

The Mountain Beauties of Hendricks, West Virginia

Mike Brubaker, 15 January 2022



These eight young women are posed playing brass instruments outdoors on a rocky embankment, a suitable backdrop for a group from West Virginia. They each wear identical dark uniform dresses with a simple T-pattern on the lower edge and soldier-style broad brimmed campaign hats. The band's instrumentation of a single cornet, two altos, a tenor, baritone, and bass, and two drums, is very like the standard brass band sets furnished in the 1900s by many American music instrument companies.

It's a small photo, $3\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, mounted on plain dark green cardstock. The edges were cut down which may have removed any mark of a photographer. But the annotation on the back certainly makes up for that with the name of the women's band, it's location, and at least seven of their first names and instruments played neatly written in cursive. This made it easy to quickly find a report of the "Mountain Beauties" Band in the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper of 3 April 1899.

Adda - Baritone
Fannie - 1st alto
Nina - 2nd "
Pearl - " Tenor
Gertrude - Tuba,
Lotta - Bass drum,
Alice - Snare "
"Mountain Beauties"
Band of
Hendricks St. Va.

The "Mountain Beauties" Band.
[Special Dispatch to the Baltimore Sun.]
ELKINS, W. VA., April 2.—The ladies' cornet band at Hendricks, Tucker county, W. Va., is attracting much attention. Their visits to neighboring towns have been occasions of unusual interest. The band is known as the "Mountain Beauties," and is composed of twelve young ladies. They have been under the instruction of Prof. Herbert Blake, of Davis, W. Va., since last August and now can play remarkably well. Those composing the band are: **Grace** Craver, Flodde Roy, Frankie Biegler, solo cornets; Mary Harper, first cornet; **Addie** Craver, baritone; Edna Biegler, first tenor; **Pearl** Craver, second tenor; Tacy Bowman, first alto; **Fanny** Craver, second alto; **Gertrude** Craver, tuba; **Lottie** Craver, bass drum; **Nina** Craver, tenor drum. The drum players are the youngest members.

Baltimore Sun
3 April 1899

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Those composing the band are: Grace Craver, Flodie Roy, Frankie Biegler, solo cornets; Mary Harper, first cornet; Addie Craver, baritone; Edna Biegler, first tenor; Pearl Craver, second tenor; Tacy Bowman, first alto; Fanny Craver, second alto; Gertrude Craver, tuba; Lottie Craver, bass drum; Nina Craver, tenor drum. The drum players are the youngest members.

The 1899 report supplied the one crucial clue missing from the note on my photo—their surnames. And the big surprise was that it was just one surname, Craver. It also supplied the name cut off at the top of the photo, Grace Craver, the cornet player. The only name left out was Olive.

Like a key in a lock, the names opened the doors of the history archives to reveal the whole Craver family in the 1900 US Census for Hendricks, West Virginia. All eleven of them.

NAME	RELATION	SEX	AGE	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH
Craver, Joseph	Head	M	52	1848	Pennsylvania	Germany	Germany		Hotel Keeper
Craver, Anna	Wife	F	43	1855	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania		
Craver, Charlotte	Daughter	F	24	1876	Penn	Penn	Penn		
Craver, Emily A.	Daughter	F	22	1878	Penn	Penn	Penn		
Craver, Mary P.	Daughter	F	19	1881	Penn	Penn	Penn		School Teacher
Craver, Mary G.	Daughter	F	18	1883	Penn	Penn	Penn		School Teacher
Craver, Grace	Daughter	F	16	1884	West Virginia	Penn	Penn		
Craver, Francis M.	Daughter	F	13	1887	West Virginia	Penn	Penn		
Craver, Mary B.	Daughter	F	10	1889	West Virginia	Penn	Penn		
Craver, Marion	Daughter	F	7	1892	West Virginia	Penn	Penn		
Craver, Mary Adalane	Daughter	F	2/12	1900	West Virginia	Penn	Penn		

1900 US Census Hendricks, Tucker County, West Virginia

The 1900 census listed Joseph Craver, age 52, as the head and lone male of an otherwise all-female household of eleven family members. Joseph and his wife Anna, or Anise, age 43, were the proud parents of nine daughters! Listed from eldest to youngest they were Charlotte Craver (Lottie, bass drum), age 24; Emily A. (Adda, baritone), age 22; Mary P. (Pearl, 2nd tenor), age 19; Mary G. (Gertrude, tuba), age 18; Grace (Grayce, cornet), age 16; Francis M. (Fannie, 1st alto), age 13; Mary B. (Nina, 2nd alto), age 10; Marion (olive, snare drum), age 7; and Mary Adalane (Mary Evelyn), age 2/12.

