

# The drum corps of Whatcom County in Washington state

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by Carl Latchaw of Pacific Northwest Drum Corps.com -- specializing in PNW drum corps of the 1960s and 1970s

Whatcom County is in the most northern county in western Washington State. Its northern boundary is the 49th parallel bordering Canada. It was home to at least four drum corps in the 1960s and 1970s. The following drum corps were from that county, save Sedro Woolley which is in Skagit County.



Albert J. Hamilton, American Legion Post #7 (right), Bellingham WA, AKA the Falcons senior (1922-1963). This corps was very active in Washington State from their inception in 1922 through their end in 1963. They were Washington State



American Legion Champions 10 times in 1922, 1924, 1926, 1933, '1934, 1939, 1940, 1946 and 1948. The Post #7 charter was in 1919, the same year the American Legion organization was formed. Post #7 signifies it is the seventh American Legion post chartered in the state.

The first known Washington State American Legion convention that had a drum corps show was in 1922, the first year that Albert J. Hamilton won.

AL Post #7 had in their midst a championship bugler named Cecil Bannister who was Washington State American Legion Champion bugler for e11 consecutive years from 1937 through 1948, retiring undefeated.

As we moved into the 1960's American Legion and VFW senior corps added an alternate "non-post" name to their drum corps. For Albert J. Hamilton, their alternate name was the Falcons Sr. or the Fighting Falcons (The Falcons Jr D&BC were located in Athena-Weston in north-eastern Oregon).

After the Bellingham Falcons Sr folded in early 1963, some members started commuting down to Sedro-Woolley to join their senior corps. That is only a 26-mile commute. Both of these corps were American Legion posts, so there was a great deal of comradery. [We've all been there, right? Your corps folds and you start looking around for a new outlet for your drum corps fix!].



Sedro-Woolley (snare, left) Sr. (1926-1965, intermittently) is the George Baldridge American Legion Post #43 of Sedro- Woolley. This post had [we believe] three different incarnations of their senior corps that existed from 1926 into the 1930s, another in the 1950s with the last iteration from 1959 through 1965. They also sponsored a junior corps (right) in late 1940s.

The first documentation of their 1960s drum corps was at the March 1961 Seattle Thunderbirds Mid-Winter competition.

They competed in the Senior Bugle Quartet category. Their first field show of the decade was in 1962 and their last was the August 1965 at the Washington State American Legion Championships where they placed second.

In October 1963, the Albert J. Hamilton post (Falcons) founded the Bellingham Matadors (top left on next page) Junior



PREPARING FOR HALF-TIME SHOW--These two groups, the Matadors Junior Brass & Bugle Corps (top) and the Matadors Senior Bugle Quartet, will compete their 1st-infinity to play as a 16-member full-time show at the 1961-62 season. Participating for the Matadors will be: Marciano Brown (conducting); in front, from left, Chester Kenner, Randy Curtis, John L. Keith, Richard, Jim Cook, Robert Corbett and Keith Martin. Others, from left, Linda Robinson, Don Tom



D&BC (1963-1965) using their old Post #7 senior corps equipment. Their goal was to field the new corps by mid-season 1964.

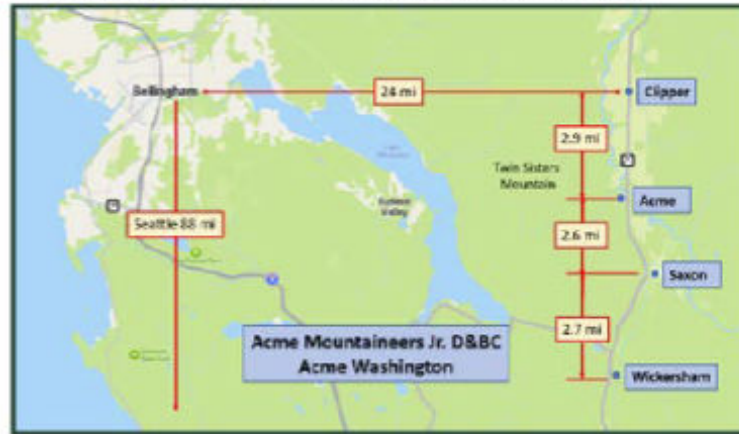
The Matadors' activities consisted of marching parades, playing standstills, marching a halftime show and were score sheet runners at the March 1965

Seattle Thunderbirds Mid-Winter Competition. They never made it on the field of competition and flamed-out after two years in late summer of 1965.

The Matadors were chronologically the second of four Hispanic-themed drum corps in the Pacific Northwest during the 1960s. For the story of the other three corps, see the October 2022 edition of *Drum Corps World*.

Next up is a small corps called the Acme Mountaineers D&BC (1937-1942), AKA The Twin Sisters Juvenile Grange D&BC or the Wickersham-Saxon D&BC.

They were centered around a small cluster of



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towns about 24-miles east of Bellingham. The towns were, north to south along Highway-9, Clipper, Acme, Saxon and Wickersham. All the towns are approximately three-miles apart.

