

A CENTURY

MINNESOTA MARCH

COMPOSED AND RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO

Miss C. F. Gates

BY

G. N. ALLEN

BOSTON Published by OLIVER DITSON 27 Washington St.

ANDANTE MAESTRO

6th

FINE m^o

Entered according to Act of Congress A. D. 1851 by Oliver Ditson in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Mass.

THE FIRST known popular piece with a Minnesota connection is "Minnesota March," published in Boston in 1851. The composer was George N. Allen (1812-1877), a psalmist, editor, and teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio. He studied under Lowell Mason, well-known hymn writer.

OF SONG

Popular Music in Minnesota

James Taylor Dunn

POPULAR MUSIC in one way or another followed the frontier. As early as 1855 sheet music was being sold in St. Paul, then capital of Minnesota Territory, and a year later nearby Stillwater could boast "five pianos; besides flutes, guitars and violins without number."¹ For many early Minnesota residents the acquisition of a square grand or "cottage organ" was not far off. In April, 1872, Joseph Haven Hanson, clerk at the Munger Brothers music store in St. Paul, boasted in the first issue of a local literary journal, *The Busy West*: "We look over our young state and find it ranks high in a musical . . . sense, for the number of musical instruments in the State, the musical organizations, and the musical taste displayed is something wonderful, when we consider our extreme youth."²

At the time Hanson wrote, Minnesota had been a state

for only fourteen years, but the pianoforte that was to inspire the popularity of sheet music was already a nationwide fad, for parlor music and parlor singing delighted almost everyone. When the first known sheet music bearing the imprint of a Minnesota music store was published in 1861, the piano had become a genteel — and expensive — token of social rank and a major status symbol.³ By 1872, however, with the accelerated growth of cities and of transportation facilities, pianos and other musical instruments became more and more available in Minnesota as elsewhere.

While few of the earliest pioneers could afford to transport pianos and melodeons with them to Minnesota, they did carry westward treasured volumes of carefully selected instrumental and vocal sheet music, often handsomely bound and individually identified with leather name labels on the covers. Included in some of these bound collections might have been the three earliest known pieces of sheet music having direct Minnesota associations: George Nelson Allen's "Minnesota [sic] March," published in Boston in 1851; Francis Henry Brown's "Minnehaha, or Laughing Water Polka," issued in New York in 1856; and George Washington Hewitt's "Minnehaha Quadrilles," published in New York in 1859. These three piano confections by well-known eastern composers were the vanguard of what eventually developed in the 1890s into a small avalanche of music either published in the state or having Minnesota connections.⁴

Although Minnesota has never had anything remotely like New York's Tin Pan Alley or the song output of cities like Chicago, Boston, Detroit, and San Francisco, the story of local sheet music publishing is nevertheless an interesting one. All that was published in Minnesota year in and year out was a microcosm of the history of popular sheet music in America, paralleling to a greater or lesser

¹ *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), May 29, 1855, [p. 1], *St. Croix Union* (Stillwater), September 12, 1856, [p. 2].

² *The Busy West* (St. Paul), 1:22 (April, 1872).

³ Joseph A. Mussulman, *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870-1900*, 170-73 (Evanston, Illinois, 1971); Mary Cable and Editors of *American Heritage*, *American Manners & Morals: A Picture History of How We Behaved and Misbehaved*, 153 (New York, 1969). For the story of the importance of the piano in early Minnesota, see Donald C. Holmquist, "Pride of the Pioneer's Parlor, Pianos in Early Minnesota," in *Minnesota History*, 39:312-16 (Winter, 1965).

⁴ It is interesting to note that the manuscripts division of the Minnesota Historical Society has a modern manuscript copy of an early song entitled "Minnesota," written by Robert Pike for a Fourth of July celebration in Minnesota City in 1852.

Mr. Dunn, former chief librarian of the Minnesota Historical Society, is well known to readers of *Minnesota History* for his numerous books and articles, including a previous music-oriented article on "St. Paul's Schubert Club" (Summer, 1964).

degree what was happening in other states of the Union. The output expressed the spirit of the times and reflected the culture of the day.⁵

What follows in this report is an effort to examine decade by decade the popular songs and instrumentals — exclusive of art songs — that were part of the local scene from 1851 to the decline of sheet music publishing in the 1940s. Little attempt will be made to evaluate the music as such, a task which must be left to qualified professionals. Sigmund Spaeth, America's foremost historian of popular music, has commented that "The amateur song-writer has a curious habit of sticking to the most conventional ideas and the most hackneyed materials of text and melody."⁶ Even a nonprofessional study of state-published and state-oriented sheet music confirms Spaeth's judgment, and it seems safe to say that few compositions of lasting merit were offered by Minnesota publishers or composers. Regardless of their musical merit, or lack of it, Minnesota songs are worth collecting, however, as reflections of the times in which they appeared and for what they represent in terms of cover designs, theme topics, attitudes, and the like.

The principal collection of local sheet music, and the one upon which this report is largely based, is that gathered by the Minnesota Historical Society's library, which has more than doubled its Minnesota music holdings during the past six years. Included is a sizable accumulation of Minnesota items from a large general collection assembled by St. Paulite Howard R. Woolsey and presented to the society in 1970 by his widow, the late Elizabeth Bisbee Woolsey. The growth of the MHS collection has been such that both the St. Paul and Minneapolis public libraries graciously turned over to the society all the state items on their shelves. Although it is impossible to guess how complete the MHS popular music collection is, it now numbers well over 700 different local pieces, and it is still growing.⁷

MINNESOTA'S FIRST resident composer appears to have been German-born George Seibert who arrived in St. Paul in 1857 and took over the directorships of the Great Western Band in 1863 and the St. Paul Musical Society in 1870. His unceasing efforts, according to a contemporary historian, did "much to advance the musical tastes of our citizens."⁸ During March, 1861, Munger Brothers placed on sale Seibert's only known published composition, "The Acker Waltz." "We have heard it played, and it goes finely," reported the *St. Paul Daily Press*.⁹ The piece was named to honor William H. Acker, then adjutant general of the state, who was killed a year later in the Civil War Battle of Shiloh.

Frank Wood, apparently Minnesota's first song writer and a man history seems to have forgotten, was more generous of his talents, being responsible for a total of eight published songs and one march during his close to

ten years as an active composer. The remainder of his life, until his death in 1899, was devoted to teaching piano in St. Paul.

Little is known of Wood, who was born in Waterford, New York, in 1839 and appeared upon the St. Paul scene in about 1861. He quickly gained a reputation as a quiet, unassuming musician and piano teacher and, with his sister Julia, a singer, was active during the 1860s on the local concert stage. He was a sought-after soloist with Seibert's Great Western Band and the St. Paul Musical Society, which organization he directed for a brief season during the mid-1860s. In September, 1863, he appeared as pianist-leader in a rather unusual concert with Kelley's Automaton Musical Troupe — six automatons "of life size" invented and constructed in St. Paul, "so perfectly arranged as to perform some twenty to thirty different pieces of music in as fine style as living beings." According to the *State Atlas*, a newspaper published in Minneapolis, Wood was the "best Piano player in the State," and *The Busy West* concluded that "Probably no man has done more for music, in our immediate vicinity, than has Frank Wood. As a thorough and pains-taking teacher, he has few equals in America."¹⁰

Wood's first local publication — an instrumental, not a song with words — was "L'Etoile du Nord March" in 1863. The *St. Paul Daily Press* called it "an excellent piece, which is now all the rage among the ladies of St. Paul." The newspaper concluded: "This is a home production, . . . and is the first music ever published in Minnesota."¹¹ The inaccuracy of this statement will become evident, however, when the music of 1872 comes into focus.

At any rate, there is at present no reason to doubt that Frank Wood's "Minnehaha" was the first song by a Min-

⁵Sigmund Spaeth, *The Facts of Life in Popular Song*, [v-vi] (New York, 1934).

⁶Spaeth, *Facts of Life*, 140.

