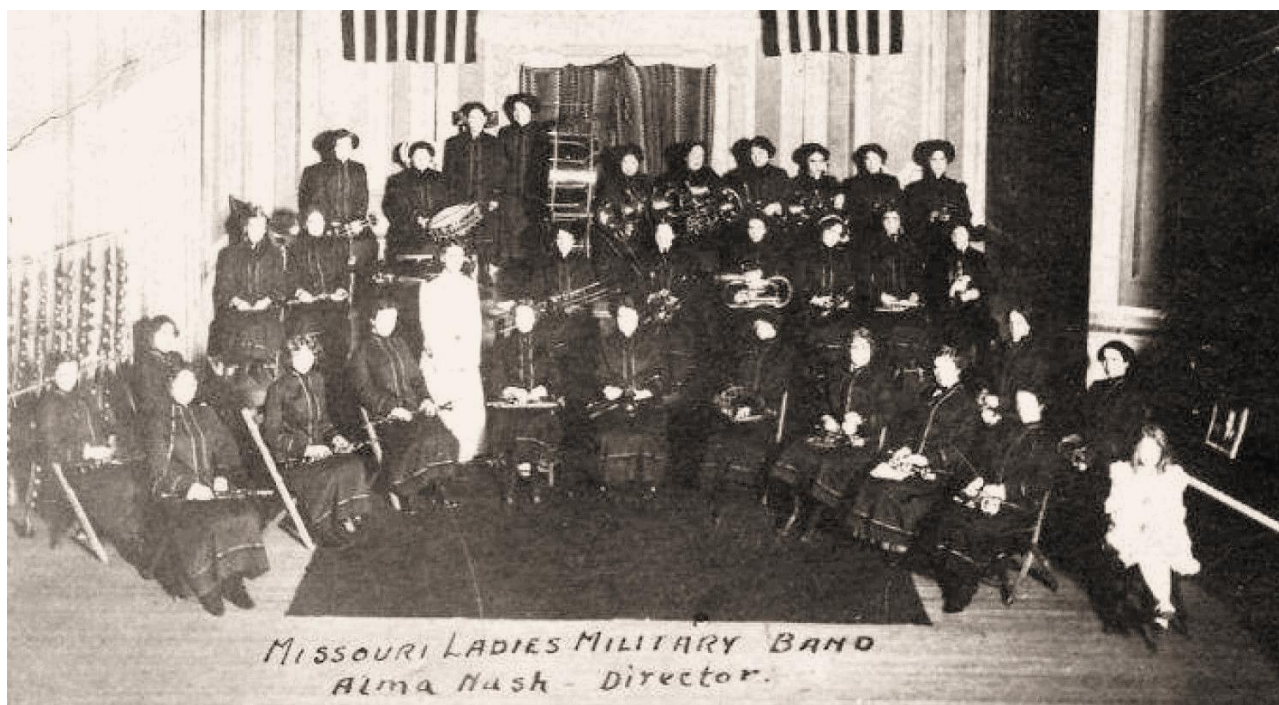


The Maryville Ladies' Military Band - a look under their bonnets

Gavin Holman, 8 April 2024

Maryville is a small city in north-west Missouri, the county seat of Nodaway County.

The Maryville Ladies Band, which was founded in September 1911 by Alma Mae Nash, came to national attention when it led a suffragists' march in Washington D.C. in March 1913, on the day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. That event, and the role played by Alma Nash and her band, are well documented elsewhere (see secondary references below), so I will not dwell too much on them. I do hope, however, to shed more light on the band itself and its activities outside the spotlight of fame. Too often, all we have is a photograph of a band. Occasionally we are able to put names to some or all of them and, even more rarely, find out a little bit more about the individuals who performed.



