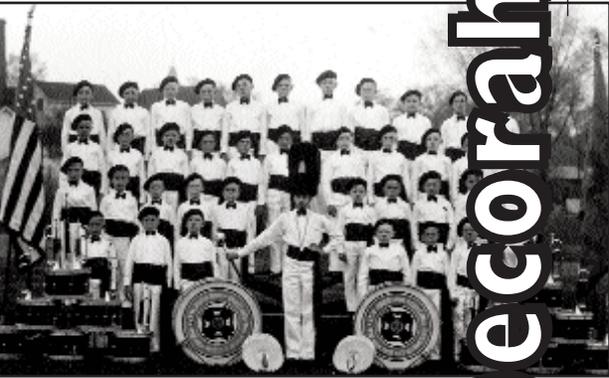



by Howard Hill

The history of the Decorah Kilties was initiated on March 28, 1876. Capt. G. Q. Gardner called a meeting of those interested in the organization of a drum corps. P. Peterson, Fifer Coleman and John



Fuller were the first in the long existence of the Decorah Kilties.

On April 19, 1876, George Scott, E. Scott, L. Miller, I. Gilbertson, M. Brown and J. Hard joined this small group. In 1880, two Neshiems, Anderson and Smout, became members and, in 1881, Charles Thompson, George Norton and Rennie Marrietta enlarged the group.

The corps in 1881 gained a national reputation, raised the membership to 15 and attended an encampment at Des Moines, IA. It was

(Clockwise from upper left) Decorah Kilties members, picture taken in 1887 after returning from the International Encampment in Chicago where the corps won a world championship. The prize was a full set of instruments including eight snare drums, eight piccolo drums and two bass drums; the first picture of the corps in their new kilts, 1934; parading at the Inauguration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953; the 1941 corps; the 1932 corps before getting kilts (photos from the archives of the Decorah Kilties).

Decorah Kilties

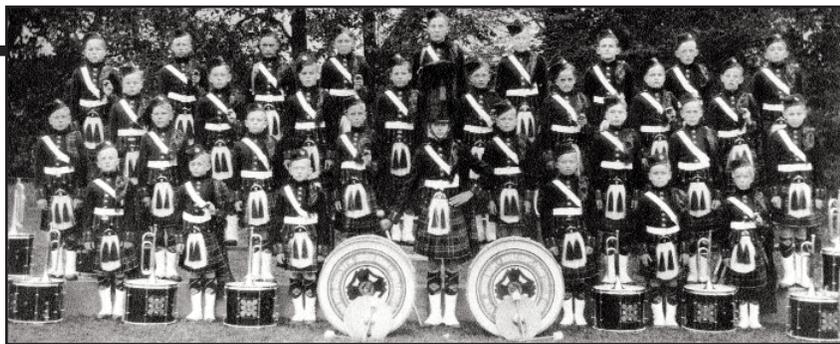
there that they gained their first victory over the Dubuque corps, became known throughout the state and were named the Fourth Regiment Corps.

In June 1882, at Waterloo, IA, first prize was awarded to the Decorah Kilties. In September at the International Competitive Drill in Dubuque, IA, their saying was, "Show what the little backwoods drum corps can do." The Decorah Kilties proved themselves by winning the first prize of \$500. This was the start of a long history of performances and victories for the organization.

Jim Hepburn, a local beer distributor and chairman of the Iowa State VFW Convention and parade, was asked to head the VFW Junior Drum and Bugle Corps as senior commander and the Kilties were organized in 1932. His job in organizing this corps, along with Junior Whitney, was to raise funds for uniforms and equipment

and to secure a musical director. Hepburn went door-to-door in town and raised \$1,200. The first donors were Ed Holmberg and Erickson Meat Market who each donated \$20.

The musical director was Thurst Kjome, owner and operator of Kjome's Music Store. At that time, Hepburn and Kjome started recruiting the boys who were sons of VFW members.



Hepburn then took charge of drill and training the corps in marching. As time went on, he lined up many trips for the corps.

