

The Cannery Girls' Band - a short-lived, fruitful organisation in Sheridan, Oregon

Gavin Holman, 17 May 2022

Fruit canning was a major processing industry in Oregon in the 1900's, together with drying establishments, juice, and jam factories. There were several canning factories in which were owned by individuals and fruit growers' associations. The cannery in Sheridan, was established by the Sheridan Fruit Growers in 1917, and LeRoy (Roy) Graves was the manager. During 1918 the cannery processed \$125,000 worth of fruit at a labour cost of \$16,000, producing 3,000 tons of canned goods.¹ 75 women and girls were employed in the company, attracting an average wage of \$2.75 for an eight-hour day.

In January 1919, the Sheridan cannery established a ladies' brass band, with 29 members. They made their first public appearance in an outdoor concert in Sheridan some time between 10 and 15 April 1919, and they were known as the Roy Graves Canning Company Girls' Band.



The members of the band (pictured above, from the back, left to right, with Roy Graves in the centre) were:

Florence A. Lamson (trombone), Wanetah E. Davis (trombone), Mary Shipley (euphonium), Ethel Kochis (bass), Florence Kosack (banner girl), Katherine Hirsh (bass), Helen Chapman (euphonium), Norma Barnett (trombone), Mildred Allen-Rood (trombone), Alice Kidder (horn), Ruth Bradley (horn), Mamie Bowman (cornet), Margaret Hintzen (cornet), Alda R. Faulconer (cornet), Marie Finney (cornet), Dorothy Stafford (cornet), Stella Maggini (cornet), Carol Chapman (horn), Lulu Kosack (horn),

¹ The Morning Register (Eugene), 11 February 1919

Mrs Roy Graves (drum major), Elva Chapman (piccolo), Erma Shawyer-Coleman (clarinet), Alma Chapin (clarinet), Francis Graves (mascot), Mabel Sunderlin (clarinet), Adah Burchell (clarinet), Martha Hintzen (saxophone), Nina Maggini (side drum), and Fred Bradley (director).²

A new cannery was built at Woodburn, and a celebration was held to mark the near completion of the factory, on Saturday 10 May, 1919, at which the new Graves Canning Company Girls' Band entertained the crowds.³ They gave two concerts on Front Street in the afternoon and on the band stand in the evening, conducted by Fred Bradley.⁴

On Sunday 8 June 1919, the band gave a concert at the Polk County Farmers' annual Picnic, at the Burch Grove, Rickreall. This was followed by a program of recitations, readings, solos, and other musical numbers.⁵

The band made an appearance in front of the McDougall's Music Store, on Alder Street, Portland, giving a concert there, on Friday 13 June 1919. Their C.G. Conn instruments had been bought through this store.⁶

The Famous Girls' Band
of the Roy Graves Canning Co., Sheridan, Or.



Completely Outfitted With C. G. Conn Band Instruments Purchased From
McDougall Music Co. 325 ALDER STREET
This unique organization will play a concert in front of McDougall Music Co.'s Store
Friday Afternoon, June 13th

After the McDougall's concert, the band, dressed in their blue and white uniforms, led representatives of the town of Sheridan in the Portland Victory Rose Festival Parade, and

² Oregon Daily Journal, Sunday 8 June 1919

³ Oregon Daily Journal, Sunday 11 May 1919

⁴ Statesman Journal (Salem), 23 May 1919

⁵ Statesman Journal (Salem), 10 June 1919

⁶ Oregon Daily Journal, Sunday 8 June 1919

they ended their day in Portland by serenading the staff at the offices of the Oregon Daily Journal.⁷



The girls' band marching in the Portland Victory Rose Festival Parade

Two of the band girls had a close shave in an accident, at Sheridan, on Sunday 15 June. Wanetah Davis and Alice Kidder were run down by an automobile while they were on their way to church to attend the high school baccalaureate service. The car passed completely over Alice, who was thrown between the wheels, and Wanetah was thrown to the curb. Both were seriously bruised, but otherwise seemed to be unhurt.⁸

The band gave a concert at Dallas, later that week, and travelled to Newberg on Tuesday 24 June 1919, giving a concert as part of the Salvation Army Drive which was being held at the Newberg Opera House.⁹

Back in Sheridan, the band provide music for the ball games and parade for the town's rousing celebration for 4 July 1919.