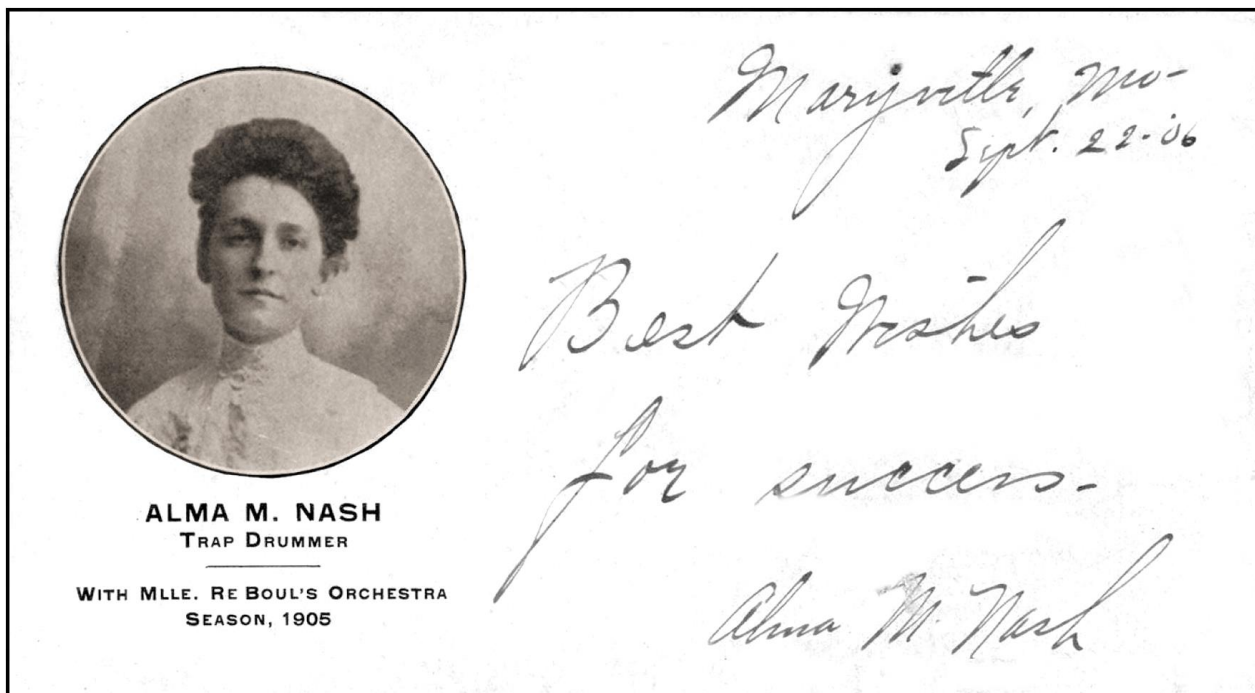
As is the case with many of my band history investigations, this started with finding a postcard showing the Missouri Ladies' Military Band (as they were known in 1913) together with a poem, "*Mary Villemo*" by George Lucas Burr. It is not unusual to see images of bands with associated pieces of text on postcards, but these are usually related advertising. It turns out that Burr penned this poem to celebrate his home city of Maryville, MO – using the name and location of the city and state to create the subject of his poem. It was set to music and published as a song by the Burr Music Company, Maryville. The foreword on the sheet music reads:

Mary Villemo is a coined word meaning, Maryville, Missouri, the only city in the United States, or the world, which bears the distinction of having a complete song of home wherein the name of the town and state are incorporated in its title. The author will present a gold medal which will bear the chorus of the song and facsimile of the famous singer who first sings the song in Maryville.¹

¹ Maryville Daily Forum, 8 July 1964

Did Burr produce the postcard to promote his poem, using the recent fame of the band to help? Or did the band commission the card and use Burr's poem to celebrate their hometown? I suspect we'll never know.

Alma Mae Nash, was born on 14 June 1883, in Maryville. Her father was George A. Nash, one of the leading surgeons in Missouri, and one of the founders and the surgeon of St. Joseph's hospital. Her mother was Mary Catherine (née Houston). Alma lived with her parents and adopted younger sister Elizabeth on Buchanan Street, Maryville. She studied stringed instruments at the Maryville Seminary and later studied in Denver. Before settling back down in Maryville, she played drums with well-known bands and orchestras in the East and Midwest, as well as playing five seasons at the Empire Theater in Maryville itself.



Alma set up her own studio on Buchanan Street, teaching music – the Maryville School for Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar. She soon became a musical entrepreneur in the town, forming a number of ensembles to perform at various events and concerts, including a mandolin club, a small orchestra, and the 'Lyric' quartet (Alma Nash, Bessie Scott, Laurence Shanks, and Orley Clark).

