

Mauston Ladies' Ideal Band

Gavin Holman, 5 February 2022

Mauston is a small city (current population c. 4,500) in the centre of Wisconsin. During the 19th century there were two cornet bands in the town – the male players of the Mauston Cornet Band, which was active from 1875 through to WW1, and the Mauston Ideal Ladies' Band which had a shorter life, from 1886 to 1888.

The origin of the Ladies' Band is not known. It was certainly fully formed when it organised a 'hop' at Anderson's Rink on Thursday 26 November 1886. Emma Anderson was one of the band's founders, and it is assumed that her family owned or ran the skating rink in the town.

"The Ideal Band hop at the Anderson's rink was in every way an ideal hop. Everyone was pleased and seemed to enjoy the event. It was in truth an ideal party. The music was good and the Ideal Band, composed of twelve of Mauston's young society ladies, opened the ball with the *'Ideal Quickstep'*. The guests of the evening cheered and encored to the echo. During the evening they rendered two pieces. Everything was ideal, including floor managers, caller, and the supper."¹



Members of the Band in early 1888 - front row (left to right): Alice Stewart (cornet), Ella Schall (cornet), Jessie Grimmer (snare drum); 2nd row: Inez Wetherby (cornet), Emily Bury, Adelaide Parker (cornet), Dora Wells (bass drum); 3rd row: Nora Hall (bass), Emma Priest (baritone), Nettie Priest (trombone), Grace Baldwin (trombone), Rosabelle Carter, and Bertha Stewart (alto horn). Not available for the photograph were: Jessie Hinton (cornet), Emma Anderson (cornet, a founder of the band), Mattie Sykes (snare drum), Mattie Burrough (alto horn), and Agnes Wetherby. The Band's director and tutor was J.G. Bates.

¹ Juneau County Argus, 3 December 1886

The next engagement for the Band was for the Light Guards' Masquerade at the Mauston Opera House, on 22 February 1887, where they performed for the occasion, assisted by the Mauston Cornet Band.²

17 June 1887 saw the Ladies' Ideal Band and the Mauston Cornet Band perform at celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of Rev. I.F. Nuzum's ministry in the town.

A major event for the Band was to be invited to provide musical entertainment during the encampment of the Third Wisconsin Regiment, at Portage, later in June 1887. Eight companies, including those of Mauston and Portage, took part, with hundreds of men. The Ladies' Ideal Band, consisting of fourteen players, were quartered in the east wing of the Agricultural Hall, and they were very popular with the ladies of the town, who visited with them throughout their stay.

"The band is composed of young society ladies, and attired in a neat costume of light blue, they present a very attractive appearance."³

"It is alleged that the boys cannot hear enough of their music, and crowd their ears against cracks and knotholes while the band is practicing in the Agricultural Hall."⁴

The Band created great interest in the town also, with a show window at Schulze Co.'s being decorated in their honour, with a harp and two imitations band instruments.⁵

The Regiment paraded through the streets of Portage, led by Dana's Cornet Band of Wausau, with a carriage containing the Ladies' Ideal Band bringing up the rear. Unfortunately, George Marsh, the editor of the *Camp Rusk Journal*, which was established for the duration of the encampment, made some disparaging and insinuating remarks about the band ladies. He did not apologise, and was subsequently pelted with rotten eggs by some of the Mauston company as a punishment – an action which was supported by the entire Regiment.⁶

The Ladies' Band were later engaged to perform at the annual encampment of the Fourth Battalion Wisconsin National Guard, near Milwaukee; and also at the Mineral Point Fair.

In September 1887, the Grand Lodge of the Wisconsin Good Templars held their three-day meeting at Madison. The Ladies' Ideal Band provided the music in several of the events of the session. The members of the band who took part here were:

Emily Bury (drum majoreess), Addie Parker (leader), Inez Wetherby, Alice Stewart, Ella Schall, Rose Carter, Bertie Stewart, Nettie Priest, Grace Baldwin, Emma Priest, Nora Hall, Jessie Grimmer, and Dora Wells.⁷

The Band also serenade the State Governor, Mr Rusk, and other state officials, in Madison during their visit. Their uniform was reported to consist of light blue dresses and caps, trimmed with gold lace.

The first annual celebration of the Juneau County Old Settlers' Association, was held on 6 October 1887 at the Agricultural society's fair grounds, where the Ladies' Ideal Band

² Juneau County Argus, 18 February 1887

³ Wisconsin State Journal, 21 June 1887

⁴ Milwaukee Journal, 22 June 1887

⁵ Portage Daily Register, 22 June 1887

⁶ Portage Daily Register, 24 & 25 June 1887

⁷ Wisconsin State Journal, 6 September 1887

greeted the procession as it arrived at the grounds with music ‘most appropriate for the occasion.’