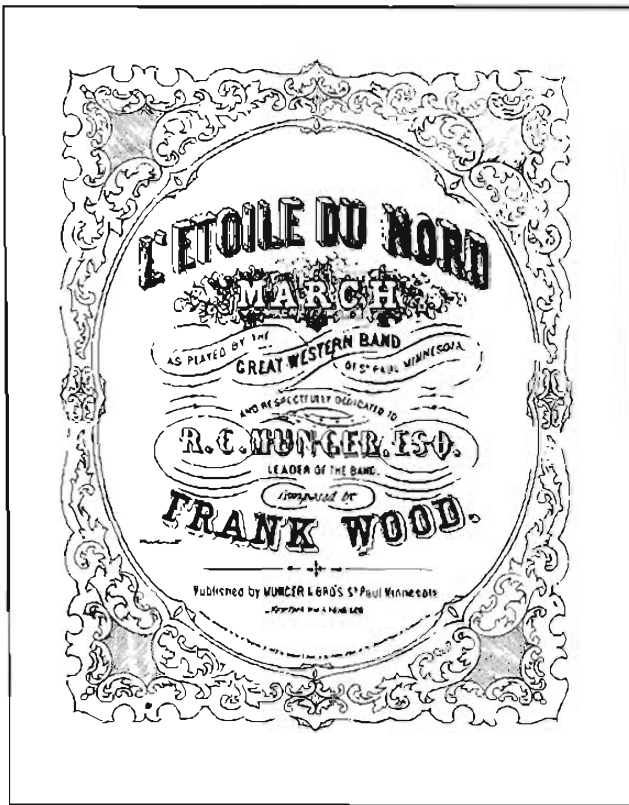
⁷The extensive sheet music collection of Kenneth Carley, Minneapolis, has also been drawn on for information concerning a good number of unusual and important Minnesota items. The music library of the University of Minnesota owns a few pieces used in this survey, as does the author, who wishes to thank Mr. Carley, June Drenning Holmquist, and John Dougherty of the society's staff for their assistance.

⁸*St. Paul Daily Press*, November 14, 1872, [p. 4]; Thomas N. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Biographical Sketches of Old Settlers*, 679 (quote), (St. Paul, 1886).

⁹*St. Paul Daily Press*, March 12, 1861, [p. 1].

¹⁰*State Atlas* (Minneapolis), September 16, [p. 3] (Kelley troupe quote), September 23, [p. 3] (Wood quote), 1863; *The Busy West*, 1:54 (May, 1872). See also *St. Paul Daily Press*, November 14, 1872, [p. 4]. *The Busy West* gives Wood's birth year as 1839, his funeral notice in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 26, 1899, p. 7, gives his age as 65. Frank Wood lies next to his sister Julia (Mrs. Frederick Will) in unmarked graves in Oakland Cemetery, St. Paul.

¹¹*St. Paul Daily Press*, February 21, 1863, [p. 4].



THIS MARCH (1863) was the first local publication of Frank Wood, probably Minnesota's first song writer. The Munger firm of St. Paul published it.

nesotan to find local publication, again with the imprint of Russell C. Munger's pioneer music store. It followed Wood's initial composition by eight months, appearing in October, 1863. The words — "Minnehaha, laughing waters, cease thy laughing now for aye" — were written by Richard H. Chittenden, a captain in the First Wisconsin Cavalry, who took part in the Sioux Uprising. The song is dedicated "To the memory of the victims of the Indian Massacre of 1862." It details in lurid words the terrors of the Indian revolt and was as close to the Civil War as any of the local music came. For the most part, the music of the 1860s in the society's collection contains few stirring mili-

tary marches or patriotic Civil War ballads. During this time of civil strife and national upheaval in the United States, Minnesota composers seemed bent on escaping into waltzes, schottisches, and polkas such as George Osten's "Winona Ladies Polka" and "Winona Normal School March," both with 1867 Winona imprints, which are among the baker's dozen of pieces of sheet music known to have appeared in the state during those years. Frank Wood wrote one more known song during the 1860s — "Lovely Minka, We Must Part," based on a German tune and published in Philadelphia in 1866.

Another composer of the decade was George Washington Lovejoy who was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1838 and moved to Rochester, Minnesota, in 1857. He was an able violinist, the first professional music instructor in Rochester, and for years its leading musician. He accidentally drowned in the Zumbro River while fishing in 1905.¹² Representative of his compositions are one song, "The Beautiful West" (1868), and three instrumental pieces — "Winona Schottische" (1866), "The Brightest Hope" (1868), and "Minnesota Quick Step" (1868). Two were published in Chicago and the others in Milwaukee and Cleveland.

An additional song of the 1860s deserves passing mention because of its subject. "Minnesota, Lily of the West" was published in 1868 by the prestigious Root & Cady firm of Chicago, but little is known of the composer — one Will Hill of Rushford, Minnesota. It was yet another version, this time for the parlor, of a well-known folk song:¹³

"Our prairies are all dotted o'er with houses
white as snow,
Where nothing was but cabins rude a short ten
years ago.
So that's the way we do things here enjoying
them with zest
In lovely Minnesota, the lily of the West."

THE DECADE which historian Sigmund Spaeth dubbed the "simple seventies"¹⁴ did not produce an outpouring of popular music in Minnesota, but what little was published followed the American pattern when public disasters, elections, and events of the day inspired stirring songs and descriptive piano pieces. This topical music had an additional selling point: It especially delighted the public because of the appealing, elaborate gift wrappings which make for "a vivid record of the changing interests and tastes of the period."¹⁵ Minnesota followed the national trend by publishing with appropriate covers only a few such edifying pieces as "The Minneapolis Mill Disaster" (1878) by Milton L. Rentfrow, a Minneapolis painter and guitar player; Frank Wood's "Old Betz" (1871) with a lithograph of the well-known, aged Indian woman; and "O! What makes Grant so fearfully frown?" (1872), which was undoubtedly sung with gusto by the Minnesota delegates to the Cincinnati convention of Republican dissentients

¹² Joseph A. Leonard, *History of Olmsted County*, 205 (Chicago, 1910); letter from Mrs. T. M. Richards of the Olmsted County Historical Society to James Taylor Dunn, December 21, 1973.

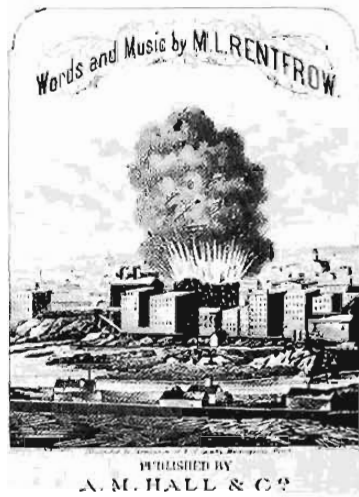
¹³ Dena J. Epstein, "Music Publishing in Chicago Before 1871," in *Notes*, 2:323 (September, 1945). For the full story of this song, see Bessie M. Stanchfield, "Beauty of the West: A Minnesota Ballad," in *Minnesota History*, 27:179-89 (September, 1946).

¹⁴ Sigmund Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music in America*, 175 (New York, 1948).

¹⁵ Michael Twyman, *Printing, 1770-1970*, 109-10 (London, 1970).



THE MINNEAPOLIS MILL CATASTROPH



"OLD BETZ," by J. H. Hanson and Frank Wood, was dedicated to a well-known, aged Indian woman.

A TOPICAL piece was this M. L. Rentfrow song about the tragic explosion of the Washburn A mill on May 2, 1878.

THE FIRST song actually printed in Minnesota was this one in support of Horace Greeley's 1872 candidacy.

which nominated Horace Greeley for the presidency.¹⁶ There were dance tunes, too, though few in number — a polka, a galop, and a few love songs, but little else

It was in the 1870s that Frank Wood published six additional songs and then ended, so far as is known, his music writing-publishing career. A notice about one of these pieces provides an example, then as now, of the interest in much of the sheet music published. His "Laughing Water," with words by J. H. Hanson, was called "Worthy of more than a passing notice, not only for excellence of its music and words, but for the extreme elegance of its title page, which is adorned with a splendid lithograph of Minne-ha-ha Falls."¹⁷

One final composer of the period should be mentioned. Pioneer organist Alfred M. Shuey, who became one of Minnesota's most prominent musicians and the writer of over fifty pieces of more serious music, made his debut during this decade with the "Minne-ha-ha Falls Waltz" (1870). Critic John K. Sherman called it one of his "youthful indiscretions."¹⁸ Other early Shuey items, which may or may not have been additional "indiscretions," were "Phi Delta March" (1875), "Fairy Dell Polka" (1878), and, a little later, "Russian Broom Brigade Triumphant March" (1882). Shuey remained active for many years and was known as Minneapolis' "grand old man of music" when he died in 1930.¹⁹

Perhaps the major contribution of the 1870 decade was the first piece of sheet music that was a complete Minnesota product. Before 1872, Minnesota music had to be set in the East because there were no facilities for electrotyping in the state.²⁰ Thanks to a contemporary note

penned on the title page of the Minnesota Historical Society's copy of the St. Paul Greeley Club song about General Grant's fearful frown (a statement written at the time, it is believed, by Warren Upham of the society's staff), the problem of the first song to be physically produced in Minnesota is laid to rest. That song, published by the piano firm of John A. Weide and William H. Ross, was designated the "1st sheet music ever printed in Minn. Ramaley, Chaney & Co., Printers: St. Paul."