If idle hands must find something to do,
why not study
BANJO, MANDOLIN OR GUITAR
this summer? A few second-hand in-
struments for sale or rent.
ALMA M. NASH, Directress
MARYVILLE SCHOON BANJO, MANDOLIN, GUITAR

An advertisement from May 1910

In June 1910, Alma went to Kansas City to assist the Navassar Ladies' Band with their several days' engagements at Electric Park.² It is quite possible that being part of this popular and successful female band gave Alma the idea of establishing a similar group back home in Maryville.

Alma Nash spent the autumn and winter season at the Majestic Theater, Topeka, and also in Wichita, playing in their orchestras, leaving her studio in the capable hands of Laurence Shanks. She returned in spring 1911, re-energised to pick up her teaching reins again.

On 4 September 1911, Alma posted an advertisement in the *Maryville Daily Forum*:

WANTED—25 girls and young women musicians to join ladies' band. If you want to join, call at my studio, Wednesday, 2:00 p. m., Sept. 6. Alma M. Nash.

A few days later, on 7 September 1911, a second advertisement appeared:

WANTED—At once, five ladies to play basses, valve trombones and melophones in Ladies' Band. Address or call, Alma M. Nash, Maryville.

Ten days later, a benefit concert was held at the Fern Theater for the new band, which already had a full complement of instrumentalists.³ They were meeting each Friday evening to rehearse and expected to give their first concert no later than February. Some of the members had their own instruments and the remainder had been ordered from the Field-Lippman Piano Company in Maryville. These had arrived and were on display in their window.⁴

The original members of the band in September 1911 were:

Anna Laura Dougan [21] (Bb clarinet); Cornelia Terhune Hurst [15] (drums and traps); Dr Gertrude Duvall [38] (Bb clarinet); Edith Louella Davenport [17] (Bb clarinet); Elizabeth Ellen Doran [20] (mellophone); Elizabeth Nash [10] (cymbals); Esther May Eversole [19] (bass viol); Gertrude Beatrice Kirch [17] (Bb cornet); Gertrude Mason (Eb alto); Grace O'Brien (Eb alto); Hazel Garrett [15] (Bb cornet); Hazel Smith (Bb clarinet); Hazel Genevra Vandervoort (Bb cornet); Helen Rowley [13] (piccolo); Hilda Denny [9] (mellophone); Lola Ethel McElroy [24] (slide trombone); Lulu (Lou) Cunningham [22] (valve trombone); Luella Van Horn (Bb baritone); Mabel Mason [20] (Bb cornet); Margaret Anne Conway

² Maryville Daily Forum, 13 June 1910

³ Maryville Daily Forum, 18 September 1911

⁴ Maryville Daily Forum, 21 September 1911

[21] (Eb clarinet); Mary O'Brien [19] (Bb clarinet); Mary Q Evans (Bb cornet); Mary Ann Thomas [19] (Bb baritone); May Shipps [18] (slide trombone); Minnie Olive Reece [19] (Bb bass); Mrs Del Thompson (valve trombone); Mrs May Denny [26] (slide trombone); Myrtle Lanning [17] (Eb bass); Ora Grace Quinn [14] (Bb clarinet); Velma F. Lanning [14] (Bb bass); Velma Beulah Gray [17] (Eb bass); Verna I. Thomas [16] (drums and traps); and Virginia Lawson (Bb cornet).

More details about these ladies can be found in the appendix, below.

The following ladies answered Alma's call, and signed up, but did not subsequently appear in the band's first line-up. Katherine Kuchs; Clara Taylor; Cleo Masoner; Helen Burris; and Mrs Charles Gaugh.

The band's first public engagement was at the three-day educational meeting of the teachers in the county, held in Maryville on 2nd to 4th November 1911. The Maryville Ladies' Military Band gave a concert on the Thursday evening and the Saturday afternoon, with Alma Nash's orchestra giving a concert on the Friday evening.