Scottish kilt uniforms were ordered from Scotland. Because they would not arrive in time for the first year, the corps was dressed in white pants and white shirts, black ties and berets and red sashes. Hepburn was with the corps until his death in the late 1940s, at which time Kjome took over the corps completely.

On December 21, 1932, Kjome's first instruments consisted of 12 bugles, 12 drums, two bass drums of Scotch design, two cymbals and a drum major's baton. These bugles were of a straight design with no



valves, except the traditional spit valve. He was asked to have two songs ready for Memorial Day 1933: *The Iowa Corn Song* and *We're in the Army Now*.

Kjome wrote several songs for the corps to play and later sold them to other corps.

The most outstanding trips for Hepburn and Kjome were to Los Angeles, representing the Elks, and to the first Presidential Inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953.

Kjome was director for 22 years, retiring from the organization in 1954.

Corps staff

Early years: Thurst Kjome, Jim Hepburn, Sig Sparatti.

Mid-years: Thurst Kjome, Jim Hedden, Jim Casterton, Art Branae, Al Sensor, Mike Jensen, Bob





(Above) Decorah Kilties in the 1950s (photo from the archives of the Decorah Kilties); (below left) 2000 (photo by Dan Scafidi from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below right) 1998 (photo by Karen Sunmark from the collection of Drum Corps World); (bottom) 1997 (photo by Ron Walloch from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Blount, Don Allen, Harold Eaton, Dr. Vincent Williams, Kermit Hendrickson and John Walker.

Mike Root become director in 1969 with approximately 20 soprano horns that had a piston and no rotary valve, pitched in G and D. The corps had five baritones with just a piston, in the pitches of G and D, two bass drums and two sets of cymbals, four tenor drums and eight snares.

When Root left in 1970, the corps worked under a board of directors. Before that, the Mother's Club took care of the responsibilities of fund-raising and chaperoning.

In 1972, Root returned as director, with new initiative and new direction. It was realized that the drum corps world had advanced and drastic changes were needed.

Root and Greg Orwoll (now director of the Colts in Dubuque, IA) united efforts toward a better drum and bugle corps.

Equipment needs and musical adaptations were critical to updating the corps. Maury Moenhart and Doc Crosser



Decorah Kilties, 1996, at De Kalb, IL (photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World).



(Osage, IA, Precisionaires), giants in the drum corps world, became involved, using their expertise in drum corps. With this, the pride, the integrity and the trophies increased accordingly.

In 1975, the corps represented the state of Iowa at the National Jaycee Convention in Miami Beach, FL. In 1978, a championship performance in Dallas, TX, claimed the National VFW MOC National Title.

Root has recently taken the Kilties to DCI Midwest Championships and International

Championships, traveling the Midwest, west to Wyoming, to the East Coast, down the eastern coast and to Florida, as well as two tours into Canada. He has had the longest tenure of any director to date.

The Decorah Kilties have traveled thousands of miles over the years, performing at presidential inaugurations, parades and conventions and they now participate in DCI Midwest and International competitions.

The main objective of the Kilties organization has been and always will be to teach self-development. They continue to use music and excellence to teach each other powerful life lessons for success in life.

The uniform the Kilties proudly have worn for the past 70 years is a replica of one worn by the ancient Scottish clan "Camron of Erracht." The kilt is typically worn only by the male gender, but since girls were allowed to join the Kilties in 1985, they also wear them.



Howard Hill started his drum and bugle corps career in 1978,

marching with the Blue Stars. He went on to teach the La Crosse, WI, corps until 1990 and was interim director in 1984 when he hired Brian Whitty as a brass instructor who eventually became the

director.

Hill graduated from the University of Idaho in 1983 with a degree in music composition.

Soon after director Mike Root converted the Decorah Kilties from doing only parades to participating in drum and bugle corps competitions in the Midwest and on an international level, Hill came on board to evaluate the program and in 1994 he became the corps' percussion caption head.