Established in 1937, the corps was sponsored by the Acme Grange No. 922. The "Twin Sisters" name was for Twin Sisters Mountain with two peaks directly west of the small string of towns. They were a typical 1930s small town corps and provided entertainment at local events, parades and the annual Peace Arch (above) Observance held at Blaine.



REMEMBRANCE: The above painting, from an exhibit at 2016, the U.S. National Park service and part of the first National Latino and Latin American Month, is the following artist at the Park West, 2016. The artist is a Hispanic-themed drum corps member. The artist is a Hispanic-themed drum corps member. The artist is a Hispanic-themed drum corps member.



The last known documentation on the Mountaineers was the 1942 Bellingham World War-I Victory parade.

Back to Bellingham, eight years after the Bellingham Matadors folded, there was another effort to start a junior drum and bugle corps in Bellingham called the Brassmen. We cannot find any activity for this corps other than their exhibition at the July 1973 American Legion show in Bellingham.

In 1978 the Brassmen D&BC of Whatcom County (1978, 1981-1989) was formed and disbanded in the same year. The same corps was started again in 1981 and disbanded again at the end of the 1982 season. The name and location of this new corps is identical to the 1973 corps, so we suspect that these were attempted reformations of the 1973 corps by the director of the Ferndale HS Golden Eagles band and director Mel Hansen. (Ferndale is approximately nine miles north of Bellingham).



1985 CAPITOL LAKEFIRE PARADE  
Olympia • July 13, 1985 • Washington

In 1984 under the directorship of Tom Flanik, they were C-Division champions at the Northwest Drum Corps Association Championships. (above, 1984).

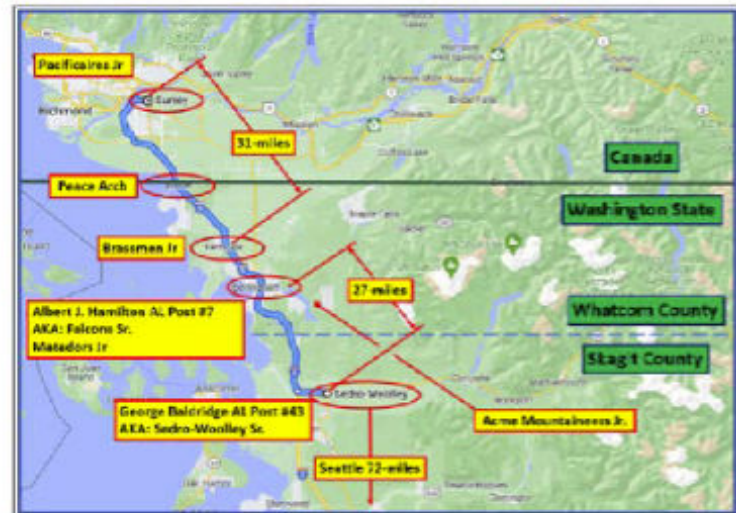
1985 shows the Brassmen of Watcom County merging with the Pacificaires District Band from Surrey British Columbia and being renamed the Pacificaires Drum & Bugle Corps (1985-1987).

In 1987 the Pacificaires disbanded and the Surrey half of the corps went back to their Canadian

District Band format and continued competing with winter guard and band activities. The Brassmen continued until their end in 1989.

Starting with Albert J. Hamilton Post #7 (Falcons Senior) and ending with the Brassmen of Whatcom County, this county of Washington State has had fairly continuous drum corps activity from 1922 through 1989. That's a 67-year span of drum corps, which is a pretty long time anywhere in the Pacific Northwest.

**Long Live Drum Corps! -- PacificNorthwestDrumCorps.com.**



CECIL BANNISTER

Crack leader of the American Legion drum and bugle corps that will march today on July street at 11 o'clock Thursday morning. It was on July 11, at 11 a. m. eleven years ago, that the American Legion band, fighting in the World war, marched in the champion league of the Department of Washington of the American Legion. It was this band in connection with the best Legion band of the state at the Walla Walla convention in August.

Bellingham American Legion Post #7



Cecil Bannister  
Dies Here at 69

Cecil Bannister, 69, of 218 Main St., a former state champion American Legion band leader, died after a long illness.

He was the son of Wally, 82, and Lillian, 81, who were both World War I army veterans with the Canadian forces, a long time member of the American Legion, Bellingham Post No. 7. Legion band, a 100 member band of the American Legion, a member of the State's National Guard, and 1919 City League.

He was a 41-year member of Bellingham and with a wife, mother and three sons, he is now living in Bellingham.

**MEMBER INDICATED**  
Cecil Bannister joined the Legionary drum corps in 1914 and continued as a member until a shoulder wound a dozen years ago. At that time he was in the hospital for a long time. During his convalescence, he always played "Cannon" and he sang the "March of the American Legion."  
He also served on the drum corps council in Bellingham.

Funeral services will be conducted by Rev. John B. Wood at 1 p.m. Friday at James Funeral Home, Bellingham, 112 So. 4th. Visitation.

November 1937 (left)  
May 1970 (right)