On Tuesday 14th November, Alma Nash addressed the members of the Maryville Commercial Club, petitioning them for assistance in raising funds for the band. This they agreed to do, but they also received a similar request from Oliver Bovard on behalf of the Maryville Band, led by Professor Donald Cady (consisting of male players), which was also endorsed – the two bands being seen as positive influences and advertisements for the town.⁵

The next concert for the Ladies' Band was at the Clark Opera House in Bedford, Iowa, on Friday 2nd February 1912. A leap year party for the band was given by Alma Nash at her parents' house on St Valentine's Day, and this was followed by a concert in Maryville, on Friday 16th February. A newspaper report of this concert implied that this was the band's first public engagement – clearly not the case – but it was very appreciative of the ladies' performance:



Alma Nash

The big audience that heard the Ladies' band concert at the Empire theater last night are enthusiastic in praise and do not hesitate in giving the opinion that the band will prove an immensely popular musical organization. The concert was their initial appearance and the excellence of the program surprised many, as the band has only been organized about six months and the quality and rendition was such as might have been expected from a more practiced company. Several of the descriptive numbers were of unusual merit and were heartily applauded. The top-notch of the program was the closing number, a descriptive overture, "*A Day in the Cotton Fields*".⁶

⁵ Maryville Daily Forum, 15 November 1911

⁶ Maryville Tribune, 22 February 1912

Following this concert Alma Nash renamed the band – The Missouri Ladies’ Military Band. Later, during March 1912, it was reported that the band would begin to sell baked goods at their future concerts, to help raise funds for the band:

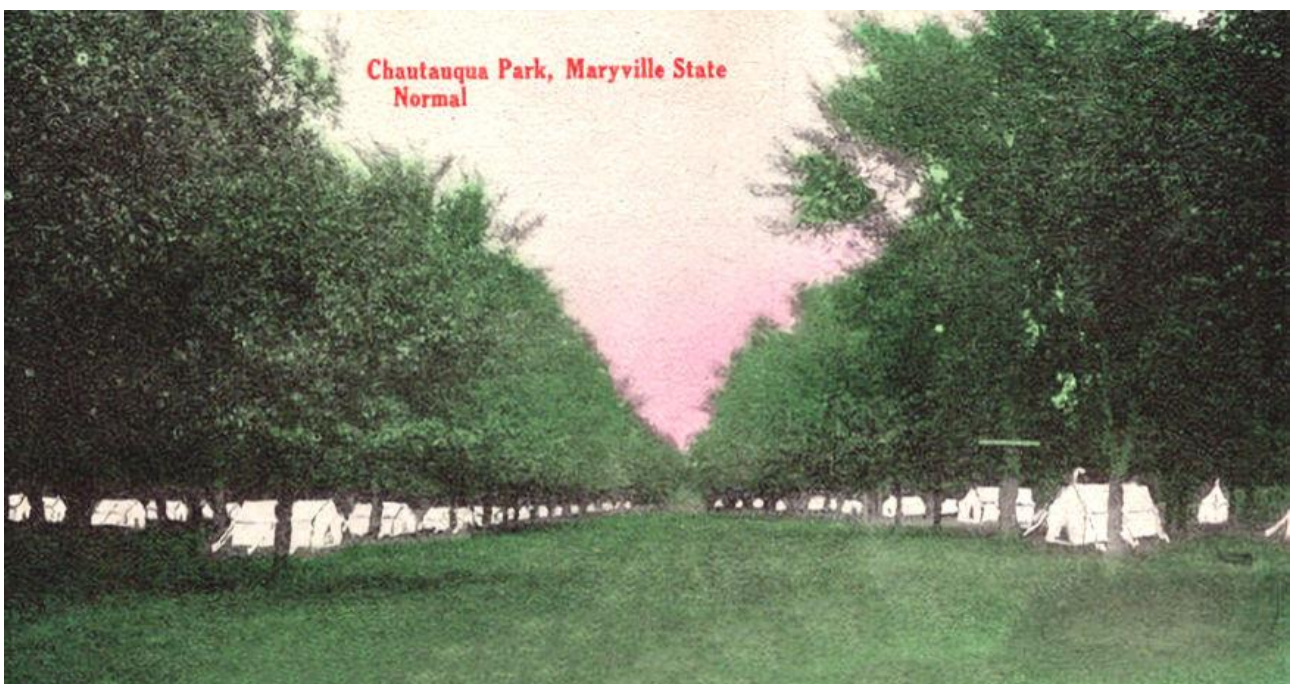
Miss Alma Nash and her Missouri Ladies' band have decided on a novel plan to raise the money to pay for their instruments and new uniform. It may not be known generally, but there isn't a girl in the band that cannot cook or bake a number of things to a queen's taste. So they have decided to hold a number of markets of all kinds of good things to eat, and will begin soon. When "the good old summer time" comes they are going to give a number of outdoor concerts And serve ice cream and cake at the close of the program. "Where there's a will there's a way," and it is safe to predict that the girls will meet with success.⁷

Another concert in Bedford, Iowa, took place on Saturday 20th April 1912.

