



Music of the Pioneer Days in Nebraska [Part 5]

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society). You may download it for your personal use.

For permission to re-use materials, or for photo ordering information, see:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: Miriam Stanley Carleton-Squires, "Music of the Pioneer Days in Nebraska [Part 5]," *Nebraska History* 23 (1942): 128-137

Article Summary: This is the fifth article in a series that records 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: Levi Handy, Mrs Jacob Hungate, S E Kemp, Theodore M Haller, B M Willsey, Mrs Emanuel Castetler, H O L Otterman, Wallace L Johnson, Mrs L L Lantry, Stanley Copps, Ellen Beach Yaw, Josef Lhevinne, E S Marker, Mrs Albinus Nance, Miss Josephine Headstrom, Cyrus M Barber, Ashton Shallenberger, Neva McCray, H W Wendland, Lena Knott, Mrs J A Parks, John S Knott, Mrs W E Morgan, Professor Worley, O B Howell, Mrs B E Sedgwick, Mrs L D Stilson, Flora Green, Nellie Stevenson, Mabel Chilcote, Maud Chilcote, Mabel Cobb, Mrs Squires, J A Parks, Mrs Joseph Fountain, P N Elarth, Harry Love, Prof John F Lenger, Alexander Hunter, David Guthrie, August Schmeling, Eugene E Simpson, Josephine Day, Carrie Beach, Mrs F S Fosmire, Jeanette Dysart, Mrs J S Young, Mary Felt, Josephine Day, A A Connor, Dr Myers, Mrs A W Agee, A M Glover, P H Burt, Edward Baxter Perry, Miss Hannah Wismer, Mrs E P Savage, Alfred Stoner, Mrs I W Norton, Professor Zipser, Mrs William Mundy, Henry Williams, E B Whaley, Ella Woolington, Mrs James N Yates, Earl Vincent, Dr R R Baker, Mrs S A Myers, Miss Carroll Wheeler, Vanner Vangreen, Miss Johanna M Mortensen, Lawson Sheldon, Lily Chadsey, Millard Nellor, Mr Boone, Mr Crandall, M S Calvin, Mr Horner, Elizabeth Ahlander-Bergstrom, "Ad" Johnson, Mrs W D Griffin, G Odenerauts, A G Mackey, A Bystrom, George W Erb, Edna Vosseller, John Norman, Mrs Anna Piatt Boiset, Mrs J G Thompson, Miss Marshall, Professor Estabrook, Ethel K Thompson, Matthew Burr, Agnes Earl, Norman Carkuff, E B Geer, Charles Wille, Dr S W Allen, Jennie Smith, Howard Kirkpatrick, Dr Compton, R W Boonefield, Mr Wilkinson, James Kudrna, Professor Stone, Mrs Nora Cramer, Mattie Dill, H P Sutton, Miss Budlong, Charles Boyles, O K Eastman, Mary Regan, Mrs Penfield, Mrs Clark, Mrs Taylor, Anna Schulte, Ethel Garten, Stuart Kennedy, Mart Apgar, Leo Pieper, Gene Pieper, Harry Wells, Anton Abel, Carrie Dewey, Mrs Clara (Miller) Ellis, Mrs E A VanHorn, Mr Hogue, Dr Baker

Nebraska Place Names: Blair, Osceola, York, Niobrara, Superior, Fremont, Edgar, Sargent, Callaway, Nehawka, Weeping Water, Beatrice, Gothenburg, Plum Creek, Lexington, Alma, Neligh, Mullen, McCook, Crawford, St Edward, Nance County, Lexington, Albion, Fairmont, Sand Valley

Keywords: Blair Cornet Bank; melodeon; *Piano Method*; singing school; S Brainard & Sons [piano]; Ursuline Convent (York); Dilettante Club (York); Amateur Music Club (York); J A Parks Catalog; Andrews Opera Company; Santee Sioux Indian Band; Chicago World's Fair, 1893; *The Colonel Bogey March*; Mandolin Club

(Superior); Matinee Musicale (Superior, 1905); Messiah violin; Weeping Water Academy; Nehawka Public School; Gothenburg Cornet Band; Thomas & Bradley's Hall (Gothenburg), Dr Smith's Drug Store (Gothenburg)); Steinway [piano]; Orleans Seminary; Conservatory of Music [Gates College]; R J Earl & Sons (Neligh); cowboy band; Ladies' Aid (Mullen); Matinee Music Club and Kryl Orchestra (McCook); United States Marine Band.

