emma Pahl, Margaret Russel, and Clara Zizka.

⁵² Detroit Free Press, 3 September 1886

⁵³ Owosso Times, 18 September 1891

⁵⁴ Detroit Free Press, 13 July 1891

⁵⁵ Detroit Free Press, 21 April 1901

The Detroit chapter of the International Longshoremen's Association adopted a resolution at their entertainment on 19 December 1901:

“The Hamilton Carhatt Ladies' Band has graciously honored our first art, literary and musical reunion with its charming presence and treated us to several numbers of its exquisite music rendered in the inimitable fashion that has made the name of the Hamilton Carhartt Ladies' Band synonymous with all that is exalted in the realm of harmony and whereas, in an era when rag-time and cake-walk melodies are the accustomed entertainment of the wealthy but uneducated musical patrons of the avenues called Woodward and Jefferson, it is indeed refreshing to discover that here in our own city and among our own people a band recruited among the toilers of the Carhatt factory boldly refuses to conform to the vulgar fads and fancies of the hour, but instead gloriously maintains a classic standard that would do no discredit to the high ideals of Paris and Vienna.”⁵⁶

This resolution sparked some discourse and debate in the press.



The Hamilton Carhatt Ladies' Band, 1901.

1902 started with the Band giving a concert at the Y.W.C.A. on New Year's Day; the West Detroit Y.M.C.A. on 9 January; for the Y.W.C.A. on 22 May; accompanied the Carhatt employees on their outing to Tashmoo Park on 13 June. There are no further references to the Band beyond this date.

⁵⁶ Detroit Free Press, 20 December 1901

Hart Ladies Brass Band (Ocean County)

This band was active in 1893.



Hart Ladies' Brass Band, 1893

Henrietta Ladies' Brass Band

Active in 1884.

Holcomb and Robertson's Ladies' Brass Band

This band was active in 1884, performing at Cheboygan on 4 July; on the Algomah steamer on 15 July; and touring the upper peninsula and visiting Green Bay during September 1884. It was possibly connected to a company which produced salt in the St Louis area of Michigan.

House of David Ladies' Band (Eden Springs, Benton Harbor)

The Israelite House of David was established in Benton Harbor in 1903. Music was an important part of the community life, and their colony soon became a tourist attraction, with the various bands, miniature trains, ice creams, baseball matches and more. The bands, which included a full Ladies' Band from at least 1908, existed well into the 1920's.



Israelite House of David Ladies' Band

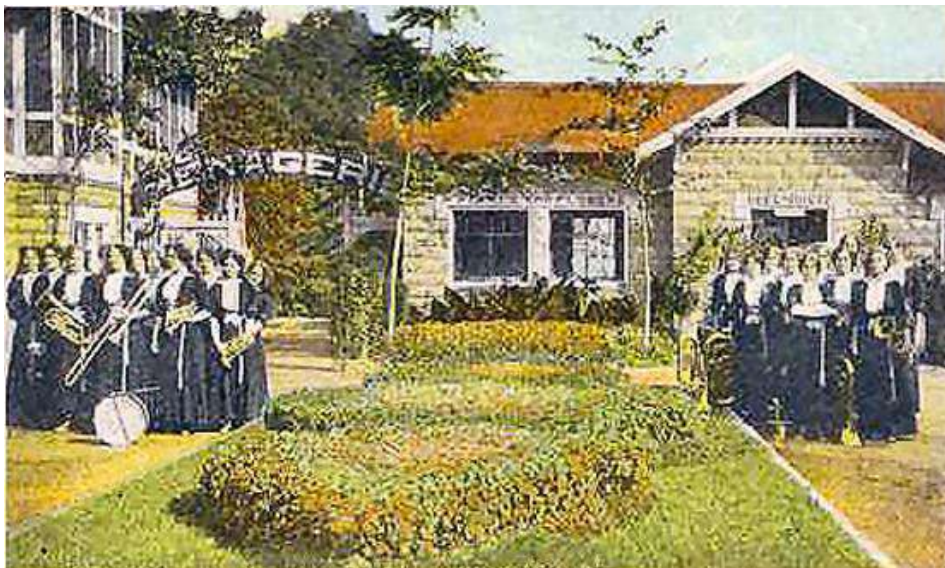


Israelite House of David Ladies' Band



Israelite House of David Ladies' Band, c. 1910





Israelite House of David Ladies' Band

Howell Ladies' Cornet Band

This band was founded in the summer of 1890, with eleven members, rehearsing on Monday evenings at Frank Lansing's.⁵⁷ They accompanied the M.E. League on their picnic to Long Lake on 1 August 1894, and gave a concert in the town on 22 February 1899.