Thursday 6th June 1912 saw the Ladies’ Band performing at the first Rural Community Life Conference of Northwest Missouri, which was led by Governor Herbert S. Hadley. Their first number, “*Q.S. Clareen*” by McCash, was especially well rendered.

Thursday 4th July 1912 saw Maryville en fête to celebrate the holiday, with competitions, games, food and good music – the Ladies’ Band played concerts throughout the day.

In August 1912 Maryville hosted a Chautauqua Assembly – a week-long educational, cultural and musical event, held in the Normal Park, Maryville. Among the various musical performances were several band concerts by the Maryville Concert Band and the Missouri Ladies’ Military Band.



Alma Nash received invitations for her Ladies’ Band to play in places in Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska. Sadly, she had to turn most of them down, as many of the girls in the band were teachers and could not leave their schools. It did perform at the picnic at Guilford, in later August, and then travelled to Ravenwood for that town’s picnic celebration, on Friday 30th

⁷ Weekly Democrat Forum & Maryville Tribune, 21 March 1912

August. Unfortunately, the person who was charged with welcoming the band overslept, causing a few problems:

When a bachelor's alarm clock failed to break into his dreams over at Ravenwood last Friday morning, the twenty members of the Ladies' band had to go into camp in a doctor's office, bunking in the operating chair, draping themselves over the instrument cases, and the overflow arranging itself artistically about on the floor. For the bachelor had been appointed a committee to meet the band at the 3:20 o'clock train with the key to the city in his hand and a full program of hospitality in the other. But when Ravenwood heard about the trick the alarm clock played the citizenry started in to make amends, and when the picnic - the band went to play for the picnic, you know - was over the town had a large balance to its credit. The young women were royally entertained, were given the hospitality of the homes of the city, ate at Mrs. Jeffries', played their music from the wrestler's mat - they had bunked in Jack Johnson's dressing tent at the Chautauqua here - and had had lots of other excitement. The Ladies'. the Harmony and the Ravenwood bands all played together at one time, over fifty pieces in the combination, and Miss Alma Nash, the Ladies' leader, and the leader of the Ravenwood band, took turns directing the combined Ravenwood and Ladies' bands at the last session Saturday night. And to cap it all, the citizens insisted in sending the members of the band all home in autos instead of by train as had been arranged. The band now is planning a minstrel for some time in October, and will go to St. Joseph next month to play in the concert.⁸

Maryville held an "Old Time Street Fair" from 16th to 21st September, with various acts and attractions, at which the Ladies' Band and the Mens' Concert Band both played daily.

The programme of the Missouri Ladies' Military Band for their concert at the Ravenwood Opera House on 2nd November 1912, was "Wedding March" from "The Rat Charmer of Hamelin", selection "A Trip to Japan", burlesque "The Arkansas Traveler", overture "Semiramide", bell solo "Let There Be Light", vocal solo, selection "Southern Memories", and quartette "The Sweetest Story Ever Told".

The Ladies' Band gave two concerts in January 1913 at the Empire Theater, Maryville, where there were also motion pictures played during the evening.



The Missouri Ladies' Military Band, March 1913

⁸ Maryville Tribune, 5 September 1912

Top row: Edith Davenport, Helene Young*, Mary Thomas, May Denny, Margaret Conway, Myrtle Lanning, May Shipps, Gertrude Kirch, Velma Lanning.
Middle row: Mary O'Brien, Anna Dougan, Ora Quinn, Helen Rowley, Lela Caudle*, Mrs Del Thompson, Hazel Vandervoort, Grace O'Brien, Mary Q. Evans,
Bottom row: Esther Eversole, Elizabeth Nash, Orlena Helpley*, Thelma Young*, Vernice Thomas.
[* new members of the band]

The next event for the Ladies' Band was the Washington Suffrage Parade, on 3rd March 1913. On hearing about the parade, Alma Nash wrote to offer the band's services. They were accepted, and subsequently travelled to Washington D.C. by train. The band performed on the train itself, and they made stops to give concerts and meet well-wishers. Because the snow in Missouri had limited them to indoor rehearsals, they scheduled a stop to practice marching outside at least one time. They arrived on the Monday morning, just hours before the parade started, and ending up leading the parade and gaining national attention.