Music of The Pioneer Days in Nebraska

Compiled by

MIRIAM STANLEY CARLETON-SQUIRES

(Mrs. Edwin E. Squires)

Broken Bow, Nebraska

Part V

BLAIR

The first musical organization in Blair was probably the Blair Cornet Band, organized in 1875 by Levi Handy.

In the late 70's the first piano came into the community. It is reported to have been owned by Mrs. Jacob Hungate.

In the early 80's S. E. Kemp conducted a music store. Also in the early 80's Theodore M. Haller and B. M. Willsey conducted singing classes every Monday night at the Congregational Church.

In the early days Mrs. Emanuel Castetler gave piano and organ lessons.

H. O. L. Otterman taught violin about 1882.

Music was introduced in the schools about 1895, and Wallace L. Johnson was the first music supervisor.

Mrs. L. L. Lantry owns an old melodeon which bears a repair date of 1865. The melodeon was made in New Haven, Connecticut.

Stanley Copps, formerly of Blair but now having headquarters in Lincoln, has composed much music. His *Piano Method* is possibly his best-known work.

Among the musicians of note who have visited Blair are Ellen Beach Yaw and Josef Lhevinne.

Dana College installed the first pipe organ in Blair about 1932.

OSCEOLA

There was a singing school in the community in 1876-1877 conducted by E. S. Marker.

Mrs. Albinus Nance owned the first piano in Osceola in 1887. Miss Josephine Headstrom gave piano lessons that same year.

The Cantata "Queen Esther" was performed in Osceola in 1880.

In 1882 Cyrus M. Barber conducted the first music store.

Music was introduced in the schools in 1887.

Ashton Shallenberger, the cornetist, organized the first band.

Miss Neva McCray in 1911 was the first violin teacher.

H. W. Wendland was the first cornet teacher.

In 1920 the auditorium installed the first pipe organ in Osceola.

YORK

Mrs. J. A. Parks (*nee* Lena Knott), living in York on Iowa Avenue at the present time, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John S. Knott, pioneers in York in 1876. They owned the first piano here—a small upright by S. Brainard & Sons which they purchased in 1878.

Mrs. W. E. Morgan, wife of the minister of the M. E. Church, was the only music teacher here in the early days, giving her lessons on an old-fashioned reed organ. She organized all of her pupils (both vocal and organ) into a singing society which was usually called upon to perform on every occasion. The Knott piano, being small, was carried along for all of these "occasions," as Lena Knott was one of Mrs. Morgan's pupils.

In 1879 the Nebraska M. E. Conference started a seminary in York in an old building which was also the Congregational Church. On October 16, 1880, the cornerstone of a new building was laid and in 1881 the school was moved into its new location. The seminary buildings are now used by the Ursuline Convent. In the seminary Professor Worley taught voice and Mrs. Morgan taught voice and piano, as well as being the head of the Music Department. In 1893 Mr. and Mrs. O. B. Howell replaced Professor Worley, and they remained in York for two years before moving to Lincoln. It is claimed that Mrs. B. E. Sedgwick was the outstanding piano teacher, as Professor Worley was of voice.

Foremost among the musicians in York from 1876 to 1900 were Mrs. L. D. Stilson, Flora Green, Nellie Stevenson, Mabel and Maud Chilcote, and Mabel Cobb—most of whom gave private lessons.

The Dilettante Club, organized by one Mrs. Squires on December 16, 1894, is said to have been the first music club in Ne-

braska. Its name was later changed to the Amateur Music Club, and this group functioned until about 1935. Mrs. D. E. Sedgwick was its first president, serving for eight consecutive years. During that time the club gave "Trial by Jury" and two cantatas.

The name of J. A. Parks is known all over the world, and the J. A. Parks Company catalog lists thousands of compositions and arrangements. Mr. Parks came to York in 1887 to teach and conduct a choral class. Before that date he lived in Lincoln. He established his music publishing house in 1896.

