



DAWSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

BANNER

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A Fresh Look at Our History

JANUARY 2022



The Hamilton Cadets 1896

Back Row: Venia Warrington, Dora (Zimmerer) Krier, Cornelia (Krier) Jacobson, Laura Squier, Kate Walker, Clara Bradley, Wm H Hamilton

Second Row: Edna (Smith) Volk, Etta (Baird) Root, Cora (Hiser) Bancroft, Laura (Smith) Wiese, Tena Gunn, Ida Little

Bottom Row: Flo (Cole) O'Harra, Flossie (Hyde) White, Drummer Girl – Ella (Cole) Kohler, Zelpha (Squier) Wallace, Truly (Fink) Davis

Other Lexington Hamilton Cadets named but not with this season's unit: Eva Banks, Jennie Hanna, Rose Fagot, Lulu Holliday, Bertha Kirkpatrick, Maud Willis, Grace Fry, Roxie Kennedy, Cecelia Ashley, Dell Little

The museum would love to find first-hand accounts from the girl cadets. If you have family histories/diaries that include any of these young women, please send us a copy of their stories. Thank You!!

The Hamilton Cadets - Crystal Werger

A couple months ago a reporter from the *North Platte Telegraph* contacted the museum to find information about the Hamilton Cadets. At first, I didn't know what he was talking about. I'd never heard of such a thing. But as he told me about the story he was beginning to uncover I became very interested. In the back of my mind I knew I had seen something like he was describing.

History is often like connecting the dots – especially when you work at a museum. Over the years I've worked here, I've been through most of our collection. A large part of it still means absolutely nothing to me because I haven't connected the dots yet, but as with Hamilton and his Cadets I know that someday it will. And when that happens, it is such an amazing sensation!

After I got off the phone with Todd Von Kampen, he emailed what information he had compiled on the Hamilton Cadets. As I often do, I began to think out loud and whoever is around has to play the game with me. That day it was volunteer Chris Johnson. I asked her if the name sounded familiar to her. Since she grew up in Miller and has lived in this area most of her life, she's a good one to ask. She gave me the look I would have given Todd if he had been sitting in front of me rather than on the phone. But she did say I should look in our photo files because I might find a picture of the Cadets. So I looked...and guess what...I found a photograph of uniformed young women surrounding a middle-aged man sitting with his arms crossed. The envelope label just said *Girls' Drill Team*. Hoping I had something, I turned the photo over. On the back it listed the name of each girl, and the man was William H. Hamilton! I knew I had looked at that photograph before but having only the words "Drill Team" on the file didn't mean much to me when I had first seen it. Now, it was so much more significant because I knew a story behind it!

William Henderson Hamilton was born in Ireland in 1849 and immigrated to the United States in 1872. He had several different retail businesses in Plum Creek and Overton. He served on the Dawson County Fair Board and as Lexington's first Fire Chief in 1893. In 1890 Hamilton became the Sheriff of Dawson County serving until 1894. That year he organized a girls' drill team from the High School. The group consisted of 16 young women and a drummer girl. Mr. Von Kampen's research spoke very highly of the Hamilton Cadets. And I have to admit, it really surprised me!



These were teenage girls conducting military drills. Cadet Drill Teams were for boys. It was an era when there was a strong movement promoting physical education in all young people. There were other types of synchronized drill teams for girls – using flags, scarves, flowers, even Japanese lanterns. Hamilton started these girls with a Scarf Drill and progressed straight into marching and military maneuvers. He also worked with a boys' unit, but it wasn't as popular and lasted only one season.

I am amazed the girls were received as fondly as they were, but according to the *Lexington Clipper-Citizen* on December 22, 1894: "It is no idle boast to say that not another sixteen young ladies in the state can be produced that can equal them in maneuvers or marches." This came after one of their first public appearances. The local Sons of Veterans Camp held a fundraiser where the young ladies' drill corps performed twice. Their first routine was an afternoon exhibition drill on the streets downtown. After this event, the group officially became known as the Hamilton Cadets.

The Cadets became a hometown favorite of the veterans and auxiliary groups. They appeared at local events for the S. of V., Woman's Relief Corps, and the Grand Army of the Republic. After an event in February of 1895, *Dawson County Pioneer* stated, "These young ladies are very proficient and execute fifty-six movements, one after the other, without a word of command. Mr. Hamilton is deserving of great credit for the manner in which he has trained his pupils."