The Missouri Ladies' Military Band, Washington D.C., 3rd March 1913

Saturday 19 April 1913 saw the Grand Baseball Carnival in St Joseph, with a large parade, floats, band contest and concerts. The bands involved were: Missouri Ladies Military Band (director Alma Mae), Whiteville Athletic Club Band (H.H. Cline), New Point Rube Band (Lum Patterson), King City Boys Band (Nevil Folk), Highland College Band (F.S. mentor), McNutt's Band, and the 4th Regiment Band. A band contest was held during the afternoon, but the results are unknown.

Sunday 8 June 1913 – the Ladies' Band travelled to Maitland to play at the Memorial Day exercises there.

Friday 4th July – the celebrations in Maryville were supported musically by the Missouri Ladies Military Band and the Maryville Concert Band.

The Nodaway Chautauqua, in Maryville from 9 to 17 August 1913, featured a number of concerts by Ewing's Zouave Band, the Maryville Concert Band, Roney's Boys' Concert Company, the Helen Sisters Concert Company, and the Missouri Ladies Military Band giving six concerts themselves during the week.



The Missouri Ladies' Military Band, Washington D.C., 3rd March 1913

The Ladies' Band performed at the Lafayette County Fair at Higginsville, on 19-22 August 1913.

Wednesday 10 September 1913 – the band visited Burlington Junction, giving a concert there, whilst en route to their engagement at the big fair at Clarinda, Iowa.

Saturday 4 July 1914 – the Ladies' Band performed at the Tarkio Independence Day celebrations, which included aeroplane flights and a moving picture show.

During 1914 the band struggled – possibly due to some of the ladies moving on with their lives, or financial pressures. In January 1915, local businessmen in Maryville were asked to help support the band with their financial situation. This does not appear to have been successful and the Missouri Ladies' Military Band faded from view.

Alma's father died in 1915 and she moved with her mother to Kansas City, where she continued to teach music. She died on December 22, 1965 and was buried in Maryville.



APPENDIX

The original members of the band in September 1911:

Anna Laura Dougan [21] (Bb clarinet)

- b. 18 Jan 1890, d. 3 Apr 1922. Daughter of John Dougan who came to the USA from County Donegal, Ireland, in 1867, and Mary Listen, a seamstress.

Cornelia Terhune Hurst [15] (drums and traps)

- b. 15 Aug 1896, d. 1973. Lived on South Main Street with her mother, Gertrude Duvall.

Dr Gertrude Duvall [38] (Bb clarinet)

- b. 4 Jan 1873 (Gertrude Johnson), d. 1968. First husband, Charles Hurst, died shortly before Cornelia's birth. She remarried Benjamin Duvall in 1904. She was an optician.

Edith Louella Davenport [17] (Bb clarinet)

- b. 15 Apr 1894, d. 28 Dec 1925. Lived on West 3rd Street with her widowed mother Belle and her three sisters and brother. Edith was a schoolteacher, and obviously a keen suffragist, judging by this undated photograph of her.

Elizabeth Ellen Doran [20] (mellophone)

- b. 23 Mar 1891, d. 29 Jun 1968. She lived with her parents on South Vine Street, and she was a general store saleslady.

Elizabeth Nash [10] (cymbals)

- b. c1901, Elizabeth was adopted by George and Mary Nash, and became Alma's sister.

Esther May Eversole [19] (bass voil)

- b. 6 Feb 1892, d. 31 Dec 1976. Her father, Jake, was a miner from Kansas, working away from home, and her mother had died in 1907.