During August 1919 the band undertook a tour of the Willamette Valley – one stop on the route was in Albany:

“Twenty-eight comely maidens, dressed in natty turquoise blue uniforms trimmed with silver braid, and wearing little blue overseas caps, visited Albany this morning. They are members of the Graves Canning com-pany's Girls' Band, of Sheridan, and are on a tour of the Willamette Valley. This afternoon they will give a concert and then go on to Cascadia, where they will rest and enjoy the scenery for a couple of days. The trip is being made in automobiles and is personally conducted by Roy Graves, president of the company which has packing plants at Sheridan, Woodburn and Tillamook employing more than 400 people. The girls are led by one mere man, who directs the playing and

⁷ Oregon Daily Journal, Sunday 13 June 1919

⁸ Oregon Daily Journal, Monday 16 June 1919

⁹ Oregon Daily Journal, Thursday 26 June 1919

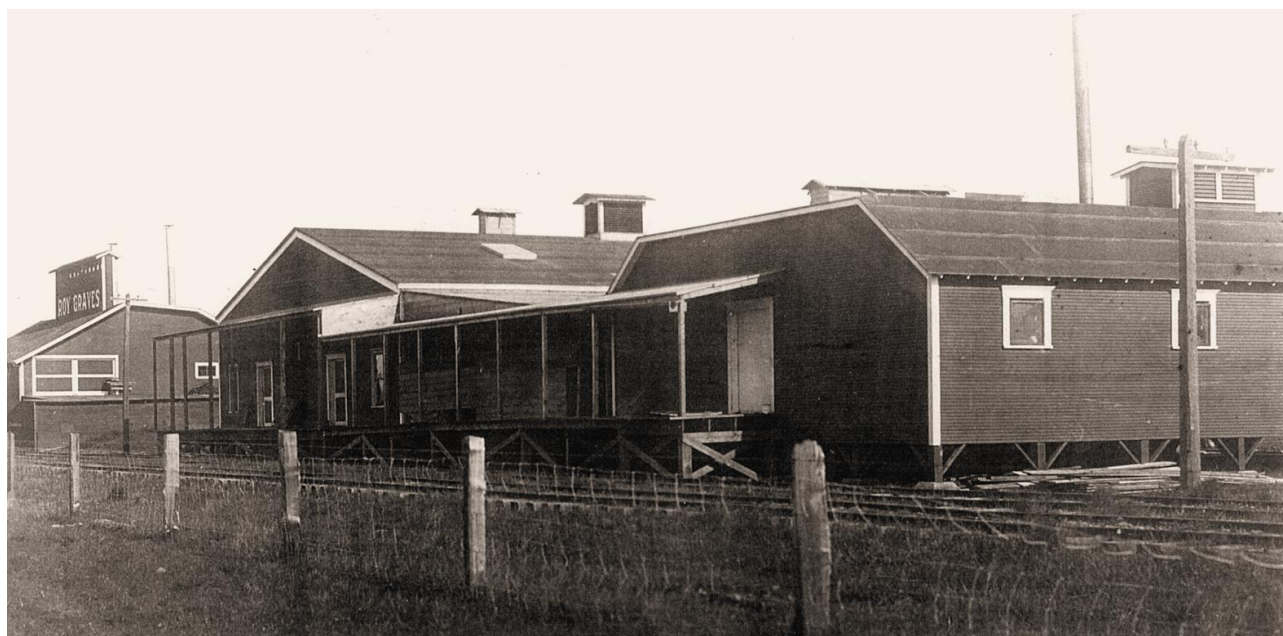
who trained them to play. And they make real music. They play together well and show careful instruction. A large crowd gathered at the corner of First and Broadalbin streets this morning and enjoyed their concert. The equipment, instruments and uniforms are valued at \$5,000, which was supplied by the company. Mr. Graves states that his company will do a million dollar business this year. They are packing all kinds of fruits and adding hundreds of thousands of dollars in prosperity to that section of the state, which benefits the state in general."¹⁰

Returning to Portland, on Wednesday 20 August, the band gave a concert for the Portland Ad Club, in a program which included speakers from the fruit growing industry. Each attendee was presented with a can of pears, Royal Anne cherries, and jam. The girls were afterwards entertained by the Ad Club in theatre parties at the Hippodrome and Liberty.¹¹

The Lincoln County Fair, at Toledo, engaged the band to give concerts during the week of 14 September 1919.¹²

Their next appearances were at Salem and Woodburn on the weekend of 22/23 November 1919. They travelled by train to Salem, playing at the White House Restaurant, and gave further concerts in Salem and Woodburn, returning home on the Sunday evening (see advert on the right).¹³

Marie Finney, aged 17, a cornetist in the band and a high school junior had an operation for appendicitis on Friday 2 April 1920, but sadly died at home shortly afterwards. The band played at her funeral, placed blossoms over her grave, and gave a five-foot high floral harp as a tribute.¹⁴



The Graves Cannery at Sheridan

¹⁰ Albany Democrat, Tuesday 12 August 1919

¹¹ Oregon Daily Journal, Thursday 21 August 1919

¹² Lincoln County Leader (Toledo), Friday 22 August 1919

¹³ Oregon Daily Journal, Tuesday 25 November 1919

¹⁴ Statesman Journal (Salem), Sunday 11 April 1920

In May 1920, the Sheridan Commercial Club decided to erect a bandstand in the city, for the girls' band, at a cost of \$2,000, which was expected to be raised by the club and the city.