They were scheduled to perform for the 1895 Memorial Day celebration. Promotion for the event promised that during one of their drills, the Hamilton Cadets would spell out "Memorial Day." However, after 5" of rain that week, outdoor events were postponed due to muddy streets. Instead, they performed at the 4th of July Celebration. Reports of that event describe the Hamilton Cadets along with the Lexington Drill Corps on the streets downtown executing marching movements. Hamilton said that between the two groups they went through 300 movements without a spoken command. The young women and men captivated the crowd for nearly an hour followed by prolonged applause.

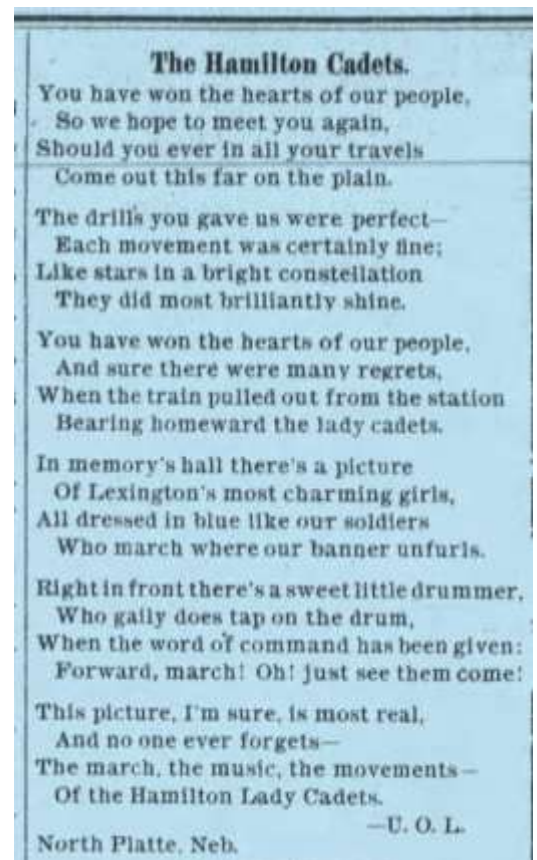
The Hamilton Cadets were then invited to events outside of Dawson County. In August of 1895 they performed several times a day at the G.A.R. Reunion Encampment in Hastings. On the way home they detoured through Grand Island to give an exhibition drill for the old veterans at the Soldier's Home. "The young ladies acquitted themselves nobly in the many and difficult evolutions performed, and evinced a knowledge of marching and countermarching which can only be acquired after long, tedious teaching, and Capt. Hamilton deserves much praise. . . ."

They were invited back in 1896 for the next Encampment, this time in Lincoln. (And yes, they did stay in 3 tents on the grounds.) Reporters from this event tell us more about their drills: over 200 tactical marching and fancy movements, including wheels, crosses and circles, spelling any name by "the Spencerian system in evolutions", and doing it "splendidly."

After a weekend at home, they boarded the train to Omaha to perform at the State Fair doing multiple drills over several days. On September 3, the *Omaha Daily Bee* describes the Tuesday night parade as magical under new electric lights. "Small in numbers but great in attraction, the Hamilton Cadets of Lexington captured the hearts of the multitudes. Each was arrayed in a pure white costume, much on the lines of a yachting rig, consisting of a trim blouse, a shortened skirt, leggings, and yachting cap. The pretty faces and trim figures, garbed in the attractive uniform, conspired to form a most attractive picture under the soft light of the electric globes. All along the line the cadets executed many pretty and devious marches and maneuvers with all the skill of veterans."

In October the Cadets appeared during two days in North Platte at the first Nebraska Irrigation Fair. This was the Hamilton Cadets' last major performance. The North Platte Juvenile Orchestra hosted a reception and dance in honor of the drill team. A week later this poem written by someone in North Platte was published in the *Dawson County Pioneer*.

Although the Hamilton Cadets lasted only a few years in Lexington, we now have their story here at the museum. William H. Hamilton purchased the Burke & Company Flour & Feed Store in North Platte, relocated, and started a new group of lady cadets there. In 1898 the North Platte Hamilton Cadets appeared at Omaha's Trans-Mississippi Exposition. Researching this story led our volunteer Chris to explore the story of the Exposition and she was amazed with what she found. That's the way it works. History holds so many secrets and mysteries just waiting for us to find. I think it is fun to find something I didn't know before, and I don't mind if it makes me dig a bit to find something more. Connecting the dots. That's what makes history so interesting. That's what makes my job so fascinating. I just never know what I'm going to find next!



