

Dad Was In A Band!



In the forty-four years that I knew him, my father never mentioned that he had played a musical instrument or sang in a choir at any time during his lifetime. Imagine my surprise to learn otherwise while on a multi-state genealogical research expedition!

Ralph Fred Barton (1903-1987) (pictured on the left holding the mellophone) was born on November 22, 1903, on the family farm in Hume, Bates Co., Missouri^{1,2}. His father, Fred Barton, was a graduate of Illinois State Normal University³, had been a teacher at the Huffman School in Marshall County, Illinois⁴, and the principal of Odell High School, Odell, Livingston Co., Illinois⁵. Fred Barton and Nancy Anna “Anna” (Huffman) Barton, had moved some 500 miles from Saratoga Twp., Marshall Co., Illinois, to Hume in 1903, and purchased 80 acres of rich, rolling farmland⁶. Little Ralph joined the family consisting of mother, father, and ten year-old half-brother Isaac Truman Barton and thirteen year-old half-sister Stella Joy Barton (the children of Fred and his first wife Sarah Louise Creadle Rogers who died in 1898)⁷. Like his own father, Fred was a successful farmer accumulating enough capital to finance another change of careers. In 1909 he purchased a half-interest in the Dickinson Store in Hume⁸. Fred sold his interest in the store in the spring of 1910, sold his farmstead in Hume in June of the same year⁹ and moved fourteen miles north to Amoret, Bates County, Missouri, in October of 1910 where he established Bartons Cash Store, a general mercantile shop. Bartons Cash Store is pictured below with (probably) the entire population of Amoret posed in front.

Tragedy struck the family on January 6, 1911, when gasoline stored in the lighting plant within the store exploded, instantly killing Isaac and one other worker and burning Fred and Anna. The force of the explosion snuffed out lingering flames as the building was saved¹⁰. Fred sold the business in 1915 and moved the family fifty miles across the border to the rural township of Colony, Anderson County, Kansas, where he purchased 154 acres for \$12,000 and resumed farming¹¹. It's there that thirteen year-old Ralph entered Colony High School in 1916 and started his high school education. Did he play an instrument or sing in a choir then? We don't know for sure. However it's possible since he had been raised by a piano-teacher mother who enjoyed playing the piano and organ throughout her lifetime (Anna was mentioned in the newsletter of her convalescent home while in her late eighties as “playing a pump organ even though sightless in one eye and partially sighted in the other”)¹².



A hard earthquake struck Colony in early 1919 resulting in the condemnation and demolition of Colony High School. Would Ralph continue his education? Where and how? It's a measure of the importance that Fred and Anna accorded to continuing Ralph's education, as well as his own maturity and brightness, that Ralph was sent some 120 miles away to the nearest large city, Carthage, Missouri, where he entered Carthage High School in September 1919 to begin his senior year¹³. Just sixteen years old and living in another state far away from home! There is no record of whether he lived with relatives [none are known to have been in or near Carthage] or truly on his own although the latter seems likely.

Making new friends, continuing his education, and enjoying the stimulation of living in a city rather than on a farm with the attendant new experiences marked Ralph's life in Carthage, Missouri, during the 1919-1920 school year. It was during my visit in 2006 to Carthage that I came across his fragile high school class annual wherein the above photo of Dad and his mellophone leaped off the page to me. Elsewhere, in the

annual I learned that he had sang in the Glee Club, participated in the Debate Club (the May 13th, 1920, edition of The Carthage Evening Press reported that he and a teammate had lost a debate on the negative position of “Resolved: That the United States Should Immediately Declare War on Mexico”)¹⁴, the Hi-Y Club and the Athletic Association¹⁵.

Dad must have had fond memories of his senior year at Carthage High School as I remember in 1970 while living in Whittier, California, that he flew back to Carthage, Missouri, to attend his fiftieth class reunion. Did he sing songs or pick up an instrument that evening? I don’t know and can only speculate. I do know, though, that one time in his life Dad was in a band!



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¹ “Memoirs of Mrs. Rachel Minerva (Owsley) Barton”, ca 1916, personal files of Gary M. Barton

² Biography of Ralph Fred Barton by his son Alan Lee Barton, 21 Jan 1949, personal files of Gary M. Barton

³ Illinois State Normal University, *Semi-Centennial History 1857-1907*, (n.p., n.pub., 1907)

⁴ “Ancestors of Cornelius Huffman Also Descendants”, MS, undated, Longmont CO

⁵ High School Commencement Announcement, Odell High School, June 13, 1890, personal files of Gary M. Barton

⁶ Elizabeth Nickolls Laidman, *The Story of Cornelius Huffman His Contemporaries and His Descendants*, n.p., self-published, March 1964, hereafter referred to as *Story of Cornelius Huffman*

⁷ Stella Joy (Barton) Kinter, “Rogers Family Genealogical Notes”, Oct. 6, 1961, personal files of Gary M. Barton

⁸ Burned To Death, *The Border Telephone*, Hume, Kansas, Jan. 13, 1911, pg. 1

⁹ DEED: Fred Barton and his wife Anna H. Barton to L. G. Williams, Book 226, pg. 37, Bates Co. MO Courthouse, Butler, Bates Co., MO.

¹⁰ Fern Glassmire, *A History of Amoret Missouri*, (n.p., n.pub., n.d.)

¹¹ DEED: Joseph P. and Grace B. Turner his wife to Fred Barton, Book 79, pg. 131, Anderson County Kansas Registrar of Deeds, Garnett, Anderson Co., KS

¹² Elizabeth Nickolls Laidman, *Story of Cornelius Huffman*

¹³ Carthage High School Annual Staff, compiler, *The Carthaginian* (n.p., n.pub., 1920) hereinafter cited as *The Carthaginian*

¹⁴ High School Notes, *Carthage Evening Press*, Carthage MO, May 13, 1920, pg. 4 col. 3

¹⁵ Carthage High School Annual Staff, *The Carthaginian*