In mid-June 1920, the band took part in the Travellers' Protective Association parade through the streets of Portland. They followed this with an outing to Tillamook, where they gave concerts, touring the beaches, on the weekend of 26/27 June, and gave concerts at the 4 July celebrations at Hillsboro on 4 and 5 July 1920.

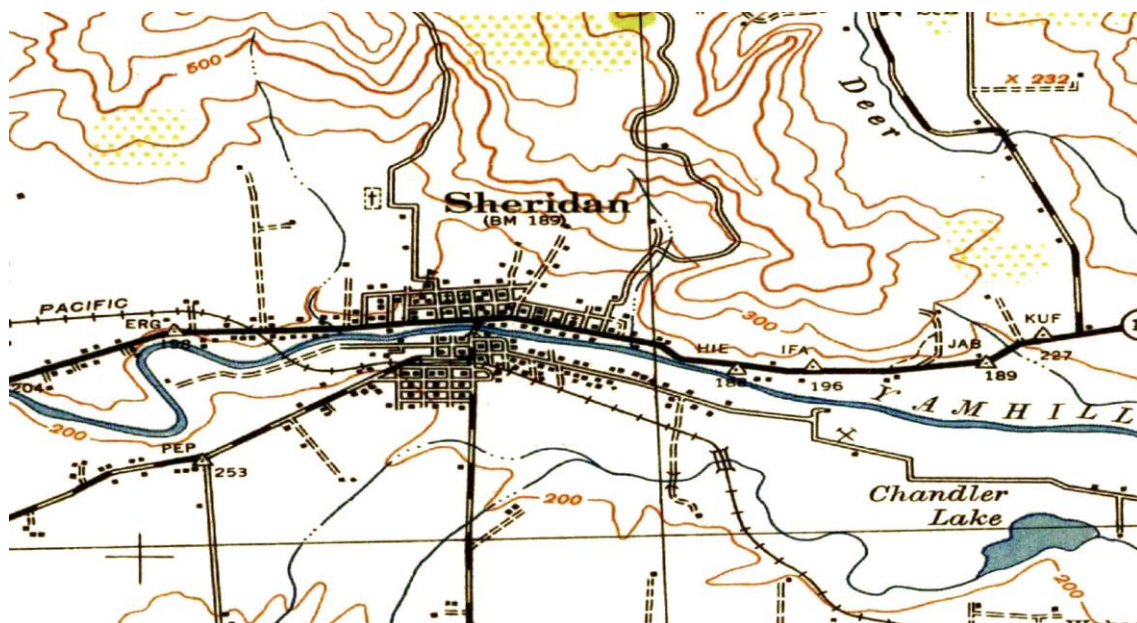
In the 1920 US census, the Graves family were recorded as living at Monroe Street, Sheridan, (Le)Roy Martin Graves was 43 years old and his occupation was listed as being 'cannery manager', his wife, Grace (37), was 'band drum-major', and daughter Frances 7, was 'band mascot'. Their son, Lee (16) had no occupation listed.

Labor Day, 6 September 1920, saw a great Order of United Artisans meeting at Salem, with 71 assemblies taking part. The girls' band was engaged to play a sacred concert at Wilson Park, on Sunday 5 September.¹⁵

Portland held a large Fire Prevention Parade on Saturday 9 October 1920, which featured the Canning Company Girls' Band as one of those providing martial music during the procession.¹⁶ The band's last known concert in 1920 was for the Amity Community Commercial Club, in Salem, on Monday 8 November.¹⁷

There are only two known engagements of the band during 1921 – at the Polk County Fair, at Dallas, 18 to 20 August 1921, and later at the McMinnville Carnival and Fair, on 22 to 24 September 1921.

The fate of the band beyond these dates is not known.



Sheridan – map, c. 1940

¹⁵ Statesman Journal (Salem), Thursday 2 September 1920

¹⁶ Oregon Daily Journal, Sunday 3 October 1920

¹⁷ Capital Journal (Salem), Saturday 30 October 1920