

Two cornet bands from Morgan County, Tennessee

Gavin Holman, 4 March 2024

Deer Lodge

Deer Lodge is a small community in Tennessee, which was established as health resort in the 1880s. At its peak, in the 1890s it had two hotels, a newspaper, a theatre, a band, a planing mill, and numerous clubs and civic organizations. An advert in 1899 promoted Deer Lodge:

“No healthier place on earth - the invalids paradise. The climate is delightful, the elevation being about 1900 feet, making it an all-the-year-round health resort. Sufferers from catarrh, hay fever and kindred troubles receive immediate benefit, from a short sojourn in this lovely region. The water is safe, pure and is highly helpful for all kinds of kidney trouble.”¹



The Deer Lodge Citizens Cornet Band was founded in March 1910 by Professor George Clark, of Harriman, Tennessee, and it provided entertainment for the visitors to the health resort. As can be seen from the photograph, a third of the band were ladies. Unlike the UK, it was not unusual to find women members of brass bands in the USA during the nineteenth century. Indeed, there were quite a few ‘ladies only’ bands, sometimes led by a man (see photograph below). No further details are known about this particular band.

¹ Dickinson, Calvin W. - *Tennessee county history series: Morgan County* – Memphis State University Press, 1987. ISBN: 0878701575

The population of Deer Lodge had significantly declined by the mid-20th century with many younger people moving away, particularly after the Whipple's wood planing mill closed.

Rugby

The Rugby community in Morgan County was established by Thomas Hughes, an English lawyer who had been educated at Rugby School, in England. He created the Board of Aid to Land Ownership, which bought 75,000 acres of land in Tennessee in 1879, with construction starting in Rugby in 1880. At its peak some 400 settlers made their homes in Rugby.

The Rugby Cornet Band was formed in spring 1882, with \$100 collected in subscriptions by mid-June, and by the autumn was ready to venture into public playing. A correspondent noted that the success of a recent social entertainment would be beneficial to the band:

Such gatherings would enable our Cornet Band to accustom themselves to playing in public, and also to overcome their bashfulness and extreme susceptibility to a sense of ridicule, which, in a spirit of common fair play to beginners, ought to exist only in their own imaginations.²

The members of the band in October 1882 were: C.H. Blacklock (president & Eb cornet), A.H. Brown (secretary & Bb cornet), C.S. Moore (treasurer & Eb alto), J. McKinlay (Eb cornet), N.H. Tucker, F.C. Fisher, & G. Rogers (Bb cornets), S.R. Brown (Eb alto), C.H. Wilson, (Eb tenor), J. Dimling (Eb bass).

One of the early engagements for the band was at the Commissary Hall for the Rugby Union Sunday School entertainment on Christmas evening 1882. The band was given a new bass drum, costing £12, by the Rugby Lawn Tennis Club, in February 1883. The band often provided music to guests at the Tabard Inn, in Rugby.

The Rugby Cornet Band is coming out, or, rather, has come out, and the general verdict is, with much success. The amount of music stowed away in what, at one time, looked rather unpromising material is quite surprising, and Rugby is to be congratulated upon the great pains the Band has taken to make its efforts successful. "When Music, heavenly maid, was young" no doubt it took a good deal of patience and practice before she was able "to raise a mortal to the skies, or bring an angel down," but we believe she did it, and we are inclined to believe, also, with a few more months practice the Rugby Cornet Band will be able to "discourse most eloquent music," and take the palm from many counties around. Last Saturday, in the Commissary Hall, they gave a rehearsal concert, which was well attended and much appreciated. The pieces were interspersed with a reading from Mr. Blacklock and songs from Mr. Milmore and Mr. C.S. Moore. On Tuesday a substantial wagon, drawn by four forbearing and amiable mules, carried the band, and several gentlemen, to Glen Mary, where they were advertised to give a concert for the benefit of their funds. Mr. Kassafang most kindly provided the conveyance free of all charges. Arrived at Glen Mary, after a most enjoyable ride, they found a good and highly appreciative audience, that listened with evident satisfaction to what in these mountain lands is a great and unusual treat. The programme consisted of sixteen pieces, including a reading and two songs from

² *The Rugbeian and District Reporter*, 14 October 1882

Blacklock, two songs from Mr. Milmore, two songs from Mr. C.S. Moore, and one from Mr. Rogers. "Jeff" Shelby gave a performance on a mouth organ. Closing with "Hail! Columbia," the band traversed the forest in the small house, arriving in Rugby in time to get up. Before dispersing they gave the sleeping village a charming tune, terminating, from all points of consideration, a most successful musical outing.³



An unknown band from Tennessee

In May 1884 the band's line-up had changed to: C.H. Blacklock (president & Eb alto), F. Taylor (secretary & Eb cornet), C.S. Moore (treasurer & Eb cornet), C.H. Wilson & G. Rogers (Bb cornets), Mr Potbury (Eb alto), H. Blacklock (Bb tenor), N.H. Tucker (baritone), ?? (Eb bass), T.J. Davie (bass drum), J. Shelby (tenor drum).

The Rugby Cornet Band, composed of some ten or eleven gentlemen, has well maintained its position, acquiring quite a reputation for musical ability.⁴

Robert Jefferson "Jeff" Shelby ran Rugby's laundry, having previously worked at the Tabard Inn, and lived in Pioneer Cottage (which still stands, and is used by overnight lodgers today), with his wife Hattie.

A remark was made lately that it was a pity that our "Band" did not occasionally learn a new piece instead of always playing the same old tunes. We do not presume to be "musical critics" ourselves, but we believe we can distinguish one tune from another when we hear it. Mr Tucker, when he came back from Cincinnati about a fortnight ago, brought with him some new music, and the band have already learnt six or seven pieces. What the band is most in need of, at present, is an automaton conductor to beat time for them, and we should imagine

³ *The Rugby Gazette and East Tennessee News*, 3 March 1883

⁴ *The Rugby Handbook*, Board of Aid to Land Ownership, 1884

that the author of the above remark has just about enough musical ability to fill the position. Why does he not apply?⁵

Christmas Eve, 1885, saw the band performing at the Commissary Hall, conducted by Rev. J.H. Blacklock, opening their programme with the overture "*Break of Day*". There was also a cornet duet by C.H. Wilson and C.S. Moore.

This is the last known engagement of this band. Hopefully more evidence can be found, to extend or complete the story of the Rugby Cornet Band.

A new Rugby Cornet Band, as a tribute to the 19th century one, was established in 2023.



Mrs Hamilton's Ladies' Band, Newbern, Tennessee, c.1915

With thanks to Laura Steinke, of the resurrected Rugby Cornet Band, and Rugby historian George Zepp.

⁵ *The Rugby Gazette and East Tennessee News*, 5 September 1885