The 1870s also saw the beginning, in Minnesota, of what is termed "courtesy imprints." To increase sales, Minnesota music companies arranged with large or well-known out-of-state publishers to have the local names appear on song covers along with those of music companies in other cities. To today's collectors these imprints are of secondary importance, although the practice continued with productive regularity until almost the end of the sheet music era.²¹

¹⁶ William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota* 3:75 (St. Paul, 1969).

¹⁷ *The Busy West*, 1:22 (April, 1872).

¹⁸ John K. Sherman, *Music and Theater in Minnesota History*, 33 (Minneapolis, 1955).

¹⁹ *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 9, 1930, p. 1.

²⁰ *The Busy West*, 1:60-61 (May, 1872).

²¹ Sheet-music publishing in Minnesota was dominated by W. J. Dyer & Bro., St. Paul. It was active from 1872 with the publication of Samuel H. Dyer's piano piece, "Shadows," until the death of the firm's founder, William J. Dyer, in 1925. After 1895, Paul A. Schmitt of Minneapolis was also a prominent music publisher in the Twin Cities, especially of art songs and classical music. Others of lesser importance, most of them

The 1880s in America produced what one historian has called a "dreary melange of popular songs" and lugubrious ballads which provide us with "an insight into the Victorian pleasure of a good, mindless cry."²² It took another decade, however, for this trend to reach Minnesota, except for one known tearjerker, "Baby's With the Angels," with words by Charles L. Pleasants and music by William H. Pontius, a combination conductor, composer, teacher, and singer who in later years presided over the Minneapolis School of Music. On the back cover of the song is an advertisement for Minneapolitan Dr. Anson B. Spinney's Nerve Tonic and Dyspepsia Cure — a quack nostrum perhaps needed after performing the song.

Topical songs and decorative covers for the 1880s are represented in the MHS collection by two marches and a waltz about Minneapolis and seven pieces honoring the St. Paul Winter Carnival. Especially notable among the latter, because of their interesting covers, were two items by local music teachers: "Palace Polka" (1887), a rippling little piece by Oscar Werner, and "Ice Palace March" (1886) by Charles G. Titcomb. Except for these (and a sad song of loneliness called "The Traveling Man, or What are the little ones doing at home?" written in 1884 by Thomas S. Quincey, himself a Minneapolis traveling agent), the 1880s decade was undistinguished on the local music production scene, especially in light of what was to come.

Until the 1890s the songs, ballads, and waltzes produced in Minnesota, although they continued to follow the general pattern of song writing in the rest of the country, were rather limited in number when compared with the great output of popular sheet music published in such centers as New York, Boston, and Chicago. During the century's final decade, however, Minnesota began to catch up — in its small way. For the first time the number of songs known to have been printed in the state, or about it, in one decade was slowly approaching the hundred mark. Lachrymose, doleful pieces continued to be written and sold, and mush and treacle never ceased to fascinate both the professional and amateur musician as well as the public almost to the end of the time when sheet music publishing was popular. The dismal ballads and absurdly sentimental waltzes were, however, declining in number during the 1890s and 1900s. One of the last of the breed in Minnesota was a sad tale of bank robbery, bigamy, and dramatic

following the turn of the century, were the Metropolitan Music Company, which took over Dyer's Minneapolis store in 1897; McClure Music Company and J. Calder Bramwell of St. Paul; and Joseph E. Frank and Carleton C. Pillsbury of Minneapolis.

²² Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 4, 6 (New York, 1972).

²³ Paul Henry Lang, ed., *100 Years of Music in America*, 146 (New York, 1961). Ben R. Harney has been generally credited with introducing ragtime to New York City in the mid-1890s. See Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music*, 284-86. He does not mention Scott Joplin.

A. M. SHUEY wrote this march on the occasion of a visit to Minneapolis and Lake Minnetonka in May, 1882, of the Russian Broom Brigade of St. Louis. The latter was a uniformed, broom-carrying drill unit of young women who traveled from St. Louis to Minneapolis and back on an excursion sponsored by three railroads.



ANOTHER MARCH by another serious musician was this one dedicated to the Minnesota Boat Club and published in New York in 1893. Emil(e) Oberhoffer, the composer, later organized the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.



confrontation and accusation at the altar, all in the tradition (for the lyrics at least) of melodrama at its best — or worst. Entitled "Why Did the Bell Cease Ringing, or The Answer That Never Came," by Minnie E. Elliott, it was published in Minneapolis in 1897 by the composer's husband. Topical songs, too, continued to be issued, exemplified by pieces like J. B. Lambert's "Spiral Bridge Waltz" (1897), with a photograph on the cover of the unique and now long-gone bridge over the Mississippi at Hastings.


STARTING IN THE late 1890s, however, and continuing through the first two decades of the 1900s, fresh musical breezes made themselves felt. The windows were opened by Scott Joplin with the publication in Sedalia, Missouri, of his "Maple Leaf Rag" in 1899. He was among the first to bring to the notice of the world a kind of music, exclusively for the piano and largely Black in origin, that was new and refreshing and completely American — ragtime.²³

Miss A. Wood, C. Wood
LAUGHING WATER
 ENCHANTED DELL
 MINNEHAHA



Williamson **8070** Frank Woodl.

MINNEHAHA
SLUMBER SONG



WORDS BY
 CAROLINE BRITFITH
 MUSIC BY
 FRED C. SHARDLOW

Shardlow Music Pub. Co. C.
 MONTEVIDEO MINN.



WORDS BY
 LOUISE BIRCHARD

MUSIC BY
 W. B. FASSBINDER



MINNEHAHA FALLS has been a favorite theme of Minnesota song writers like Frank Wood whose "Laughing Water" (left), published in 1872, followed by nine years his "Minnehaha." Fred C. Shardlow's "Minnehaha Slumber Song" (1903) is an example of Minnesota music published outside the Twin Cities, in this case Montevideo. Among many songs by William B. Fassbinder is "Minneapolis Makes Good" (1908), with a falls picture.

In the 1890s, too, vaudeville and the minstrel show were at the peak of their popularity, and the public flocked to be entertained by whites in blackface or by genuine Negro minstrels. It was out of this Black culture that the elaborate cakewalk (or two-step) with its high-stepping, strutting walk for the prize cake developed. So did the popular "coon shout" (usually belted out by a lusty, curvaceous female singer).²⁴ In Minnesota, however, the coon shout fad was the recipient of considerable criticism from, among others, Oscar F. G. Day of Minneapolis, editor of *The Critic: A Journal of Amusements* and himself an occasional lyricist and composer of popular music. He was by no means taken in by some of the songs being published. Although he did not mention any Minnesota music in particular and concentrated primarily on what was coming out of New York, he fulminated against the "illiterate, unmusical, wishy-washy things called coon song, and descriptive ballads crippled and spavined by monstrosities in the shape of rhyme." He admitted that there were perhaps "two or three really fine songs in that style, which are really gems," but for the rest, he said, "Oh, send us on the war songs, if only to kill those others off."²⁵

During the late 1890s Minnesota produced no known coon shouts, but it had its own cakewalk specialist in Edmund Braham, a Twin Cities music salesman and teacher who apparently appeared on the local scene in 1898. By 1901 he had moved on to unknown regions and perhaps additional song-writing efforts.²⁶ He composed, among other piano pieces, three two-steps or cakewalks published in Minneapolis: "The 'Big Hit'" (1899), "The Winner" (1898), and "Hog Town Pig-anninies" (1899) as well as two marches. Although Braham's compositions are reasonably sophisticated and attractive musically, they could not be as infectious as their elaborate, multicolored covers.

Ragtime, as well as the cakewalk, was not a product of Tin Pan Alley professionalism; it came from the people, evolving not only from the Black minstrel show but also

²⁴ Larry Freeman, *The Melodies Linger On*, 23 (Watkins Glen, New York, 1951).

²⁵ *The Critic* (Minneapolis), vol. 1, no. 37 (May 7, 1898), vol. 1, no. 36 (April 30, 1898).

²⁶ One additional known Braham item, "Boy Scouts of America March" (1911), was published in Springfield, Massachusetts.

When Our Shell Fire Pours the
Hell Fire into Pots-damn

PATRIOTIC THRILLER

Words by
LADNORG
Music by
MAETZOLD

PUBLISHED BY
Red Wing Printing Co.
RED WING, MINN.

For Sale by...

DEDICATED TO MY FRIEND
MRS. C.D. GRIFFITH.

DANCE OF THE
HOGANS
ALLEY KID.

DIS AM DE HOTTEST ONE YET.

