



Kansas State University Libraries
New Prairie Press

Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

2011 – Freedom's Frontier in the Flint Hills
(Laurie J. Hamilton, Editor)

The First Kansas Band

Edward Bumgardner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sfh>

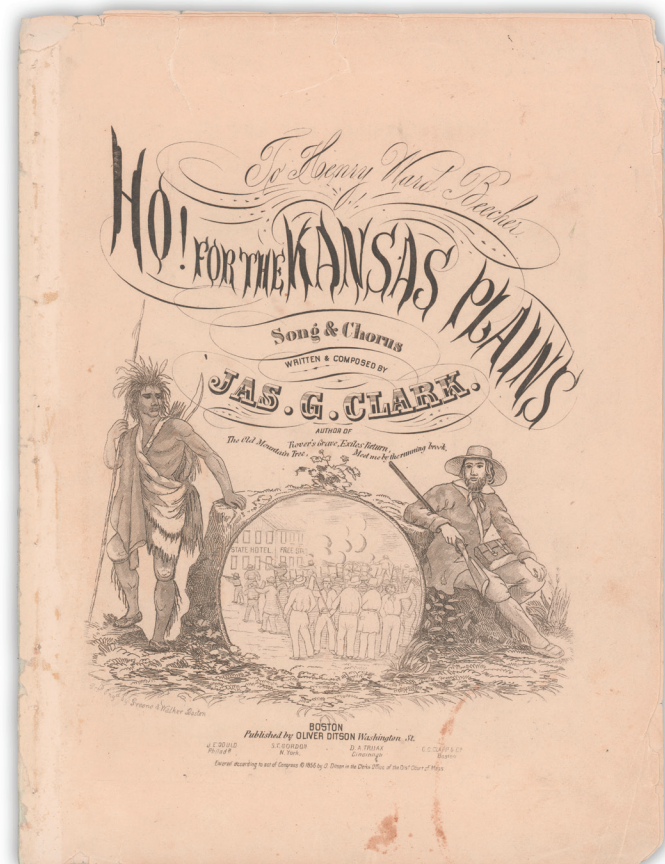
Recommended Citation

Bumgardner, Edward (2011). "The First Kansas Band," *Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*.
<https://newprairiepress.org/sfh/2011/arts/1>

To order hard copies of the Field Journals, go to shop.symphonyintheflinthills.org.

The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.



Kansas State Historical Society

The First Kansas Band

In the early records of the Kansas Academy of Science, the name of Joseph Savage occurs frequently. He was the pioneer explorer in the fertile field of Kansas paleontology. As a boy, he lived at Hartford, Vermont, where he was a member of the village brass band. On Sunday, August 26, 1854, he suddenly decided to emigrate to Kansas.



One party of New Englanders had already availed themselves of the reduced rates secured by the Emigrant Aid company and had reached the site of Lawrence. Another party was to leave Boston on the 29th of the month.

Mr. Savage made his way to Boston, arriving there on Tuesday. When he went to the station the next day to join the party bound for Kansas, he was surprised to find his brother, Forrest Savage, and two cousins named Hazen,

who were also members of the Hartford band. At the last moment, they too had decided to go to Kansas. They were carrying in their hands their four musical instruments — “one E♭ copper key bugle, one brass post horn in B♭, one B♭ cornet, and one B♭ baritone.”

There was considerable excitement at the station. A large crowd was on hand to bid the emigrants farewell. Whittier had written a poem especially for the occasion. This had been printed on

cards and distributed among the people in the crowd. Someone discovered that the meter of the poem corresponded to “Auld Lang Syne.” The four Vermont boys took up that tune with their horns, and as the train pulled out, the voices of the Kansas emigrants and of the people remaining at the depot, led by the four instruments, were united in singing:

*We cross the prairies as of old
The Pilgrims crossed the sea,
To make the West as they the East,
The homestead of the free.*

The route of that second party of New Englanders bound for Lawrence was a little different from what it would be today. They went from Boston to Buffalo by rail; from there to Detroit on a lake steamboat; from Detroit to Chicago by rail; to the Mississippi River over the Chicago and Alton Railroad, which had just been completed; down the river to St. Louis, on a Mississippi steamer; and up the Missouri by boat to Westport Landing.

At different points along the way

through the North, people assembled to see the “abolitionists,” and were entertained by the playing and singing of the Kansas hymn. The song had become immensely popular as soon as it was published. No sooner had the party boarded the boat at St. Louis, however, than profane threats against the Yankees warned them that the song of freedom must be taboo on the long journey up the Missouri River. But when the little band relieved the monotony by such selections as “Annie Laurie” and “Oft in the Stilly Night,” there was no interruption.