Florence I. Shipps

- b. 1889. Lived in Polk with her parents (farmers)

Gertrude Beatrice Kirch [17] (Bb cornet)

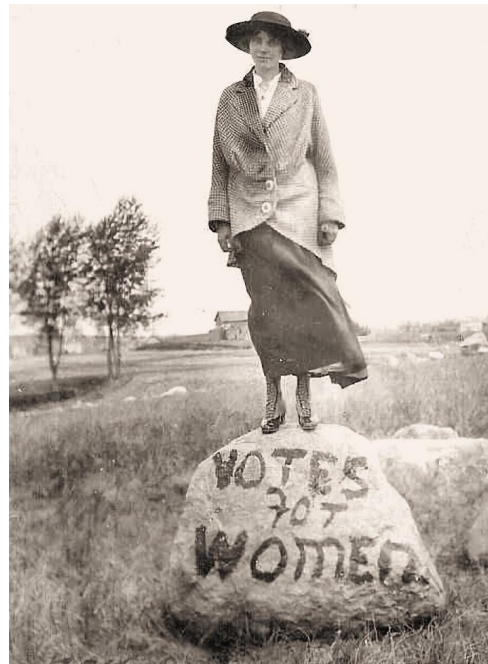
- b. 30 Sep 1893, d. 10 Sep 1969. She lived with her parents on East Thompson Street, and was a seamstress in a factory.

Gertrude Mason (Eb alto)

- b. May 1893, d. 1969. She lived with her parents and sister Mabel on East 4th Street.

Grace O'Brien (Eb alto)

- b. 1895, d. 1975. Lived with her parents and sister Mary on Buchanan Street. Her father, Matthew was a railroad contractor.



Edith Davenport



Elizabeth Doran

Hazel Garrett [15] (Bb cornet)

- b. 9 Aug 1896, d. 27 May 1950. She lived with her parents (father a barber) and siblings on South Market Street.

Hazel Smith (Bb clarinet)

- No details found.

Hazel Genevra Vandervoort (Bb cornet)

- b. 11 Feb 1896, d. 4 Aug 1980. She lived with her parents (a theatre manager and a dressmaker) on West 3rd Street.

Helen Rowley [13] (piccolo)

- b. 21 Nov 1897, d. 1974. She lived with her parents Bert (a lumber merchant) and Lucille on East 4th Street.

Helena Anna Young

- b. 12 Feb 1893, d. 7 Apr 1951. Lived on North Main Street with her family in 1910, father Charles was a building contractor.

Hilda Denny [9] (mellophone)

- b. 10 Dec 1902, d. 9 Sep 1949. She lived on East 1st Street with her mother Maye (a racket store saleslady)

Lela Mabel Caudle

- b. 17 May 1891, d. 27 Dec 1968. Lela was a teacher and lived with her parents and brother on their farm in the South Park township.

Lola Ethel McElroy [24] (slide trombone)

- b. 4 Aug 1887, d. Feb 1972. She was a clerk in a department store and lived with her parents John and Lizzie (farmers in Lincoln Township).

Lulu (Lou) Cunningham [22] (valve trombone)

- b. Jan 1889. Lived with her parents, Abe and Anne on Mulberry Street.

Luella Van Horn (Bb baritone)

- No details found.

Mabel Mason [20] (Bb cornet)

- b. 19 Sep 1890, d. 23 June 1962. She lived with her parents and sister Gertrude on East 4th Street.

Margaret Anne Conway [21] (Eb clarinet)

- b. 16 Jan 1890, d. 12 Jul 1947. Margaret was a stenographer, boarding on Mulberry Street.

Mary O'Brien [19] (Bb clarinet)

- b. Jan 1892. Lived with her parents and sister Grace on Buchanan Street. Her father, Matthew was a railroad contractor.

Mary Q Evans (Bb cornet)

- No details found.

Mary Ann Thomas [19] (Bb baritone)

- b. 14 Apr 1892, d. 11 Jun 1935. Lived with her parents, Roland and Alice (farmers), and sister Verna, on East Halsey Street.

May Shipps [18] (slide trombone)

- b. 29 May 1893 (Vera Maye Shipps), d. 12 Nov 1989. Lived in Polk with her parents (farmers)

Minnie Olive Reece [19] (Bb bass)

- b. 7 Dec 1893, d. 1 Aug 1982. Lived with her family on a farm in Lincoln Township.

Mrs Del Thompson (valve trombone)

- No details found.