Mrs. Joseph Fountain, who came to York in 1874 from Aurora, Illinois, owned a melodeon which was carried to all musical gatherings.

At some time in 1882 the Andrews Opera Company gave a performance in York.

P. N. Elarth, who conducted a music store in the early days of the town, also gave violin lessons. Among the first cornet teachers were Harry Love and a man by the name of Klink.

The Methodist Episcopal Church had the first pipe organ in the city.

Among the many musicians of renown who have performed in York are David Bispham, Evan Williams, Arthur Middleton and Maud Powell.

NIOBRARA

After having served as a musician in the Austrian army for seven years, Prof. John F. Lenger, a Bohemian, came to Niobrara in 1879. He organized several bands in northeastern Nebraska, his most famous being the Santee Sioux Indian Band, which, at the time, was the only all-Indian band in the world. This band played at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, and for President Harrison in Washington, D. C. It may be well to note here that Professor Lenger could speak numerous Indian dialects.

Professor Lenger was able to play every band instrument and was also a composer of music. His favorite composition was "The Colonel Bogey March." When he died in April, 1941, he requested that this march be played at his funeral. The request was honored.

SUPERIOR

The Alexander Hunter family came to Superior in 1875. Their piano was hauled overland from Edgar by August Schmeling on October 28, 1875.

When David Guthrie came to Superior from London, Ontario, he brought his violin, tuning-fork and bass viol with him.

After 1880 many operettas and other musical events were presented by local talent.

After Eugene E. Simpson had taught school here in 1892 in order to get money enough to study the violin in Europe, and had been to Leipsig to study, he returned to give a violin recital in April, 1905. It is said that this was the most artistic event that had ever taken place in Superior. Josephine Day was his accompanist.

In 1892 or 1893 Carrie Beach organized a Mandolin Club. Maude and Carrie Beach, known as the Beach Sisters, lived at Cadams, ten miles northeast of Superior, but came to Superior to teach and play.

Superior's first band was organized before 1892. Yager was the name of the director.

Miss Warren (now Mrs. F. S. Fosmire of Fort Morgan, Colorado) was Superior's first piano teacher. She also taught in the nearby towns of Hardy, Nelson, and Cadams.

Miss Jeanette Dysart (Mrs. J. S. Young of Fremont, Nebraska) was Superior's first music supervisor in 1902. She also gave private lessons in voice and piano.

Mary Felt and Josephine Day, driving in a phaeton to the doors of various women who were interested in music or singing in a chorus, and asking them to join, organized the Matinee Musicale in the fall of 1905. The ladies studied musical history and sang together for many years, doing very commendable work.

A. A. Connor had the first music store in Superior.

In 1923 a pipe organ was installed in the First Presbyterian Church. The Methodist Episcopal Church at one time had an organ pumped by hand, but it was of little value.

AURORA

Dr. Myers organized and directed the first band in Aurora some time prior to 1880.

The first piano came into the community about 1880, and Mrs. A. W. Agee was the first piano teacher.

In the early 80's A. M. Glover conducted a music store in Aurora.

"Madame Butterfly," given by local talent some time before 1885, is the first record of a musical event of any importance in Aurora. At that time the town had a musical association.

About 1890 P. H. Burt taught the violin.

Edward Baxter Perry of Boston gave a concert in Aurora about 1900—probably the first concert by a professional musician there.

Music was introduced in the Aurora schools in September, 1908, Miss Hannah Wismer being the first supervisor.

The First Methodist Episcopal Church installed the first pipe organ in Aurora in 1910.

SARGENT

In 1880 Mrs. E. P. Savage, whose husband later became the Governor of Nebraska, owned the first piano in Sargent.

Sargent's first singing-school was formed by Mrs. I. W. Norton in 1881.

Sargent's first band was organized in 1885 and Alfred Stoner was the first band-master. At about the same time Professor Zipser taught the violin.

In 1891 Mrs. William Mundy taught piano.

Henry Williams has a valuable Messiah violin which has recently been examined and listed for sale.

CALLAWAY

E. B. Whaley conducted the first singing-school in Sand Valley in 1883.

Ella Woolington in 1884 owned the first piano in this community, and the first piano-teacher was Mrs. James N. Yates, who was Ella Woolington.