Imperial Girls' Band (Reading)

This band first appears in 1910, with 13 players, managed by Fred A. Rogers, playing at the Angola Methodist Church in early August; performing four times at the Second Annual Maple Lake Chautauqua, Paw Paw, on 22/23 August. They toured the Chautauqua circuit that summer and also in the following year, 1911. On 15 August 1912 the Band performed with 15 players at the Masonic Elk field day at Lansing, which included the girls occupying an automobile float in the parade, and they were generally fêted by the city during the day. The Band was still active in 1915.



Imperial Girls' Band, Reading, c. 1910. Bandmaster Simeon J. Whaley, with his daughter Rae Whaley on tuba, far right

⁵⁷ Livingston County Daily Press and Argus, 27 November 1890



Imperial Girls' Band, Reading, 1915

Jackson Ladies' Brass Band

This band was active in 1883 when it took part in the Michigan State Band Association Tournament in June. This comprised 21 bands and 383 musicians. On 6 June, the bands marched through the city, the 26 Jackson ladies surrounded by the other bands – which included two other ladies' bands (Caro and Fenton). The previous two evenings the Jackson Ladies' Band provided music between the acts of the comedy “*Flashes*”, at the Detroit Opera House. The Band was barred from contesting against the other ladies' bands due to the presence of five men in the Band, but it did play an overture of national airs, as an exhibition. Members at this time were:

Professor Mills, C.W. Fowler, N. Schwemfurth, Emma McClary, Addie Putmun, Walter Spaulding, A.M. Yocum, Mollie Harris, A.C. Tinker and wife, Etta Tinker, Ella Tinker, C.L. Howe, Minnie Whitney, James Moloney, M. Crittenden, Louis Lucker, Lizzie Lucker, F.B. Russell, Nellie Emerson, C. Sustzer, Mrs Addison, Mamie Wycoff, S. Cornell, Anna White, Dora Carroll, and A. Cooper.

Kalkaska Ladies' Cornet Band

Active in 1906, conductor Frances F. Getty. The Band played at the West Michigan Sugar Company's Farmer's Basket Picnic, at Charlevoix, on 6 September 1906.⁵⁸



Kalkaska Ladies' Cornet Band

Lakeside Ladies' Band (Detroit)



Lakeside Ladies' Band, 1884

Lenox Girls' Brass Band (1)

Active in the early 1890's, leader Theodore Miller. Members included his son Del and two daughters Nellie and Anna. The Band was a leading attraction in the town, winning several prizes in band tournaments in Michigan and Canada.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Charlevoix County Herald, 1 September 1906

⁵⁹ The Times Herald (Port Huron), 1 November 1913

Lenox Girls' Brass Band (2)

This was formed in November 1913, using the former instruments of the boys' band.

Lexington Ladies' Brass Band

Active in 1912.

Lyons Ladies' Brass Band

Founded in late 1882, with *"just enough young men in it to make the meetings interesting."*

Mancelona Ladies Band

Founded in early 1893.⁶⁰

Midland Ladies' Band

Founded in 1885.

Minden Ladies' Brass Band

Founded in 1895.

North Branch Ladies' Cornet Band

Active in 1889

Oak Grove Ladies Independent Band

Active in 1910, associated with the Knights of the Maccabees, specifically the Ladies of the Modern Maccabees.

Owosso Ladies' Cornet Band

Active in 1900.⁶¹

Richmond Ladies' Silver Cornet Band

There are reports of the Band going camping at Orion, in August 1887; taking part in the Maccabee Jubilee in Port Huron, in August 1888; and performing at the Capac Fair in September 1888.