Joseph Craver, the father of this band of sisters, was born in Pennsylvania in 1848. His parents came from Baden, Germany and lived in Susquehanna Township in Cambria County, PA, east of Pittsburgh, where his father, Lewis Craver, was a farmer. Joseph's occupation in 1900 was recorded as *Hotel Keeper* in Hendricks, WV. Two of his daughters, Mary Pearl and Mary Gertrude, were listed as *School Teachers*, though they were then only age 19 and 18. [Fun fact: Pennsylvania has four Susquehanna Townships scattered around the state.]

A ladies' cornet band was not an unusual ensemble in America during the 1890s-1900s. But a brass band made up of eight sisters from the Appalachian mountains of West Virginia was definitely something to attract attention of newspaper editors. Especially if there was a photo.

FAMOUS MOUNTAIN BEAUTIES BAND OF WEST VIRGINIA



THE MOUNTAIN BEAUTIES' BAND

The organization is composed entirely of women, the Craver sisters, of Hendricks, W. Va. They have been instructed by Mr. Blaker, of Davis, W. Va., who appears with them.

Special to The Inquirer.

HENDRICKS, W. Va., June 3.—A novel musical organization that has created a great amount of favorable com-

ment wherever it has appeared is the Mountain Beauties Band, of this place. The members of the band are all sisters, daughters of Mr. Craver, proprietor of a prominent hotel here.

They appear in natty uniforms and have played at a number of places in the vicinity of their home. Some time ago they made a trip to Cumberland and several near-by towns in Pennsylvania.

Philadelphia *Inquirer*
4 June 1901

This photo of the Mountain Beauties' Band appeared in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* on 4 June 1901. The eight Craver sisters wear the same uniform dresses, described as *natty* here, but black with gold braid in other reports, and flat caps almost like a sailor's. They are arranged in a close reverse pyramid at a photographer's studio and have their director, Mr. Blaker, of Davis, WV standing at the back. Unfortunately their surname, along with Prof. Blake/Blaker's, is misspelled as Ceaver instead of Craver. The paper does not say if they performed in Philadelphia, only that the band had made a trip to Cumberland county which is next to the state capital Harrisburg.

Hendricks, a small town on the Black Fork and Cheat rivers, tributaries of the Monongahela River in eastern West Virginia, was first settled in 1803 by a German settler, Henry Fansler, who optimistically named it Eden. It was incorporated in 1894

On 6 September 1959, the Newport News *Daily Press* ran a story on local shipbuilding history with the headline "First Vessel to be Named 'Newport News' Enjoyed Long, Colorful Career." The article focused on the steamship Newport News built for the Norfolk and Washington Steamboat Company in 1895 to work the shipping route from the port cities on the James River: Norfolk, Portsmouth, Hampton, and Newport News to the cities on the Potomac River: Alexandria and Washington. It was 274 ft in length overall with a beam of 46 ft. The typical travel time between Washington and Norfolk was about 12 hours.

In October 1901, the steamboat company and two railroad companies offered a promotion to 500 West Virginians for a "Grand Seashore Excursion" on the Newport News passenger steamer that departed from Washington and steamed down the Chesapeake Bay to Newport News, the "magic city of the Atlantic Coast." It would include a special event, the launching of a new Pacific mail ship, the S.S. Siberia, then the largest ship ever constructed in America at 683 ft long.

The entertainment for the West Virginian excursionists would be their own Mountain Beauties Band. A Mrs. Julia Parsons Murphy provided a photo of the band which I believe is possibly the same one that I have acquired. Mrs. Murphy even had the names and instruments of all eight Craver sisters, unfortunately misspelled again as Craven.



The Mountain Beauty Band of Hendricks, W. Va., was one of the attractions offered passengers on the steamboat Newport News on an excursion to this city on the occasion of the launching of the s.s. Siberia in 1901. The band was composed of eight Craven sisters, Grayce, solo cornet; Adda, baritone; Pearl, tenor; Fanny, alto; Nina, alto; Lotta, base drum; Olive, snare drum; and Gertrude, tuba. (Photo courtesy Mrs. Julia Parsons Murphy).

Newport News VA *Daily Press*
6 September 1959

The trip down the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay to Newport News must have been a thrill of a lifetime for these young women from a small mountain town. The Wikipedia entry for the Norfolk & Washington Steamboat Company includes a photo of the steamboat's grand central parlor with ample space for a small brass band, though they likely played outside on deck.