CHARACTERISTIC PIECE FOR PIANO

BY R.C. SHARDLOW

PIANO SOLO 30
PIANO & GUITAR 40
PIANO & GUITAR 50

PUBLISHED BY
W.J. DYER & BRO.

608-611 COLLEGE AVE. MINNEAPOLIS.
21-22 WEST FIFTH ST. SAINT PAUL.

PAROD. & PIANO 50
2. PAROD. & P. 75

COLORFUL COVERS among Minnesota songs include these four. The "patriotic thriller" at upper left is typical of World War I songs everywhere. Richard Outcault's famed "Yellow Kid" cartoon is featured on the 1897 piece at upper right. An early (1902), localized love song is at lower left and an interesting cover of 1909 at lower right.

MY
MINNESOTA
GIRL

MUSIC
BY
JOS. H.
BARETT
LYRICS BY
L. ST. JOHN
BROTLEY

3

PEEK-A-BOO

WORDS BY
GUS S. FINNEY

MUSIC BY
A.M. DUPRE

CHAS. WESTERN MUSIC CO.
St Paul, Minn.



A VARIED "QUARTET": a 1909 tribute to the "dandy" driver of a six-cylinder automobile; a rare song of 1906 extolling both Minneapolis and St. Paul as "the town for me"; a "grotesque dance" of 1892 with an assortment of rag dolls; and a somewhat later (1922) tribute to "The Flapper Girl" who "understands the men from A to Z."





LAKE COMO — the one in St. Paul, not Italy — and love were the themes of this 1916 song by the mysterious "Harley Rosso" (H. Ross McClure).

believe the blurb printed on a later Fitz song of the same type, "Don't You Want a Little Doggie?" (Chicago, 1900). Fitz was the writer of more than 100 popular songs, including one written with William H. Penn — a national hit of 1901 entitled "The Honeysuckle and the Bee," which musicologist Spaeth said had "a sprightly tune and attractive words." Fitz died in Los Angeles in 1922.³⁰

ALBERT FITZ was one of a number of composers who tried a popular new way to publicize his output. By the 1890s the "courtesy imprints" of the 1870s had given way to the fine art of song plugging as musicians sought wider distribution for their pieces. Many composers, to get their songs heard, promoted them by tying in with a well-known singer or vaudeville troupe whose pictures then appeared on the printed covers of the sheet music. These professionals performed the pieces and thereby probably brought them more success than they otherwise might have enjoyed. In Minnesota this system of plugging was apparently successful, although on a small scale. It was tried by several writers, among them Fitz who publicized his "coon hush," "My Mammy's Lullaby" (1895), as being sung by

MY WELCOME'S GONE SINCE I QUIT WEARING THE UNIFORM



THIS LAMENT of an ex-World War I soldier ("I've lost my pull with the beautiful") had music by J. Edward Woolley and was published in 1919.

the "talented little New York soubrette Marguerite Ferguson." He was one of those who felt that "a portrait of the singer has always been a popular method of attracting the purchaser's eye."³¹

Around the turn of the century, reprinting in local newspapers was another way to keep songs and instrumentals before the public. For example, Joseph H. Barrett's sentimental ballad, "Tell Her That I Loved Her," with words by Joe Flynn, was first published in 1898. On November 22, 1903, it was reprinted as a supplement in the *Minneapolis Sunday Times*. Song writers also used local and national musical journals to make their efforts known. Back in the 1870s *The Busy West* used this procedure, and a couple of decades later a Twin Cities publication called *Orpheus* was one of many which printed music in the center signature. Its April, 1891, issue, for example, offered "Theo Waltzes" by Theodore G. Fischel, a department manager at Dyer's St. Paul music store.

³⁰*Minneapolis City Directory*, 1896; Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music*, 315; *New York Times*, May 22, 1922, 19:302.

³¹*Graphis* (Zurich, Switzerland), 9:302 (1953).

Another plugging method, begun in the 1900s and continued well into the 1930s or later, involved performing the music in department and ten-cent stores where sheet-music counters usually featured key-tinkling saleswomen to play and even sing the latest hits for prospective customers. Two of the better known Minneapolis pianist-saleswomen, among many, were Libbie Erickson at Powers & Hutchinson Department Store in 1904 and Clarice Nelson at S. S. Kresge's some years later. Both were also fledgling song writers.³²

As the twentieth century arrived and the heyday of Minnesota music publishing approached, a gradual change came in the type of music and lyrics produced. A new and euphoric mood seemed to be on the horizon in America, influenced by victory over Spain and the country's new-found imperialism.³³ Where the old songs had been slow and tearful, many of the newer ditties were fast and lively. Nationally, "mother" songs were on the way out and pieces such as "Silver Threads Among the Gold" (1873) were giving way to the likes of "Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet" (1909). Minnesota, too, occasionally turned to brisker, livelier lyrics (if not music), as in Danville L. Savage's "The Nattiest Girl in Town" (1903), and to "story" songs with satiric, ironic love twists. This change was anticipated in 1896 by John T. Hall of Minneapolis and his "I Don't Kiss Boys," with words by Oscar F. G. Day, and followed by songs like Joseph Barrett's "Just a Simple Country Maid" (1903) and Atlee M. ("Bud") Budke's "Peek-a-boo" (1909).³⁴

As for the ragtime tunes that were so notable a part of the musical scene in this period, Minnesota's few contributions to the field included Joseph Barrett's self-published "Alabama Hop" (1901) which gained a greater distribution and recognition than might be expected because he wisely enlisted the "courtesy imprints" of publishers in the Twin Cities, Boston, New York, and Milwaukee. Two years later Frederick T. Swanson of St. Paul contributed "Minnesota Street Rag," but then ten years passed before Elmer M. Olson of Minneapolis wrote "Rag de Luxe" (1913). He followed this with "Town Talk, a Classic Ragtime" (1917).

³² Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, 548 (New York, 1954).

³³ Douglas Gilbert, *Last Chords: The Diverging Story of American Popular Songs*, 296 (New York, 1942).

³⁴ Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, 546. In 1896 Hall also wrote a national hit tune, "Wedding of the Winds," a favorite with mandolin clubs and still occasionally heard. See Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music*, 292.

³⁵ Richard S. ("Butch") Thompson III of Minneapolis, ragtime pianist, has called "Minnesota Street Rag" an "inventive, good, primitive rag." Max Morath, nationally known ragtime entertainer, has also stated to the author, in a letter dated November 24, 1974, that the piece is "most characteristic and musically intriguing." The Wessel number, according to Mr. Thompson, is a song, not a true rag, in spite of its title.

The last known rag printed in Minnesota was "The Dance They Call the 'Très Bien Rag'" by Harry E. Wessel, an insurance agent of St. Paul. It was published by Dyer in 1920, several years after the close of the main ragtime era in most places.³⁵

In the mass of two-steps, three-steps, waltzes, marches, and Spanish-American War "patriotics" like Edmund Braham's "Minneapolis Journal March" (1899) that made up the sheet music published in the state near and during the first decade of the new century, only a few compositions stand out. Among them are two University of Minnesota songs, Truman Rickard's "Hail! Minnesota" (1905) and Floyd M. Hutsell's "U. of M. Rouser" (1909), which have lived on to today. Another interesting piece is "Minnesota Shakedown: A Country Two Step" by William H. Penn, coauthor with Albert Fitz of the previously mentioned "The Honeysuckle and the Bee." This second Penn offering, billed as a composition that "embodies the quaint style and flavor of the country," was published in New York in 1900. Nine years later Harold C. Paris, a Minneapolis candy salesman, wrote an attractive early automobile number, "The Six Cylinder Kid," with words by Mark D. Hawkins of St. Paul, who himself had been responsible for a number called "Dear St. Paul" (1907).

In this period, too, Charles Wakefield Cadman, an eastern classical composer of national reputation, wrote one of the best-known songs about the region — "From the Land of Sky-Blue Water" (1909), in recent years widely publicized as a singing commercial for a St. Paul beer. Then five years later Thurlow Lieurance, an Iowa native who specialized in American Indian music, composed "By the Waters of Minnetonka" (1914), based on a supposedly authentic Indian melody. No other two Minnesota-oriented songs have enjoyed such continuing popularity.

Among notable individual composers of popular songs during the period under discussion, four turn-of-the-century men, all professionals, call for additional comment as did Frank Wood in the 1860s and Edmund Braham and Albert Fitz in the 1890s. They are Barrett and Swanson for their contributions to ragtime, William B. Fassbinder for the sheer number of his published contributions to Minnesota music over a short period of time, and James J. Latourelle for his great popularity and unusual story.