⁶⁰ Grand Rapids Herald, 23 January 1893

⁶¹ Owosso Times, 22 June 1900



Oak Grove Independent Band, 1910

Saint John Ladies' Band

Founded in 1882 with 17 players.⁶² Performed at the Clinton County Agricultural Society show in October 1883. It took part, with 16 players in the Michigan State Band Tournament at East Saginaw, in June 1884; and performed at the East Saginaw roller-skating rink on 25-26 December 1884.

Silk Girls' Band (Bending)

Active in 1908.

South Haven Ladies' Marine Band

Founded in 1892, with 10 players – most of whom were teachers in the public schools in the area. The played for the crowds gathered to see the schooner George L. Wrenn set off on its round the world journey from South Haven, on 4 July 1894; the Band accompanied an excursion from South Haven to Benton Harbor, on 9 July 1894. Their successful performances at Benton Harbor led to a return engagement the following year, on 4 July 1895, giving concerts from the balcony of the Hotel Benton.⁶³ Their last known outing was again to Benton Harbor, with an excursion on the “*Soo City*”, on 29 August 1895.

South Lyon Ladies' Brass Band

Disbanded in February 1893.⁶⁴

Vermontville Ladies' Band

Active in 1884.

⁶² The Times Herald (Port Huron), 15 July 1882

⁶³ Weekly Palladium (Benton Harbor), 21 June 1895

⁶⁴ Pontiac Gazette, 17 February 1893

Whitehall Ladies' Cornet Band

Active in 1887, when it entertained the troops at the Michigan Division Sons of Veterans encampment, on 7 June, and performed at Shelby, a few miles away, on 4 July 1887.⁶⁵

Williamston Girls' Band

This band was active from 1909 to 1912. It purchased some new instruments in 1911 and organised a social event to raise funds to pay for them in October 1911. It provided music for the annual picnic of the St Agnes Catholic Church at Rounsville, on 21 August 1912.