The ladies of Mauston arranged a special celebration for the 4th July 1888 in Mauston. The Ladies' Ideal Band and the Mauston Drum Corps furnished the music.

“This is no woman's rights demonstration, but purely a patriotic move, calculated to keep alive the spirit of '76 and furnish a chance for all creation to enjoy the festivities incident to a celebration of the glorious Fourth. The naughty men will not be called upon for anything but contributions and labor, but will be allowed the freedom of the city, if they behave themselves.”⁸

The Band also appeared as one of the attractions at the Myers Opera House in Janesville, on 23 July 1888, in an evening arranged by the Janesville People’s Lodge of the Good Templars, with their musical contribution consisting of solos with full band accompaniment and other selections.⁹ During their visit to the town, pictures of the Ladies’ Band were on display at S.C. Burnham’s and Eldredge’s establishments.

The ninth annual encampment of the Monona Lake Assembly, at Lakeside, near Madison, was held at the end of July 1888 for eleven days. The Ladies’ Ideal Band were residence throughout and performed five formal concerts, together with the Stewart Concert Company of entertainers.¹⁰ They were greatly appreciated and were deemed to be worthy of their home town:

“The Ladies’ Ideal Band at Lake Monona are highly praised. Nothing is too good for them, and their society is much sought after. It will be a worthy advertisement for Mauston.”¹¹

“The Band is composed of fifteen young ladies, educated and refined. They have been here during the whole eleven days, discoursing enlivening music.”¹²

This was the last known engagement of the Band, which is presumed to have disbanded later in 1888. They had lost Inez Wetherby, when she died in March 1888. The Band may only have lasted two or three years, but the evidence from the contemporary reports shows that they were highly proficient musically and were impeccably turned out in their smart uniforms. A colourised version of their photograph, showing how they would have appeared, can be seen below.

Little is known about the lives of the individual players. Some went on to marry and raise families, others had somewhat shorter lives. Inez Wetherby has already been mentioned. Alice Stewart died in 1889, and Jessie Grimmer in 1895 – soon after her marriage. The few known details of their lives are shown here:

- Agnes Mary Wetherby (1868-), married William Gregg Boorman in 1887
- Alice (Allie) Stewart (1869-1889)
- Bertha Stewart (1866-1904)
- Dorothy Dode Laurinda Wells (1867-1938), married Glenn Francis Ramsey in 1897
- Ella M. Schall (1870-), married Frederick LaVerne Van Wie, in 1897

⁸ Portage Daily Register, 2 July 1888

⁹ Janesville Daily Gazette, 11 July 1888

¹⁰ Wisconsin State Journal, 19 April 1888

¹¹ Juneau County Argus, 3 August 1888

¹² River Falls Journal, 16 August 1888

- Emma [Emily] Anderson (1868-), married Edward Bradley
- Emma Lansden Priest (1865-1946), married William W. Hinton in 1889
- Grace Millicent Baldwin (1871-1940), married Justin L. Price in 1900
- Inez H. Wetherby (1870-1888) – died 4 March 1888
- Jessie Maria Grimmer (1867-1895), married Herbert Hudson Heath in 1894
- Jessie Virginia Hinton (1867-1951), married Melvin Lamont Bunnell in 1892
- Margaret Emily Bury (1869-1927), married Louis W. Earle in 1889
- Mary Adelaide Parker (1869-1958), married Gurdon Horatio Winsor c. 1902
- Mattie Sykes (1866-1895), married Leslie E. Bowes
- Nettie E. Priest (1863-1945), married Will Roy Lyon c. 1905
- Nora E. Hall (1869-1960), married John Tanner Dixon in 1891
- Rosabelle Carter (1869-), married George H. Winchell in 1890



The Mauston Cornet Band



Photographed in 1909, with members: John Enschede, Art Cammack, William Martin, Glenn Russel, Clint Holuenstock, George Barner, Will Enschede, Charles Bradley, Alfred Hauer, Elmer Wetherby, Nando Winsor, Bert Carter, Otis Loomis, Clayton Wetherby, Dodge, Abe Holgate, Tony Neustader, Karl Sharp, Perry Peters, Gardner Buglas, Roy Holgate, Hollis Fluno, Clem Bradley, Walter Marvin, Delos Strong, Carl Davidson, G.F. Behnken, Matt McCarty and Steele Brow.

The Mauston Cornet Band, under leadership of Prof. M. A. Rublee, maintains its position as one of the best bands in the State. They have recently procured a new and tasty uniform and are deserving the rank they have attained.¹³

¹³ Mauston Star, 22 May 1884