Little is known of Joseph Hezekiah Barrett, except that he was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1878 and moved to Minnesota before the turn of the century. In the Twin Cities he became a pianist, and about 1902 he organized the Wolff and Barrett Orchestra with Abraham N. Wolff of St. Paul. Barrett's music-writing career may have been short because he composed only six known published songs that came out mostly in Minneapolis between 1898 and 1903. Besides his "Alabama Hop" rag, he also wrote "My Minnesota Girl" (1902), perhaps the first example in the state of a localized love song. Its words were by Edward St. John Bromley, a Minneapolis advertising manager.

Barrett continued his interest in music, however, and it is said that at one time he conducted an orchestra at Wildwood Amusement Park, White Bear Lake. About 1915 he became president of Local 30 of the St. Paul Musicians' Association which position he held for some eleven years. Undoubtedly he also kept writing music from time to time, for on May 15, 1916, his "Glacier Park Outdoor Carnival March," dedicated to Louis W. Hill, Sr., was performed at the gala Elks Carnival in the St. Paul Auditorium.³⁶ It is not known, though, whether this piece was ever published. In the 1920s Barrett became a deputy sheriff of Ramsey County for five years, a position he returned to some ten years later. He died in St. Paul, unnoticed by the local newspapers, in June, 1940, while still in office.³⁷

Frederick Theodore Swanson, like Barrett, is remembered today for a rag — in this case the "Minnesota Street Rag," which boasts one of the more colorful front covers published in the state. Born in Red Wing in 1869, Swanson moved to St. Paul when he was about nineteen and devoted most of the rest of his life to music. He was a teacher of mandolin and guitar, the organizer of the popular Twin City Mandolin Club, a sheet music publisher, and, finally, a piano dealer until the Great Depression of the 1930s forced him into other work. Swanson died in St. Paul in 1954. His six known published songs spanned the years from 1901 to 1904, although he continued for the rest of his life to compose special-occasion music for the benefit of his family and friends.³⁸

The most prolific of all Minnesota composers of popular dance music, marches, and an occasional song was William Blaze Fassbinder. Born in Charles City, Iowa, in 1873, he moved in the early 1890s to Minneapolis where his father Michael became a cutter for Joseph H. Thompson, merchant tailor. Young Fassbinder took up music as a profession, teaching, tuning pianos, fulfilling theater and dance-hall jobs, appearing in local concerts, and composing and publishing many of his own pieces under the imprint of the Royal Music Company, St. Paul. He also took on an occasional assignment as an arranger and publisher for other local song writers like Libbie Erickson, Eleanor Langdon, and James Latourelle.

In his active music-writing career from 1899 to 1914, Fassbinder turned out thirty-nine known compositions — twenty-three of them during the first five years. Most were issued in St. Paul and a few in Kansas City and Chicago, where some were also reprinted by the famed Will Rossiter, Chicago publisher of many national hit tunes. It is interesting to note that Fassbinder's first known piece, following the lead of Edmund Braham, was a cakewalk called "Ragalies" (1899) — the last of Minnesota's four known cakewalks. About 1912 Fassbinder moved to a six-acre farm a few miles south of Minneapolis, where he turned to raising tomatoes, although

he continued to take wintertime playing assignments in the cities. In 1918 the family moved to the state of Washington, and there Fassbinder died in 1934 after living for a while in California.³⁹

The fourth popular turn-of-the-century composer already referred to was James J. Latourelle — ironically nicknamed "Little Jimmie" because of what one newspaper kindly called his "exceptionally large physique." He is reported to have weighed at least 450 pounds and maybe an incredible 507 pounds and to have been five feet, eleven inches in height and exactly five feet, eleven inches in circumference. Latourelle was completely a product of St. Paul, having been born in a cottage at Eleventh and Robert streets and educated at Cathedral School and Cretin High School, where at the age of fifteen he made his first public appearance as soloist with the school's orchestra. He studied violin under Professor Emil Straka of St. Paul and soon became proficient in playing all kinds of reed, string, and wind instruments. He was also said to have possessed a clear, resonant tenor voice, and according to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, was a composer of "no mean ability."⁴⁰

"Little Jimmie" was not only a clever musician but also a genial man with a wide circle of friends. When he died suddenly in September, 1908, at the age of thirty, the *St. Paul Dispatch* noted in a lengthy obituary that he was "reputed to have had more friends in the theatrical profession than any other orchestral director before the American stage." An estimated 2,000 mourners followed his funeral cortege to St. Louis Church in downtown St. Paul. Although his musical output was small (only one march and two songs are known), he is remembered for his musical ability, his personality, his size, and one tearful song about early death. Entitled "Pretty Bunch of Doll Rags," with words by Paul Gyllstrom, Sunday editor of the *Minneapolis Times*, this song was published in 1905 and gained a certain popularity in the East.⁴¹

UNLIKE THE previous decade, few individual Minnesota composers stand out in the years from 1910

³⁶*St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 14, 1916, fourth section, p. 12.

³⁷*St. Paul Musician*, October, 1922, p. 9; information from Minnesota Health Department, *Vital Records*; James Taylor Dunn interview with Norton L. Risedorph, St. Paul, August 8, 1974.

³⁸Letter from Donald F. Swanson, the composer's son living in Orinda, California, to James Taylor Dunn, March 27, 1970.

³⁹Letter from Marcus J. Fassbinder, the composer's son living in Bremerton, Washington, to James Taylor Dunn, March 1, 1971.

⁴⁰*St. Paul Dispatch*, September 21, 1908, p. 5 (large physique quote).

⁴¹*St. Paul Dispatch*, September 23, 1908, p. 1.

through 1919. Stanley R. Avery of Minneapolis, a popular church organist and prolific composer of religious and semiclassical numbers, wrote a few popular songs. Among them was "Minneapolis: The Flour City Song," which appeared in 1917. The decade also produced several young composers like Edgar M. Allen, who while a student at the University of Minnesota wrote three musical comedies: "The Prof and the Princess" (1910), "Knowland" (1911), and "The Girl in the Moon" (1911), which together include a total of fifteen published songs that were well received not only by campus audiences but also at public performances in downtown theaters. But Allen did not live up to the opinion of his fellow students that he was "half and half of Richard Mansfield and George Cohan." He left his cello and music in general for newspaper work in California.⁴²

Among other local musical comedies that provided songs enjoying some vogue in this area were "Miss Minnesota," with book and songs by Rudolph F. Brosius and produced at the university in 1914, and a show called "The Mountain Maiden" (1913). The latter had songs by Herbert B. Crooker and a book by Val C. Sherman, brother of the late drama and music critic, John K. Sherman. Pictured on the cover of some of the sheet music from the show was one of its stars, Edith Marie Day, daughter of the previously mentioned Oscar F. G. Day and later to be the toast of Broadway when she popularized "Alice Blue Gown" in the initial production of the hit musical, "Irene." Still later, she became a famous star of musicals in London.

Occasional pathetic ballads continued to appear into the second decade of the new century — songs of neglected children like "Lonely Little Refugee" (1914) and "Mister, Won't You Buy a Paper?" (1910) by Eleanor Langdon of Minneapolis, who also contributed a heart-touching number called "Write a Letter Home to Mother" (1913). More in keeping with the changing spirit of the times were such compositions as "Oh! Sam! I Envy You" (1911) by Harry DeRoe Jones, a Minneapolis piano tuner and one-time newspaper editor at St. Cloud and Chatfield, and "Thup Your Thtuttering, Jimmy" (1919), a St. Paul-published World War I song by Hal Blake Cowles. At one time Cowles undoubtedly called the Twin Cities home, for his name is linked in several songs with that of William H. Kelly, the manager of a St. Paul tailoring company who wrote a number of pieces

that were favorites of the noted Irish singer and stage personality, Fiske O'Hara. Kelly in turn composed a St. Paul Winter Carnival piece, "Let's Go Now" (1917), published in, of all places, Sidney, Ohio. To confound the confusion, three other early Sidney publications with Minnesota overtones were "St. Paul Band Tournament March" (1911) by one L. J. Meyerholtz and "Harley Rosso" whose real name was Harley Ross McClure, and two 1916 songs by Rosso-McClure, "Back to Old St. Paul" and "I Want to Go to Lake Como."

The remainder of the Minnesota output of sheet music in the 1910-1920 decade was overshadowed by one subject — World War I — not by any particular composer or song style. To help arouse support for the war effort, at least three dozen known songs of blatant patriotism rolled off the presses in Minnesota. Although thoroughly uninspired efforts for the most part, many were "packaged" with colorful and emotion-arousing covers — among them being "When Our Shell Fire Pours the Hell Fire into Pots-damn" (1918) by Ernest F. Maetzold, a teacher in Red Wing, and S. N. Ladnorg. As in the rest of the country, Minnesota World War I songs were much higher in quantity than in quality. The lyrics especially seem to have been colored with superpatriotism. For example, Minneapolis investor-broker Monroe K. Fowler offered the following salute to the "Fighting First" in a "march fox trot" published in 1917:

"The Kaiser sure will quake with fear

When Colonel Luce and his men appear.

