

Kinsman Family Band and Concert Troupe

(As told by Mrs. A.B. Kinney, a daughter of Saul Kinsman)

“The Kinsman family emigrated from New York to Michigan in the old proverbial covered wagon, reaching Detroit as their destination in about the year 1828 or '30, when Detroit was just a little country town.

My father, Saul Kinsman, at that time considered himself old enough to assert a certain amount of independence and he asked his father if he might have a violin. My grandfather was a staunch Methodist to whom a violin was an abomination. But the boy pleaded and xxxxxxxx xxxxxx the violin, and like all boys and like all parents, they gave in and he became the possessor of that instrument. At that time there was a professor of that instrument living in Detroit. He was a fine violinist and gave lessons. My father took advantage of this opportunity and took lessons as long as they lived in Detroit. After a while he took more lessons in Ann Arbor and got so he could play for dances around Ann Arbor. He used to take his violin and walk from Ann Arbor to Eaton Rapids, playing along the way for his expenses. He used to tell a story of an adventure, just to amuse us children. He was going through the woods one night when on his way to Eaton Rapids with his violin under his arm and his head down. He ran into an Indian and he was very much frightened. But the Indian, in his smooth soft voice, said to him, “Me no scare boy. Me whistle ‘till boy get out of woods.” Father said he wasn’t very long in getting out.

At the age of nineteen my father married Mary Ann VanVoorheis, and moved to Milford to the old farm that was previously taken up from the government by my grandfather. Seven children were born to them. When the oldest son became of age he enlisted in the Civil War as a band instructor and stayed in the army until the close of the war.

The other six children, with three sons-in-law, my father organized into a family brass band and concert troupe, xxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx and played the cornet. Father played the clarinet. My two sisters played tenor horns, one brother played the bass horn, one son-in-law the E-flat alto, another horn, another a trombone. My youngest brother played the snare drum and your humble servant brought up the rear with a big bass drum and the cymbals. We were the first ladies in Michigan to play in an organization of band instruments. We toured Michigan, Indiana and Indiana with considerable success, as we met with enthusiasm wherever we went and were invited to return at some future time.

About the old violin that figured so conspicuously in our musical family—it was made in Alexandria, New York, by an Italian violin maker. It became the property of my grandfather and finally fell into the hands of my father, who was a young boy at that time. It is now the property of J. R. Gardner of Fowlerville, one of the sons-in-law who played in the band.

The great-grandson, Romine Hamilton is very fond of his great-grandfather’s old instrument and never passes it without picking it up and strumming a few notes to test its merits and he will some time be its owner. As for my father, in his declining years when he lost all interest in everything else, he never forgot his old violin. He passed away in 1901 at the age of 78 years.