The first band was organized in Callaway in 1887. Earl Vincent, who played a cornet, was its first leader.

Dr. R. R. Baker, a dentist and a very fine violinist, was the first person to teach the violin here. He was playing in the orchestra in Ford's Theater in Washington, D C., the night Lincoln was shot.

Mr. S. A. Myers, eighty years old, owns a violin which he has had for fifty years.

It has been reported that at one time there was a pipe-organ in the Episcopal Church at Callaway, but it is not in use at the present time. In 1892 the church was given a bell from a foundry in London, England.

Music was introduced in the Callaway schools in September, 1920, Miss Carroll Wheeler being the first supervisor.

There are two composers of published music in Callaway, namely, Vanner Vangreen and Miss Johanna M. Mortensen.

WEeping WATER AND NEHAWKA

In the 1870's the reed organ was the first musical instrument found in the home and small church. One of the first reed organs was bought about 1876 by Lawson Sheldon of Nehawka. A few homes possessed a square piano. The first upright pianos were purchased about 1885.

In 1885 the Weeping Water Academy had a music department, but the Nehawka Public School did not have music in its curriculum until 1926. Miss Lily Chadsey taught public-school music at Weeping Water, and Miss Millard Nellor was an early music teacher in Nehawka.

In 1887 there was a Ladies' Band in Weeping Water directed by Mr. Boone. In 1890 a Nehawka band was formed with Mr. Crandall as its director.

The first pipe organ was installed in the Congregational Church of Weeping Water.

BEATRICE

Music was first introduced in the schools of Beatrice about 1885. Prof. M. S. Calvin was the first supervisor.

It is believed that the Smith brothers, who were the bankers of Beatrice, owned the first piano there.

Mr. Horner conducted the first music store.

The first pipe organ in Beatrice was installed in the Episcopal Church.

Both Sousa's and Gilmore's bands have given concerts in Beatrice.

GOTHENBURG

Mme. Elizabeth Ahlander-Bergstrom, wife of O. Bergstrom, founder of the town of Gothenburg, though petite, possessed a voice of remarkable strength, range and compass. She headed the Ahlander-Bergstrom Concert Company which early in 1885 gave a performance here. In November, 1885, she gave a concert in Kearney to a crowded house.

The Gothenburg Cornet Band was organized in September, 1885. Its first public appearance was at a masquerade ball given Thanksgiving night, November 26, 1885, at Thomas & Bradley's Hall. Two hundred people attended.

Mention is made of a piano at the Gothenburg Hotel which all the young people of 1885 enjoyed. "Ad" Johnson owned the hotel.

In September, 1885, Mrs. W. D. Griffin, teacher of the first city school, had a new piano; and, with the band equipment, the town was said to be "well supplied with musical instruments."

The first piano teacher in Gothenburg was G. Odenerauts, who also gave lessons on the organ. At ninety-one years of age he is still living in Brooklyn, New York.

The band was organized in September, 1885. A. G. Mackey of Plum Creek (now Lexington) was its director. In November he moved to Gothenburg, had charge of the photo gallery, and assisted in Dr. Smith's Drug Store, directing the band in his spare time. The following January, (1886) he went back to Plum Creek, and A. Bystrom of Burlington, Iowa, took over the band.

It is supposed that George W. Erb conducted the first music store about 1900.

Music was introduced in the schools of Gothenburg in 1913-1914. Edna Vosseller was the supervisor.

In 1916 John Norman was the first violin teacher. He also gave cornet lessons and directed the band.

The Methodist Episcopal Church in 1931 had the first pipe organ in town.

When Godowsky gave a concert in Gothenburg, he used a Steinway piano owned by Mrs. Anna Piatt Boiset and it is said that he greatly appreciated the instrument. This was some time prior to the World War.

ALMA

Mrs. J. G. Thompson came to Alma in 1886 and taught instrumental music. She was one of the first organists of the Methodist Episcopal Church here.

About 1894 or 1895, Miss Marshall, who was a teacher in the old Orleans (Nebraska) Seminary, taught piano and voice in Alma before her marriage to Professor Estabrook of the same seminary.