His knees will shake, his teeth will rattle

When he meets the fighting first in battle.

CHORUS: With a hip hurrah! and a hip hooray!

We'll tie a can to the Kaiser;

We'll pull his fierce mustacheo.

We'll tweek his Cyranobergero."⁴³

Some songs of this era featured better-than-average lyrics. One was "My Welcome's Gone Since I Quit Wearing the Uniform" (1919), with music by J. Edward Woolley and words by Fred C. Gillitt, and a nonwar item published in Hutchinson, Minnesota, in 1916 — "When the Brakeman Calls the Station of Your Own Home Town," by Hans M. Peterson and Wellington S. Clay. The latter's lyrics read in part.

"You may sail the stormy billows and climb the mountains high;

You may watch a great volcano spout its flames against the sky;

But you'll feel more thrills of pleasure, as you take your suitcase down,

When the brakeman calls the station of your own home town."

When World War II came around some twenty years later, song writing for the cause in Minnesota was much reduced from that for World War I (as it was nationally). Which is just as well!

⁴²*The Copher*. University of Minnesota, 1911. p. 30 (Allen quote): letter from Edgar M. Allen, now of Brentwood, California, to James Taylor Dunn, April 14, 1970. For a review of "Knowland," given at the Metropolitan Opera House in downtown Minneapolis, see the *Minneapolis Journal*, June 3, 1911, p. 7.

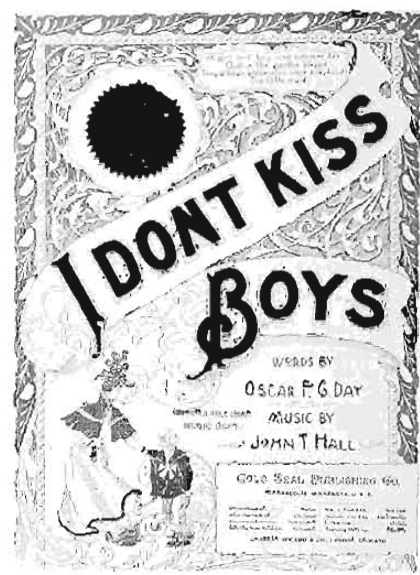
⁴³Referred to is Colonel Erle D. Luce of the First Minnesota Infantry Regiment which became the 135th Infantry Regiment.



THIS SAD song of loneliness was written in 1884 by a traveling agent, Thomas S. Quincey of Minneapolis.



SACCHARINE SONGS about children were favorites of Albert H. Fitz who published this in Minneapolis in 1895. The next year he moved to New York.



TYPICAL of pert, lively songs in vogue in the 1890s and later was this 1896 number by Minneapoltians Oscar F. G. Day and John T. Hall.

THE HEYDAY of music publishing in Minnesota, the period from 1900 to 1929, saw almost 500 known individual pieces come out for the piano-playing and singing public. More or less in line with what was happening in the rest of the country, the real peak occurred from 1910 to 1919. By the mid-1930s the decline in sheet music sales was becoming swift and inevitable, hastened by the increased popularity of the radio and the phonograph. As early as 1915 the Emporium Mercantile Company of St. Paul had added a "new phonograph department," and it was not long before the "crank box" and canned music replaced the piano as a household necessity and Americans became listeners. In their turn the phonograph and radio became status symbols of the parlor.⁴⁴

In the meantime, as Black minstrels prepared the way for ragtime, so ragtime syncopation influenced the newest fads in music — the fox trot and jazz. During the 1920s, in fact, America went dance mad, and Tin Pan Alley had a field day catering to this craze. Sigmund Spaeth has called the 1920s a "rowdy, bawdy, unashamed orgy of irresponsibility," and moralists everywhere complained of degenerate dances, immoral dance halls, and vulgar music, along with the Prohibition era's hip flasks and short skirts.⁴⁵ These were the days of flaming youth and such dances as the uninhibited shimmy, the short-lived Charleston, and the black bottom. Local musicians like William MacPhail, Minneapolis music school director, following the lead of the *Ladies Home Journal* and *Literary Digest*, in 1926 lashed

out at the "atrociously suggestive trash that is at present to be found on the pianos in our homes." He went on to denounce "music that in its rhythmic accents makes its strongest appeal to the hips" — shades of Elvis Presley! All of this, MacPhail concluded, was "jeopardizing the moral fibre of the American home."⁴⁶

Minnesotans published only a few pieces that might fit into this new genre, including the "novelty" fox trot, "The Flapper Girl" (1922), by Minneapolis telephone operator Viola Stensrud, and "Honeymoon Jazz Blues" (1923) by a cab driver named Sam Becker. Toward the end of the decade the frenetic dances gave way to slower and smoother fox trots and cheek-to-cheek dancing. A new step in tune with the times was created by the master of the theater organ, the late Eddie Dunstedter of Minneapolis. His "Radio Glide" (1929), however, apparently never gained more than limited local popularity. It had words by Harold R. ("Hal") Keidel.

In May, 1927, the world was electrified by the sensational nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic by Minnesota air hero Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., of Little Falls. No one person or single event so caught the world's imagination and so spurred the country's song writers to deluge the nation with so much inferior music and so

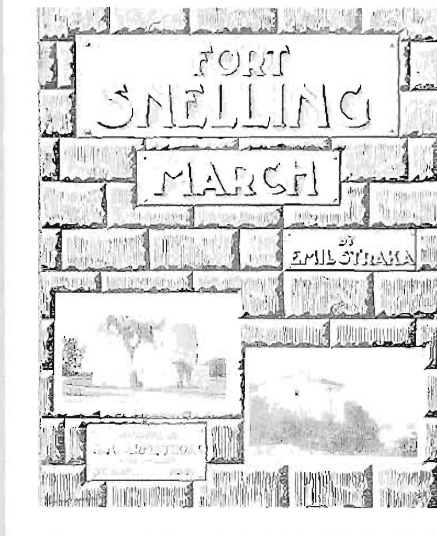
⁴⁴Emporium Enterprise, December 15, 1915, p. 2.

⁴⁵Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music*, 425.

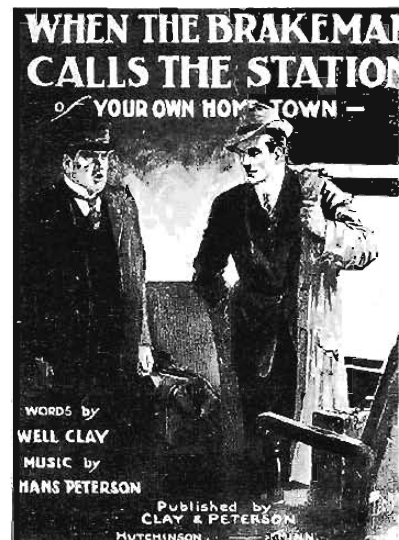
⁴⁶William MacPhail, "Menace of Today's Popular Song," in *Northwest Musical Herald*, November, 1926, p. 17.



A "PATRIOTIC" of the Spanish-American War, this 1899 march is one of the few Edmund Braham pieces without a colorful cover. It is among several numbers in the MHS collection dedicated to newspapers.



FORT SNELLING, like Minnehaha Falls, has inspired several pieces, including this march of 1906 by Emil Straka, popular St. Paul violinist, orchestra leader, and teacher.



A HUTCHINSON publication of 1916 was this "railroad" song by Wellington S. Clay and Hans Peterson. Ted Nelson drew the interesting cover picture.

many foolish lyrics. One Minnesotan who joined in the hysteria was Mrs. T. J. Ryan whose "There's Nothing Else But Lindy in the Air" included the memorable couplet, "Charming Lindy, The air is windy." Barbara Flanagan, *Minneapolis Star* columnist, recently commented on this quickly forgotten St. Paul effort: "Imagine, no pollution, only Lucky Lindy Lindbergh."⁴⁷ Across America there must have been more than a hundred such Lindbergh outpourings. None is remembered today any more than one remembers "The Minneapolis Mill Disaster" song of 1878 or the songs and marches published in Minnesota to honor presidents, presidential hopefuls, and such native sons of different eras as Governor Cushman K. Davis and Senator Hubert H. Humphrey.