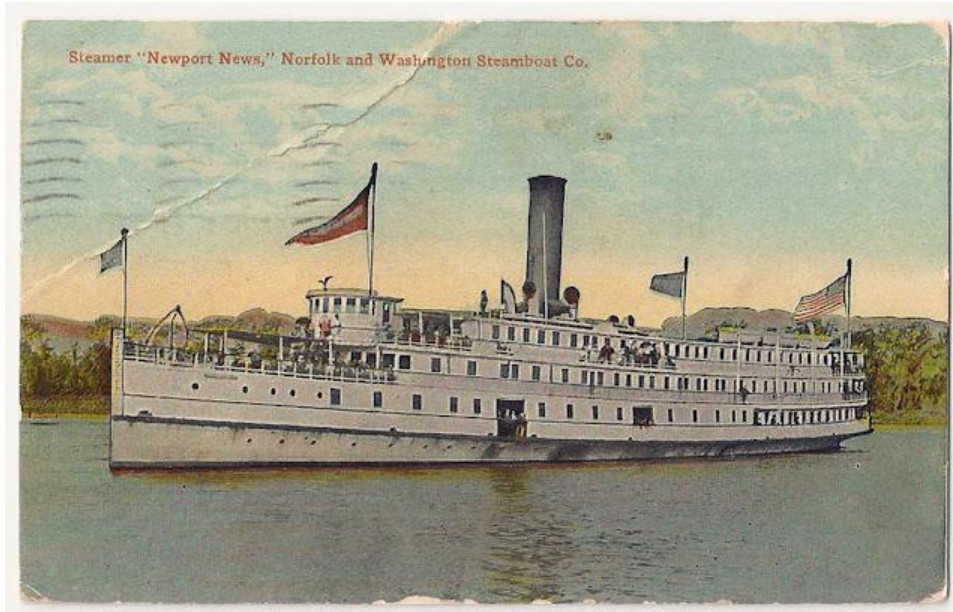


Steamboat *Newport News*

Interior of central parlor

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

In 1918 a fire at the company's warehouse spread to the steamboat *Newport News* and nearly destroyed it. It was rebuilt and given a new name, the *Midland*, but suffered another fire in 1924. The waterways of the great harbor of Hampton Roads remain much the same today as they were in 1901, but the cities are now connected by a vast network of highways, bridges, and tunnels. Today a road trip to Washington D.C. might take only 3½ hours, but it wouldn't be nearly as fun as traveling on a steamboat with the Mountain Beauties Band.



Steamboat *Newport News*
Norfolk & Washington Steamboat Company
Source: [Wikipedia](#)

As might be expected, the Craver sisters' band soon began to break up as each sibling grew up and found a husband. The band may have continued playing in their hometown of Hendricks, but reports in national newspapers disappeared after the steamboat trip in 1901.

In September 1907 Mary Bertha Grayce Craver, misspelled Carver, married Edward Augustus Schoolfield of Baltimore. The announcement made note of her many sisters and her short career as a cornetist in the Mountain Beauties Band.

Schoolfield—Carver.
Miss Mary Bestha Grayce Carver, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Carver, of Hendricks, W. Va., and Mr. Edward Augustus Schoolfield, of Baltimore, were married yesterday at the home of the bride's parents. Mrs. Schoolfield is one of nine sisters, and was the leading cornetist of the Mountain Beauties Band, composed of the Carver Sisters, of Hendricks. Mr. and Mrs. Schoolfield will be at home after October 10 at 128 West Twenty-seventh street, this city.

Baltimore American
11 September 1907

I regularly use Ancestry.com as my primary resource for identification of the subjects in my photo collection. I usually do my own research to find records on people, and generally don't use the Family Trees that many descendants post on this awesome website. However in the case of Joseph Craver and his family there was actually only one useful census record with all his daughter's names. There was nothing for 1910 or later, and of course, finding a woman's name after marriage is always a very challenging hunt.

But fortunately a descendant of Joseph Craver's family posted a very detailed tree that proved very useful in confirming the family's surname and checking the sisters' individual names against the annotation on my photo of their band. It provided Joseph Craver date of death as 1 May 1919 at the age of 71. His wife's full name was Anise Sophia Glass Craver and she survived him until 1925. The family tree also listed the life dates for all nine daughters too.

What was especially interesting about this family was that Joseph and his wife gave each of their girls the first name Mary. I haven't found other records that confirm this, but this Craver family tree is otherwise very accurate so I have no reason to believe it is mistaken. I've not encountered this name convention before. Perhaps it is a tradition that came from Joseph's German parents as their homeland of Baden had largely a Catholic population in the 19th century and earlier. In any case it added another curious element for this a special photo.