One of the best musicians of the town was Miss Ethel K. Thompson, who graduated from the Nebraska Wesleyan Conservatory of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, and studied also in Germany.

NELIGH

In 1880 the first piano to come to Neligh was owned by Matthew Burr, and in the same year Agnes Earl gave piano lessons.

Norman Carkuff organized a band in 1885 and was its director.

In 1889 a Conservatory of Music was founded at Gates College, and Prof. E. B. Geer, a graduate of Oberlin, was the professor of music. A Choral Union was then organized at the College. Although Gates College is discontinued, it has left its musical influence.

R. J. Earl & Sons had a music store in Neligh in 1889.

Charles Wille was the first violin teacher in 1890.

Dr. S. W. Allen was the first to teach cornet playing.

Also, the first pipe organ was installed in the Congregational Church in 1890.

Music was not introduced into the schools until 1911. Miss Jennie Smith was the first supervisor.

Howard Kirkpatrick, recently of the faculty of the University School of Music of Lincoln, was the first composer of music in this locality.

Dr. Compton of Neligh was a cornetist in Sousa's Band.

MULLEN

In 1887 Mrs. R. W. Boonefield owned the first piano in Grant County, and in 1889 Mr. Wilkinson gave piano and violin lessons.

The first musical organization in the Sandhills of Nebraska was a cowboy band, organized in 1900 by the Ladies' Aid of Mullen. James Kudrna was its director and taught cornet and violin. Professor Stone directed the first band in Grant County.

Music was first introduced in the schools of Mullen in 1905, with Mrs. Nora Cramer as the first supervisor.

Mattie Dill gave piano lessons in Hooker County in 1905.

McCook

I am informed that McCook has no records relating to its early musical events.

The pioneer, H. P. Sutton (head of the Sutton Jewelry Store), at one time directed a band that played well enough to be one of the official bands at the Omaha Exposition in 1898. He had previously (in 1889) conducted a music store in McCook.

The first pipe organ in McCook was installed in the Catholic Church in 1890.

The first music supervisor was Miss Budlong when music was introduced in the schools in 1904-1905.

It is thought that Charles Boyles organized the first band in 1884-85.

The Matinee Music Club, which sponsored the concert by the Kryl Orchestra in 1936, was the first musical organization in McCook. The United States Marine Band at one time gave a concert there.

Crawford

The first piano came to Crawford in 1886 and was owned by O. K. Eastman. Miss Mary Regan in 1890 gave piano lessons, and Mossman conducted the first music store.

The first pipe organ was installed in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Crawford in 1929.

St. Edward

Mrs. Penfield brought the first piano into the town on an ox-cart, but the year is not known. Mrs. Clark in Nance County has had her piano (an old Weber) since 1886.

Mrs. Taylor taught piano in St. Edward about 1895. Anna Schulte came from Columbus to teach violin about 1914.

It was in 1914 that music was first introduced in the schools. Miss Ethel Garten of Albion was the first supervisor.

The first pipe organ was installed in the Salem Lutheran Church, about nine miles north of St. Edward, about 1921.

The Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal Church choirs were the first recorded musical organizations.

Stuart Kennedy, the first cornet teacher in the town, organized the first band and was its director.

The first concert of any consequence was given by Blind Boone.

Mart Apgar has published some songs of his own composing.

Leo and Gene Pieper of Albion conduct orchestras which are quite popular at the present time.

Harry Wells owns a violin which he claims is over one hundred years old.

LEXINGTON

In 1887 Anton Abel had the first piano in Lexington. The first piano that went into Dawson County is now in the Carrie Dewey home in Fairmont. Among the early piano teachers was Mrs. Clara Ellis (*nec* Miller).

Mrs. E. A. VanHorn gave violin lessons in Lexington in 1896.

In 1903 cornet lessons were given by Mr. Hogue. Also, in 1903 Dr. Baker sold music in his drug store.

Blind Boone gave a concert in Lexington in 1900.

Between 1910 and 1912 two operettas were given—probably the first musical events of any importance in Lexington.

"The Ladies' Musicales" was the first musical organization of the town.

The first pipe organ installed here was in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1924.

(To be continued)