Like the 1890s, the 1920s produced two individual Minnesota composers who seem to predominate, at least in output. One of them is the elusive H. Ross McClure ("Harley Rosso"), mentioned earlier. It is known that, from 1916 through 1925, he lived on Grand Avenue in St. Paul and was employed as the energetic and versatile

manager of the sheet music department at the Emporium. He wrote and published his own songs as well as those of such contemporaries as Marie Prescott, Oscar R. Erickson, Herbert F. Griff, and Elmer M. Olson under the imprint of the McClure Music Company, whose exact location in the city is unknown and about which no additional information has been found. McClure's previous publishing endeavors in Sidney, Ohio, are equally mysterious, nor is it certain whether or not he actually lived there. After 1925, which was his busiest publishing year in St. Paul, McClure disappeared from the local scene into oblivion.⁴⁸

The second enigma of the 1920s is Elmer M. Olson of Minneapolis who is listed in the city directories as a student from 1912 to 1914 and then variously as a publisher, composer, and musician. After a stint in the army he returned to become the local manager for Irving Berlin, famed song writer and music publisher. Olson published a number of popular songs printed in Minneapolis by Elmo F. Bickhart and Frank L. Brzinsky. Other Olson songs carried New York or Kansas City imprints, and at least once he collaborated with the famous band leader and radio pioneer, Ben Bernie, in a song called "Kiss Me Goodnight" (1924). After 1925 Elmer Olson, like Ross McClure, disappeared into limbo. They left between them a legacy of some fifty known songs, most of them published in Minnesota.⁴⁹

With the coming of the depression years of the 1930s, America's love affair with sheet music cooled off.

⁴⁷*Minneapolis Star*, May 22, 1970, p. 1B.

⁴⁸*St. Paul City Directory*, 1916-1925: letter from Mrs. Doris G. Stephens, Amos Memorial Public Library of Sidney, Ohio, to James Taylor Dunn, August 25, 1970. The *Emporium Enterprise* contains numerous short pieces written by McClure and occasional references to his activities.

⁴⁹*Minneapolis City Directory*, 1912-1925.

Just as national sheet music sales and offerings fell off drastically as the phonograph record became increasingly popular, so song publishing in Minnesota declined during this period — to only about forty known pieces. After radios became readily available, the sheet music business went into its final tailspin.⁵⁰ There was a brief upward flutter in Minnesota during the 1940s with a few World War II “patriotics,” but by 1970, if for example you wanted a copy of the new song, “Super Mayor,” or the St. Paul-oriented “Most of All,” you could obtain them only on records.⁵¹ The only piece of music published in the state in 1970 that is in the MHS collection is Leonard Fellman’s “Fort Snelling Anniversary March.”

UP TO THIS POINT, only a few of the more prominent Minnesota composers, songs, and instrumentals have been touched on. What is left is the bulk of the sheet music published in the state — the efforts of hundreds of amateurs and professionals who felt compelled to make public their own musical inspirations, often in “vanity” publications they themselves put out. Just how original most of these compositions were, however, is a moot question.

Throughout the history of popular music in America, plagiarism has been the name of the game. In 1903 Herbert H. Taylor, topical versifier, fulminated against this “borrowing” by hit-tune writers:⁵²

“As for the music, you’ll manage that easily;
Get a few songs that were written before.
Swipe ‘em and change ‘em and have ‘em sung
breezily;

Get an arranger, you’ll want nothing more.”
Pop-tune artists unashamedly filched from each other, and the classics also inspired many a popular song like “Yes, We Have No Bananas” (1923), a combination of a number of compositions including part of Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.”⁵³

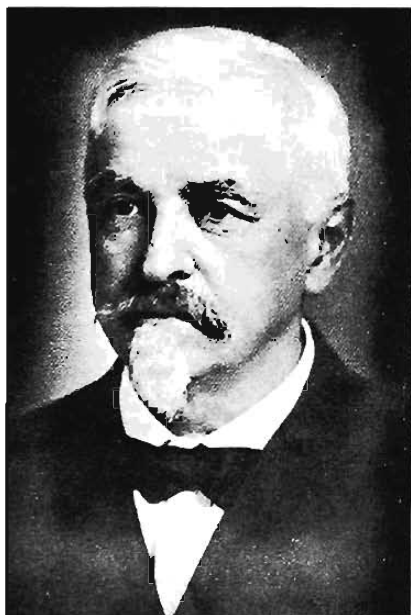
What has been called melodic kleptomania resulted in frequent legal actions from which Minnesota was not exempt. For example, in 1924–1926 Minneapolis cab driver Sam Becker sued Leo Feist, New York publisher of “When Lights Are Low” (1923), for \$100,000. Becker claimed that the writers of the song, Gus Kahn, Ted Koehler, and Ted Fiorito, had infringed on the copyright of his “Valse Allurement” (1922), and to prove it he hired a local trio, with phonograph accompaniment, to play both tunes in court. When Engelbert Roentgen, distinguished cellist and assistant conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, testified that Becker in

⁵⁰Freeman, *The Melodies Linger On*, 113.

⁵¹“Action Line,” in *St. Paul Dispatch*, December 30, 31, 1970, p. 1.

⁵²Quoted in Gilbert, *Lost Chords*, 295.

⁵³Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music*, 437.



ALFRED M. SHUEY, a prolific composer of “serious” music, also wrote popular pieces like “Minne-ha-ha Falls Waltz.”



FREDERICK T. SWANSON, composer of “Minnesota Street Rag” (see cover) and other numbers, is shown (third from left) with unidentified members of the Twin City Mandolin Club he organized.



ALBERT H. FITZ was pictured thus on the cover of his “My Mammy’s Lullaby.”

turn might have taken his melody from one of ten published songs in Joseph E. Howard's not particularly successful musical comedy, "A Broadway Honeymoon" (1913), and that all three songs, plus several other popular tunes, stemmed directly from Carl Maria von Weber's "Invitation to the Dance," the lawsuit was quickly thrown out of court.⁵⁴

Song writers not only stole from each other but they also fractured the English language on their own and plunged headlong into combinations of impossible rhymes. Although bad grammar does not appear to have been as prevalent among Minnesota song writers as it was nationally, lyricist Ross McClure doubled the assault in Marie Prescott's song, "Who Do You Love After All?" (1925), with the line, "one who loves you true." The choice of rhymes, too, frequently left much to be desired (Oscar Day had called such rhymes "monstrosities"). Many Minnesota songs can be found with such questionable combinations as "door" to rhyme with "poor," "home" with "come," "wand" with "hand," "ma" with "saw," "azure" with "pleasure," and "shine and" with "stein-land." With nine out of ten people, critic Sig-

⁵⁴Minneapolis Journal, February 22, 1925, city life section, p. 5, January 8, 1926, p. 23. See also a vertical file folder under "Becker" in Minneapolis Collection, Minneapolis Public Library.

⁵⁵Spaeth, *Facts of Life*, 148.

"LITTLE JIMMIE" (James J. Latourelle), popular St. Paul musician, weighed around 500 pounds.



JOSEPH H. BARRETT was a Twin Cities musician who wrote pieces like "My Minnesota Girl" and "Alabama Hop."

mund Spaeth said of these deviations, "Assonance passes for rhyme."⁵⁵

For the most part, Minnesota music writers fell back on conventional, though varied, ideas, and their lyrics and melodies tended toward the hackneyed. The large majority of Minnesota composers lived in the Twin Cities, were professional musicians who played in orchestras, department stores, or theaters, and taught music privately or in schools. Among the many other occupations represented, salesmen bulked the largest in number followed by teachers and housewives. Also in the song-writing ranks were an embalmer, two cigar makers, a state governor, a truck driver, a dentist, a florist, five grocers, and two ministers. An unusual combination of occupation and subject occurred in the dialect song, "Tenement Tessie" (1929), with words and music by Kenneth B. O'Brien, Minneapolis real estate salesman.

Minnesota itself (where in the words of one song "The people all have money, And live on bread and honey") has been the most popular of all local subjects for songs, accounting for more than fifty titles that contain the state's name and praise almost every imaginable, and always wonderful, attribute. Local pride also puffed various Minnesota cities in song — like "London hasn't got a thing on Red Wing."

What particularly appealed to writers in their nostalgic search for the past was a longing for the childhood

PROLIFIC in his output of popular numbers was William B. Fossbinder (right), whose musical abilities included playing the violin.



