



## The Early History of Music at Crete, Nebraska

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# The Early History of Music at Crete, Nebraska

By GEORGE H. ALLER

As told to the writer, Robert R. Hastings

The City of Crete, Nebraska, was organized in the year 1871. Little progress was made in cultivating the musical talent of the residents until a Conservatory of Music was organized in connection with Doane College. This school received its charter in 1872 and has been in continuous operation as a college since that year. Very soon after its organization, the Music Department became the center of musical training in the city.

George A. Gregory, who is now ninety years of age and still a resident of Crete, entered Doane College in 1876 and immediately offered to the Crete Public Schools his services as an instructor in voice, without salary. This plan proved very successful and a class of adults was organized in 1877. The Band of Hope was organized by Professor Gregory in the late 70's. It included 328 school children up to sixteen years of age. Rehearsals were held in the churches of the city immediately after school, and excellent results were obtained.

Quoting from an early newspaper published in Crete, the following statement was made relative to the singing of that Band of Hope:

The church was packed to overflowing. . . Nothing but the sanctity of the place restrained the audience from cheering, but even this was overcome through the spirited rendering of "The Red, White and Blue."

By 1880 a large number of adults were enrolled in the music class taught by Professor Gregory, or were taking private lessons from him. An interesting event in connection with this class is the fact that all the members of the Adelphian Quartet (referred to later in this article) took voice lessons from the professor, and this quartet became famous years later.

To Prof. Goodwin D. Swezey, who was connected with Doane College from 1879 to 1894, must be given credit for

directing the male glee clubs of the college during that entire period. Later he joined the faculty of the University of Nebraska, where he was an honored member for many years.

In February, 1889, the Crete Military Band was organized by Stephen Jelinek, a son of Frank Jelinek who homesteaded three miles south of Crete in the year 1865. This band was sponsored by Crete citizens, and once each week for three months during the summer a concert was given on the street. This practice continued for several years. One rehearsal was held each week throughout the entire year. Standard and popular selections were played. The band was in great demand and traveled extensively over Nebraska. In 1889 the band won first prize in a contest in Omaha, and again in 1890 in a contest sponsored by the G. A. R. at Grand Island. A number of its members still survive at this writing — December, 1940. They are:

John Prochaska, now living in San Diego; Harry Buchanan at Los Angeles; Burke Buchanan and Lou F. Andrews, Minneapolis; John Shary in Mission, Texas; Ed Steidl, now in Iowa City but for many years a druggist at Crete; and, in Nebraska, Stephen Jelinek, the band leader, at Lincoln; Edward Jelinek, Grand Island; Jesse Goodwin at Cambridge; and Joseph Franta and George H. Aller, who still reside at Crete.

Stephen Jelinek has never forgotten Crete and frequently comes here to visit his many friends and acquaintances. He has had a remarkable musical career. For eight years he was cornetist in Chicago theaters before the Spanish-American war, and during that war was chief musician of the 11th Infantry for three years. For five years he was cornetist of the orchestra at the old Oliver Theater, and later he was cornetist of the Orpheum Theater orchestra in Lincoln for seventeen years.

Another interesting musical organization which originated in Crete was the Adelphian Quartet, which continued to sing in concerts longer than any other quartet ever organized in the United States so far as the writer has been able to ascertain.

This quartet was composed of Dr. Homer C. House, Ross H. House, Codrus ("Cord") L. Aller, and George H. Aller. The fifth member was the "utility man," A. V. House. The House brothers and Aller brothers were great chums while living in Crete and Doane College. In 1887, while the Crete Chautauqua

was at its height, these five men were profoundly impressed by a quartet which was singing on the Crete Chautauqua platform and whose music sounded as if it came from an organ. To the surprise of these young men, they discovered the music came from four perfectly attuned human voices, and then and there they determined to organize a similar quartet. The House brothers sang tenor parts and the Aller brothers sang baritone and bass parts. They chose the name "Adelphian," meaning "Pairs of Brothers."

The Adelphian started its career as a college quartet, singing only for the entertainment of the various college and city groups of Crete. William Jennings Bryan became very much interested in these young men and for several seasons they accompanied him on his lecture tours. In 1892 the Burlington Railroad sent them to the National Convention of Christian Endeavor held at New York City, with all expenses paid, to advertise Nebraska. That summer they gave a concert before thirty thousand people in Madison Square Garden, and by reason of that triumph they were asked to sing several concerts at the original of all Chautauquas at Chautauqua Lake, New York. Bishop Vincent, its manager, expected to see this group from the Middle West dressed like cowboys, in chaps and sombreros; instead he found a group of well-groomed college men meticulously dressed in the stage-fashion of the time and each with a rose in his coat lapel.

By the time the members of the quartet had finished their education at Doane their fame was made, and they proceeded to develop the quartet on a professional basis. A. V. House traveled with them as a lecturer and assistant and Miss Lillian Chase as reader. They toured the Pacific Coast many times. They had a repertoire of 166 songs committed to memory, and on many occasions gave ten concerts on ten successive days without repeating a number.

As time went on these young men entered into business. Dr. Homer C. House became the head of the Department of English and Music in Maryland University; Ross H. House became associated with the YMCA in Denver, Colorado; "Cord" Aller was a successful miller to the time of his death; and the sole survivor, George H. Aller, still gives lessons in voice at Crete; directs "The Cretonians," a glee club of male voices selected from the business

men of Crete; and also directs various musical groups in that vicinity. For many years he was Director of Music at several Nebraska institutions, namely, the Franklin Academy, Peru State Teachers College, Wesleyan University at Lincoln, Doane College, and Kearney State Teachers College. He recollects vividly the days when the Adelpian Quartet was in demand by Chautauqua and lyceum groups until death began to take its members.

For many years during Commencement Week at Doane, the members of Adelpian Quartet used to hold a reunion, thus their music became a traditional part of the annual commencement exercises of the college. No other musical organization has given the city of Crete in general, and Doane College in particular, the publicity they have gained thru the singing and the devotion of the Adelpian Quartet.

Today, in the city of Crete, thru the efforts of George H. Aller, is a fine musical group known as The Cretonians. At the present time there are thirty-three members, and the group has been in existence since the year 1926. Weekly rehearsals are held. This is probably one of the most representative organizations in the civic life of Crete. Men from all walks of life are proud to hold membership. The Cretonians are in great demand for concerts within driving distance of Crete, and they are most generous in assisting with any program in that vicinity. Thousands of people who are not too modern to enjoy the music their fathers loved have thrilled to these splendid voices on the radio.

The Doane College Choir sings regularly in the First Congregational Church at Crete, and annually makes an extensive tour through Nebraska and adjacent states.

Appreciation of good music has been fostered throughout the years by the Conservatory of Music at Doane College, and by private music teachers in this city.

All honor must be given to those early pioneers who came to Crete when it was a new town on the treeless prairie, and began to cultivate the musical talent in that community.