Mrs May Denny [26] (slide trombone)



Mary Ann Thomas

- b. 12 Apr 1885, d. 17 Apr 1941. She lived on East 1st Street with her daughter Hilda. May(e) was a racket store saleslady.

Myrtle Lanning [17] (Eb bass)

- b. 23 Sep 1894, d. 1 Aug 1988. She lived with her parents, and sister Velma, on their farm in Polk.

Ora Grace Quinn [14] (Bb clarinet)

- b. 1897, d. 24 Sep 1978. Lived with her widowed mother, Flora, and brother on Fillmore Street

Orlena A. Helpley

- b. 20 Aug 1892, d. 2 Jul 1983. Orlena was a saleslady in a millinery store, and lived with her family – father William, a brick mason, mother and eight sibling in the Park township.

Thelma (Selma) Young

- b. Jan 1896. Lived on North Main Street with her family in 1910, father Charles was a building contractor.

Velma F. Lanning [14] (Bb bass)

- b. 12 Dec 1896, d. 30 May 1995. She lived with her parents, and sister Myrtle, on their farm in Polk.

Velma Beulah Gray [17] (Eb bass)

- b. Sep 1894, d. Sep 1979. She lived with her parents, William (a machinery commercial traveller) and Florence, on East Jenkins Street.

Verna I. Thomas [16] (drums and traps)

- b. 12 May 1895, d. 1 Mar 1981. Lived with her parents, Roland and Alice (farmers), and sister Mary, on East Halsey Street.

Virginia Lawson (Bb cornet)

- b. 7 Jun 1899, d. 8 Jul 1981. She lived with her widowed mother, Stella, a dressmaker, on North Buchanan Street.

The following ladies answered Alma's call, and signed up, but did not subsequently appear in the band's first line-up. Katherine Kuchs; Clara Taylor; Cleo Masoner; Helen Burris; and Mrs Charles Gaugh.

Mary Villemo

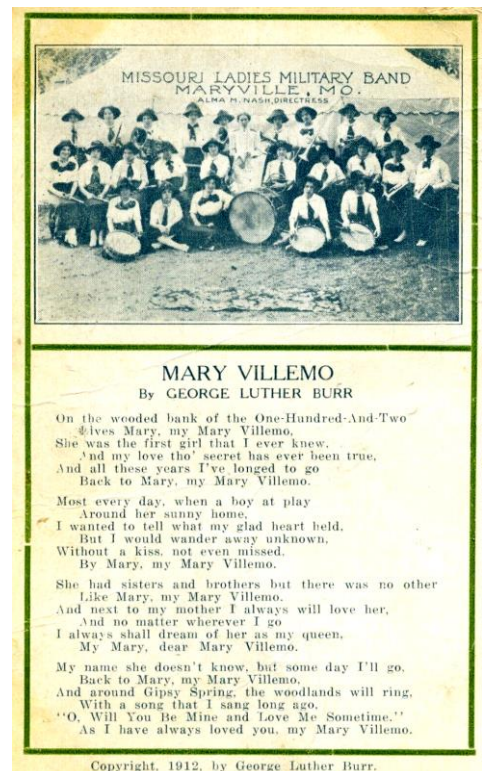
by George Luther Burr, 1912

On the wooded bank of the One-Hundred-And-Two
Lives Mary, my Mary Villemo,
She was the first girl that I ever knew,
And my love tho' secret has ever been true,
And all these years I've longed to go
Back to Mary, my Mary Villemo.

Most every day, when a boy at play
Around her sunny home,
I wanted to tell what my glad heart held,
But I would wander away unknown,
Without a kiss, not even missed,
By Mary, my Mary Villemo.

She had sisters and brothers but there was no other
Like Mary, my Mary Villemo,
And next to my mother I always will love her,
And no matter wherever I go
I always shall dream of her as my queen,
My Mary, dear Mary Villemo.

My name she doesn't know, but some day I'll go,
Back to Mary, my Mary Villemo,
And around Gipsy Spring, the woodlands will ring,
With a song that I sang long ago.
"O, Will You Be Mine and Love Me Sometime."
As I have always loved you, my Mary Villemo.



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Note: "looking under the bonnet" is a British motoring term meaning to lift the bonnet (hood) and examine the engine of a vehicle.

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