ELMER M. OLSON (presumably at the piano) published many songs in Minneapolis and other cities. With him is lyricist Sam Beverly. The picture appeared on the cover of their "Blondy's Melody."



home which in Minnesota as elsewhere was rarely bigger than a cabin or an ivy-covered "dear little old cottage."⁵⁶ At most, this "rustic woodland homestead" might take on the size of a bungalow, but sometimes it was a "dear little shack" usually in not too good repair. Its location was "well hidden among the vines" in the Gopher State, or, if elsewhere, someplace vaguely in Dixie "near de cotton fields" or "out in the West." There was also nostalgia and affection for remembered furniture and antiques: the old rocking chair (mother's, of course) which stood beside the stone fireplace, along with "the cradle she rocked" and the old hanging lamp above the family organ. Outside was a remembered gravel pathway leading to the well, the rustic old mill, and the little bubbling brook. Such cloying lyrics and "ungovernable vapors of nostalgia" make many of the Minnesota songs embarrassingly unusable today.⁵⁷

Over the years, however, no subject has received more continuous and rapturous attention from composers in Minnesota (and everywhere else) than the love of man for woman and vice versa. From the earlier days of discreet and melancholy affection which in Minnesota hark back to the time of Frank Wood, through the years of mother love, blighted romance, and maudlin self-pity, to occasional more matter-of-fact realism after the turn of the century, physical and spiritual love at one time or another has preoccupied many a musician and produced what one critic has called a lot of "lyrical garbage."⁵⁸ Almost fifty songs in the MHS collection are devoted to specific Minnesota girls whose names for the most part were simple ones like Blondy, Trixy, or Minnie. Occasionally, however, we have apostrophes to the likes of Paloma, Itoma, Alean, and Déo.

In songs of unrequited and thwarted love, composers and lyricists ran the gamut of overwhelming self-pity.⁵⁹ Rejection and death, for example, were described with telling effect in Joe Barrett's "Tell Her That I Loved Her" and in Minnie Elliott's previously mentioned song of desertion at the altar. In 1925 Ross McClure published in St. Paul a later example of a song of blighted love typical of the genre — "Gone Are the Days," by Frederick C. Johnson and Leo Friedman, containing the following two lines:

"All around me the skies are shining and the world is bright and gay,
But the world that I have built for you lasted only for a day."

It is interesting to note that Friedman also wrote the all-time favorite, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" (1910), and collaborated with McClure in an amusing and rollicking song, "Animal Fair" (1923), published in St. Paul.

It is doubtful in the long run, though, that Minnesota composers of popular music, after spilling so many tearful notes and so much ink, really hoped to make a financial killing or truly thought their creations would become

overnight hits. Many of them simply had a compulsion to write and, for the most part, to pay for the publication of their efforts out of their own pockets.

One exception, however, the singing commercial, undoubtedly did bring some writers remuneration of sorts. The earliest known Minnesota piece of this type was "The Pleasures and Comforts of Home" (1891), written (ungrammatically) by James Elwin, a Minneapolis cigar maker:

"Sweet solace and comfort only is known
When good taste and good sense in smoking
is shown."

Harold C. Paris' "Little Candy Mandy" (1908) plugged the chocolates of the Paris-Murton Candy Company in Minneapolis, and at about the same time Oliver George's "Great Big Baked Potato" praised the services of the Northern Pacific Railway's dining car department. In 1915 Clarence Roy Cox and Haven Gillespie sang of Washburn-Crosby's Gold Medal flour in the Ohio-published "Eventually — Why Not Now?" Elmer Olson got into the act with a pair of commercials, "Zum-zum-zum" (1914), with words by Oscar F. G. Day, for the Minneapolis Brewing Company and in 1922 wrote a number called "Say It With Diamonds" for White & MacNaught, Minneapolis jewelers.

Harold R. ("Hal") Keidel of Minneapolis, a professional advertising writer and co-composer of several pop-songs with nationally known bandleaders Ted Fiorito and Carleton A. Coon as well as with the ubiquitous Elmer Olson, wrote one of the last known published local singing commercials in behalf of "Your Daily Bread" (1937). How much money Minnesota popular song composers and others made is not known. Many probably made little or nothing. But certainly over the years some of the musicians who remained in the state to practice their profession must have had a certain financial success with songs — or why did the likes of William Fassbinder and Ross McClure continue to write and publish so much music? It would seem that they must have had an appreciative public and a somewhat lucrative market somewhere.

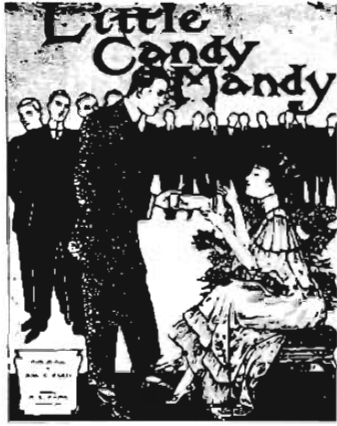
ON THE OTHER HAND, a good number of Minnesota-born writers of popular music left the state, gravitating to the major music-publishing centers of America to practice their profession. One of the best-known and successful of these is Minneapolis-born Sidney Lippman who wrote such song hits as "My Sugar Is So Refined" (1946) and "Too Young" (1951) and also the

⁵⁶ Spaeth, *Facts of Life*, 78.

⁵⁷ Wilder, *American Popular Song*, xxvi.

⁵⁸ Spaeth, *Facts of Life*, 80.

⁵⁹ Spaeth, *Facts of Life*, 49.



AN EARLY commercial song was this one of 1908 extolling Paris chocolates made in Minneapolis.

COMPOSER of "Your Daily Bread" (1937), "Gluek! Gluek! Gluek!" and other songs advertising products was Harold R. ("Hal") Keidel of Minneapolis.



⁶⁰ Philip D. Jordan, "Some Sources of Northwest History: Minnesota Sheet Music," in *Minnesota History*, 26:52-54.

⁶¹ Spaeth, *Facts of Life*, v.

⁶² *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 22, 1869, [p. 4].

⁶³ *Brainerd Weekly Journal*, March 21, 1895, [p. 4].

ALL THE SONGS pictured with this article are in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society or that of Kenneth Carley. The photograph of Frederick T. Swanson and the Mandolin Club on page 138 is through courtesy of Donald F. Swanson; that of James J. Latourrelle on page 139 is from the *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 21, 1908, p. 5; that of Joseph H. Barrett is from *Men of Minnesota*, 493 (St. Paul, 1915); that of William B. Fassbinder is through courtesy of Marcus J. Fassbinder. Other pictures are in the society's collection. Eugene D. Becker made photographic copies of the songs and composers' pictures used with this article.

score for the Broadway musical comedy, "Barefoot Boy With Cheek" (1947), for which St. Paul-born Max Shulman wrote the book based on his own humorous novel of the same title. Lippman finds a place in this account because he and lyricist Sylvia Dee wrote two state-oriented songs for the territorial and statehood centennial celebrations: "Star of the North Star State" (1947) and "They Named It Minnesota" (1958), both of which once had their day in the local sun. Worth mentioning at this point, too, is the fact that John Philip Sousa, without a doubt America's all-time favorite bandleader, was commissioned to write "The Minnesota March" (1927). Although the march never gained wide acceptance or popularity, it is still played at university events.

And so, after approximately a hundred years of rather active sheet music publishing in Minnesota, only a few songs have survived a sudden and often deserved death. Yet even the unsuccessful songs often reflect what has been called "the tastes, aspirations, and folklore of a people,"⁶⁰ providing "a most revealing index to American life in general."⁶¹

Although the Minnesota Historical Society has assembled a sizable collection of Minnesota popular music, there is no telling how many more such songs and instrumentals still lie unknown as they gather dust in attics or basements. It is known from such evidence as advertisements on songs in the MHS collection that the close to 500 musicians represented wrote at least 200 more numbers still not found. And there must be hundreds more by wholly unknown Minnesota composers. Who, for instance, was "A Gentleman of this city," the composer in 1869 of a piano piece called "Kandiyohi Waltz" that was announced in the *Minneapolis Tribune*?⁶² And where is a copy of "The Fatal Ride"? It was written in 1895 by one "Marius" to words by Joseph Vincent Brookes who, according to the *Brainerd Weekly Journal*, was formerly in the restaurant business in that city and locally celebrated as a "tragic poet." The front page of this song describing the notorious murder in Minneapolis of Kitty Ging by Harry Hayward was said to have been decorated "with a very fine picture of the buckskin horse and the carriage that were used when Miss Ging rode to her death." What a find that song would be!⁶³

Then there are the birds of passage who left their mark on the story of popular music in Minnesota and moved on into what appears to be oblivion. What became of Edmund Braham, George Elliott, Elmer M. Olson, and H. Ross McClure?

For the aficionados of popular sheet music everywhere there are always challenges in collecting. In Minnesota, too, there is the ever-present chance that something unknown and unusual will turn up in that next batch of faded, torn, dog-eared sheet music found in some attic. Maybe even a copy of "The Fatal Ride"!



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).