



Music of the Pioneer Days in Nebraska

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Article Summary: This is the second in a series of articles that record the early musical life of the state of Nebraska, after white settlers began to arrive. Written by the first DAR state chairman for the Advancement of American Music, it presents information from the DAR and other sources, including reminiscences from early white settlers.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Mary Adel Sheldon McCall, Mrs Ross Nichols, Mrs Rebecca Myers, Miss Josie Headstrom, Mrs J A Frawley, P N Elart, Mr Pembleton, Aston C Shallenberger, Miss Florence Mitchell, Miss Cora Conaway, Horace Curtis, Mrs J W Garcy, Milton Jolly, Blind Boone, Claire Owens, Florence M Gibbons, Mrs H G Smith, John Barsby, R H Wertz, Miss Elizabeth Chapin, J B Lewis, Mrs Sturges, Mrs Sturdevant, Nellie Porter, J E Porter, Charles Daugherty, Dayton Kramer, "Dad" Reed, T J Bender, Mrs G W Bemis, Mrs Phoebe Derstod, Mrs F A Pyle, F W Hohmann, Dr V M Clark, Ruby Knepper, Charles Meyer, Professor Berth, Steven Reynard, Miss Clark, Mrs Schumann-Heink, John McCormick

Nebraska Place Names: Beaver Crossing, Polk, Exeter, Fairmont, Sutton, West Point, Grand Island, Seward, York, West Blue Township

Keywords: The Silver Cornet Band, Polk, Nebraska; The Swedish Ladies' Quartette, Polk; Estey melodeon; pipe organ; Doane College; McKee and Farris Orchestra; *West Point Republican*; Liederkranz

Music of The Pioneer Days in Nebraska

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PART II

BEAVER CROSSING

Mrs. Mary Adel Sheldon McCall (mother of Addison E. Sheldon of the State Historical Society) brought her melodeon from Minnesota to her homestead on the West Blue near Beaver Crossing in 1869 and gave music lessons there. At about the same time Mrs. Ross Nichols brought her piano from New York to the Nichols homestead, which was also on the West Blue and about three miles from the Sheldon home.

POLK

Mrs. Rebecca Myers taught music in Polk as early as 1870. A male quartette was organized in 1879 and a glee club in 1880.

The first piano came into the community about 1880 and was owned by Miss Josie Headstrom, who is now Mrs. J. A. Frawley. In the early 80's P. N. Elarth conducted a music store.

The Silver Cornet Band with Mr. Pembleton as leader was organized in 1882. At about that time, Ashton C. Shallenberger gave cornet lessons.

In 1887 "Pinafore" was given by "thirty good voices," and it is claimed that it was very well done.

Miss Florence Mitchell came from Seward to give violin lessons in 1899.

In 1908 music was introduced in the schools and Miss Cora Conaway from York, Nebraska, was the first supervisor.

The M. E. Church had the first pipe organ in Polk.

Horace Curtis settled in Fairmont in 1882 and for fifteen years was the chorister of the M. E. Church. Mrs. J. W. Garcy came in 1883 and for years was a member of its choir. Milton Jolly came in 1888 and was active in the music of the Presbyterian Church.

A concert by "The Swedish Ladies' Quartette" in October, 1882, was quite a musical event. Blind Boone visited the community in the 90's.

Music was introduced in the Exeter schools in 1889, and in Fairmont in 1901. Claire Owens was the first supervisor.

Exeter's first violin teacher was Florence M. Gibbons—in 1912.

The first pipe organ in Fairmont was dedicated in the Federated Church on December 19, 1926.

EXETER AND FAIRMONT

It is reported that Mrs. H. G. Smith had the first musical instrument in Exeter—an Estey melodeon which she brought from New York in 1871.

In going over the Congregational Church records, mention was made of the fact that a new organ was bought in 1889, and a piano after 1900. The church was organized in 1872. In 1876 John Barsby and R. H. Wertz conducted the music and in 1880 Miss Elizabeth Chapin was the organist.

There was a singing class in Fairmont in 1875 or 1876, directed by J. B. Lewis.

The first piano in Fairmont was owned by one Mrs. Sturges. In Exeter Mrs. Sturdevant had a piano in 1876. Both ladies were among the first piano teachers in those communities.

Nellie Porter, who had been educated in Boston and who was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Porter, pioneers in Fillmore County in 1871, was the first instrumental and vocal teacher in Fairmont and the first teacher of music at Doane College.

Exeter's first band was organized in 1878 with Charles Daugherty as director. Fairmont did not have a band until 1890, when Dayton Kramer, a cornet teacher, became its director.

West Blue Township had a band of about twenty pieces, and "Dad" Reed was one of its first leaders. T. J. Bender came to Fairmont or West Blue in 1878 and was the band's drum-major.

SUTTON

In 1871 Mrs. G. W. Bemis, now of York, brought the first piano into Sutton.

In 1873 there were three piano teachers giving instruction—Mrs. Phoebe Derstod, Mrs. G. W. Bemis, and Mrs. F. A. Pyle.

F. W. Hohmann and son opened Sutton's first music store in 1872.

There is still in existence a program of a concert given in 1878 under the auspices of the M. E. Church choir, assisted by Prof. F. W. Hohmann and his son, and the McKee & Farris Orchestra. This choir was the first musical organization in Sutton and was led by Dr. M. V. Clark.

Professor Hohmann was Sutton's first cornet teacher, and he directed the town's first band when it was organized in 1881.

The Congregational Church installed the first pipe organ in town about 1906.

Ruby Knepper was the first Supervisor of Music when music was introduced in the public schools in 1914.

Charles Meyer, a violin maker, was Sutton's first violin teacher.

WEST POINT

In looking through the files of the *West Point Republican* since 1871, choirs were mentioned in the early issues, and a band that was organized fifty years ago.

GRAND ISLAND

Because Grand Island was a German settlement, probably the first musical organization in town was the Liederkrantz, organized in the early 70's.

Professor Berth taught cornet in the early 80's and probably about the same time Steven Reynard had a music store here.

Music was introduced in the schools about 1890, and one Miss Clark was the first supervisor.

Many musical celebrities have given concerts in Grand Island, a few of them being Mme. Schumann-Heink, John McCormick, and Sousa's band.

[To be continued]