At Kansas City, wagons and equipment were bought, and the emigrants started on the last lap of their journey to Lawrence. Walking beside their loaded wagons, the four Vermont boys led the procession across the Kansas line playing patriotic airs. As they passed Shawnee Mission, they took up again the song that was not welcome in Missouri.

After arriving at Lawrence, they became the nucleus of the first musical organization in Kansas. Often that fall,

the settlers would assemble on pleasant evenings to listen to national airs played by the little band, and to sing hymns and Sunday school songs to the accompaniment.

Gradually new members were added to the band. O. Wilmarth soon came out from Rhode Island with a clarinet, and Mrs. Harlow from Vermont with a melodeon. Thus reinforced, they furnished music for the first Fourth of July celebration in Lawrence in 1855. This celebration was held in a grove a mile northwest of the town. It was the first festive occasion after the settlements in Kansas were started. By primitive modes of travel, including a train of wagons from “Kennedy Valley” drawn by eleven yoke of oxen, settlers came from every direction until the greatest crowd of white people thus far seen in the territory had assembled.

The Delaware and Shawnee Indians had been invited and many of them were present. They appreciated the antislavery attitude of the New Englanders. After

“We are glad that our white brothers do not come to us with the trumpets of war, but with the sweet flutes of peace and civilization.”

he had heard “Home, Sweet Home,” “Yankee Doodle,” and “Hail Columbia,” Pechowkee, a dignified old Delaware chief, made a speech of welcome in which he said, “We are glad that our white brothers do not come to us with the trumpets of war, but with the sweet flutes of peace and civilization. The Indian, too, loves liberty; the tree of liberty has been watered by many an Indian with his blood.”

It was but a few months afterward that the owners of the cornet and the clarinet were called upon to play the Portuguese hymn or “dead march” for the funerals of Thomas Barber, Captain Shombre, and other martyrs of the Free-state cause.

By the spring of 1856, the pioneer band was fairly well organized. Samuel, Edward, and Fred Kimball, three brothers from New Hampshire, became interested and proved to be good musicians. Samuel Newhall came out from Boston, John Ross beat the bass drum, Abram Wilder the tenor drum, and they were led by Leonard Worcester. Often during the troubles of 1856, they were called upon by Gen. James Lane to provide martial music to stimulate enlistment in the volunteer militia for the protection of the town.

The band grew in numbers and prospered until 1863. In March of that year, the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Church was held in Lawrence. In honor of the event, the Methodist Sunday School arranged for a concert in which the band took a prominent part.

About this time, a movement was started to secure new instruments for the band. Gov. Charles Robinson headed a subscription list to raise the

necessary funds, and the band gave a series of open-air concerts to encourage contributions. At last, their hopes were realized! A set of fine new silver instruments was received from Hall of Boston. As soon as they had been tested, the members of the band were anxious to appear in a public recital with their new equipment. It was a good band.

On September 15, 1879, the remaining members of the band assembled and played for the last time.

Patient drill had made the members proficient and they were able to render harmonious music under the direction of their new leader, Mr. McCoy, from Ohio. Proudly they assembled in the evening of August 20, 1863, and gave a concert from a platform that had been erected on the spot where the great Shunganunga boulder now stands.

Several times that evening, they were

called upon to respond to encores. It was high tide for the old band. Little did the players or listeners dream of impending disaster. The next day Lawrence was destroyed by Quantrill. Fred Kimball, E. P. Fitch, and another member of the band were instantly killed, and their director was so injured that he died soon afterward. For more than a year, the survivors had but little time or heart for music. But at the time of the Price raid in October, 1864, they went to the front as a militia band and served on the border for two weeks.

Another noteworthy service was performed in June 1867, when the old band had the honor of assisting in the first commencement exercises of the University of Kansas.

On September 15, 1879, the remaining members of the band assembled and played for the last time. It was the 25th anniversary of the arrival at Lawrence of that New England party which left Boston in 1854 singing Whittier's "Kansas Emigrants," and they had been called together to furnish

music for the old settlers' meeting at Bismarck Grove. Samuel Kimball still lived in Lawrence. Samuel Newhall came from Ouray, Colorado, where he was interested in mining. Leonard Worcester came from Greensburg, Indiana, where he was a dealer in musical instruments and leader of a band. Forrest and Joseph Savage came in from their farms near Lawrence.

The last survivor of the band was Forrest Savage. He died at his home in Lawrence August 17, 1915.

Dr. Edward Bumgardner was born in Indiana and moved to Holton, Kansas, when he was eighteen, where he farmed on the family land, attended high school, and began teaching. He graduated from Campbell University and Iowa State University before moving to Lawrence where he practiced dentistry for 55 years. He served in leadership positions with many medical organizations, and was active in the Douglas County Historical Society, when he died in Lawrence, in 1953.

Reprinted with permission of the Kansas Historical Society.
First published in the Kansas Historical Quarterly (August 1936)