DECADES



**1860 – Medicinal Plants – Town & Country Garden Club
Plum Creek & Pawnee Scouts – Museum Staff**

1870 – Family Pickering – Don & Barb Batie

1880 – Edison’s Invention of Electric Light – Dawson Public Power

1890 – Lexington in the Gay 90s – Museum Staff

1900 – 1904 St Louis World’s Fair – Corky Anderson

1910 – 1913 Bonneville Chapter of DAR – Daughters of the American Revolution

**1920 – Overton in the 1920s – Cindy Hasty & Lori Hinson, Overton History Book Project
Roaring 20s – Museum Staff**

**1930 – 1930s Era Fabrics – Plum Creek Quilt Guild
Building Toys introduced in 1930s – Museum Staff**

**1940 – WWII Homefront – Museum Staff
Ralphie’s 1940s Christmas – Museum Staff**

**1950 – My Grandparents’ Vintage Silver Tree w Original Color Wheel – Sarah Neben
Stained Glass Cookies & Popcorn – Recipe Club
As We Remember It – Club 57 – Rhonda Folken & Deb Tuepker
50s Chevy Shop – Heartland Chevrolet**

**1960 – Peace, Love & Rock & Roll – Morton School
Cars & Stars – Golden Rod Car Club
Flower Power – City of Lexington
My Mom’s Vintage Tree, Color Wheel & Handmade Ornaments – Barb Hodge
1960s TV Christmas Specials - Museum Staff
Vintage Bottle Brush Tree & Ornaments – Museum Staff**

**1970 – Disco Inspired Tree – Lexington Regional Health Center
70 Hair Care – Museum Staff
Disco Balls, Roller Skates and Puka Shells – Museum Staff**

**1980 – Vintage Hanson Family Ornaments – Darren Hanson & Clarissa Araujo
Stars – Five Star Flooring
Ribbons & Rubiks – Museum Staff**

**1990 - FRIENDS Fiber Optic Tree – Home Federal
Toys & Dolls of the 1990s – Lexington Children’s Museum**

of CHRISTMAS TREES

December was a crazy busy month at the Dawson County History Museum, but it is definitely one that will go down in our history books. We exhibited 36 Christmas trees this year. 20 trees were decorated by groups and individuals from the community and the other 16 were decorated by DCHS staff and volunteers. In order to properly show off our Christmas displays we invited the public to take a tree lit stroll through our museum with the lights turned low during the evening hours the week before Christmas. The beauty of the Christmas trees at night is absolutely stunning! This year the City of Lexington expanded on our evenings of beauty by hosting a Trail of Lights in Memorial Park next door to the Dawson County Museum. The Community was able to enjoy both indoor and outdoor Christmas exhibits this year. Judging by the number of visitors we received that week I think people were quite impressed!

Kids are Timeless

Our KIDS Exhibit is still in the Art Gallery. We added a tree with photos of kids from different decades. Since they are all printed in black and white, sometimes it's difficult to tell what time period they are from. We did put a first name on each photo. Stop in and see if you can guess who they are. Each child has a connection to the museum.

Since we are now simultaneously working on three Main Street and House exhibits, this one will still be here for a while. If you haven't been in to see it at all yet, don't miss it!



COFFEE and a Chat 10:00_{am} till NOON
First Wednesday of each month

Hosted by Dawson County History Museum

JIGSAW PUZZLE

GROUP COMPETITION

Saturday February 12th 1-4 pm

Groups of 2 or 3 Persons

Pre-Register with CCC Lexington \$15 per Person

For more information or to register, contact Sindy Fiene at 308-324-8480, toll-free in Nebraska at 1-877-222-0780 or by email at sindyfiene@cccneb.edu.

Dawson County Historical Society invites the public to our

ANNUAL MEETING and PROGRAM

MORE THAN A REFERENCE

Gothenburg Author Mark Peyton speaks on the human side of science. Come hear stories describing how everyday events & circumstances inspired innovation and how personality affected curiosity and experimentation.



2:00 SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27TH

Following the program there will be a short informative DCHS meeting.