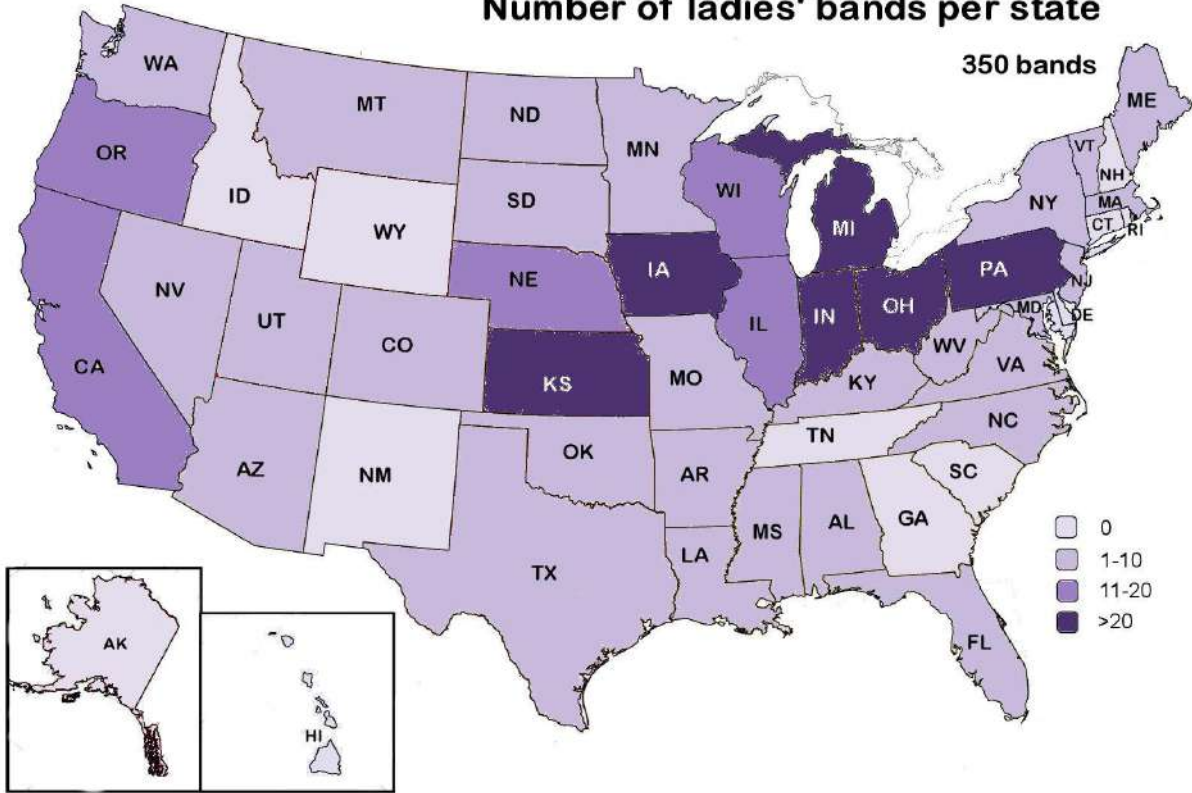
Williamston Girls' Band, 1909



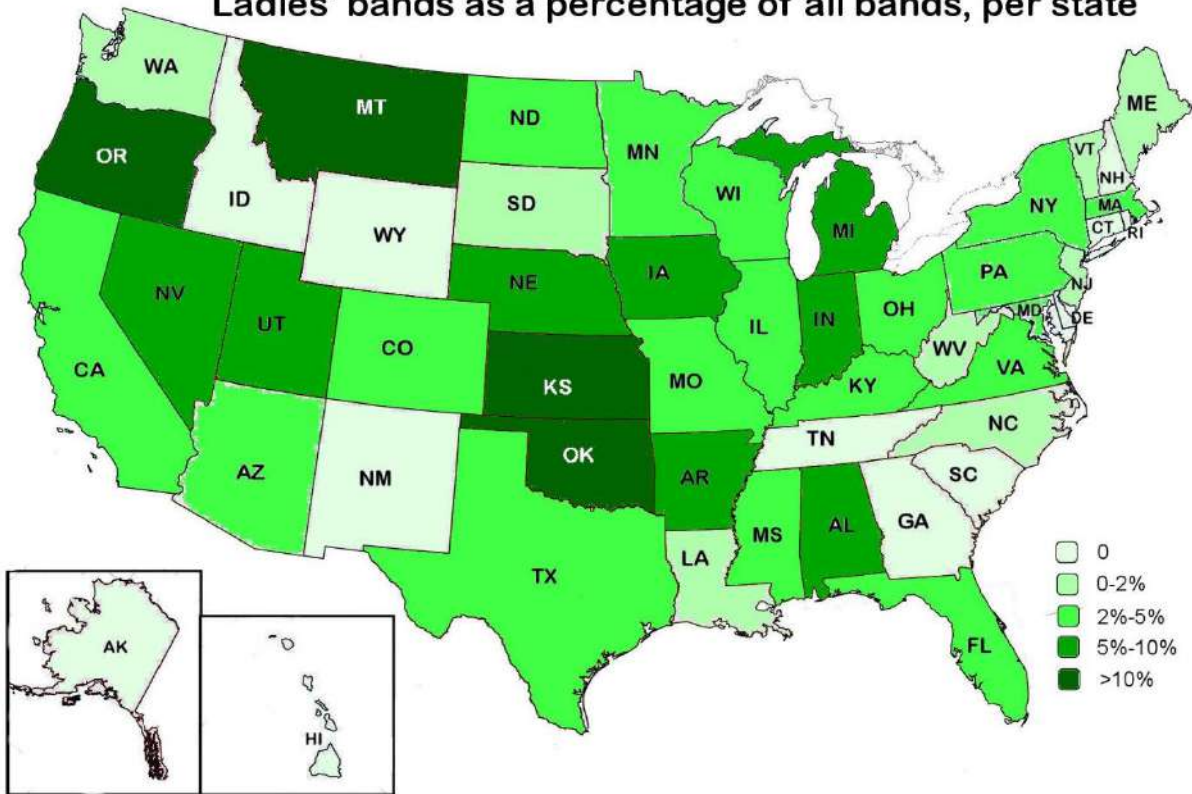
Williamston Girls' Band

⁶⁵ St Joseph Saturday Herald, 4 June 1887

Number of ladies' bands per state



Ladies' bands as a percentage of all bands, per state



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