



STEPHEN COLLINS FOSTER  
From a daguerreotype in the Foster Hall Collection



JOSIAH KIRBY LILLY  
Founder of the Foster Hall Collection



## THE RESEARCH WORK OF THE FOSTER HALL COLLECTION\*

BY FLETCHER HODGES, JR.

ON THE campus of the University of Pittsburgh, facing the entrance to Schenley Park, stands the Stephen Collins Foster Memorial. Built in Gothic style, of Indiana limestone, it is designed to harmonize with the soaring lines of the Cathedral of Learning, which rises above it. Charles Z. Klauder of Philadelphia was the architect. The building is a tribute to America's great composer, Stephen Collins Foster, whose songs are so much a part of his country's heritage. He was born in Pittsburgh on July 4, 1826. He spent most of his life in Pittsburgh, wrote most of his world-famous songs in Pittsburgh, and was buried in Pittsburgh's Allegheny Cemetery, in January, 1864. It is appropriate that the city of his birth should dedicate to him one of the world's great memorials to composers.

In his brief life-time, Foster wrote more than two hundred songs, many of which are as widely sung today as when they were first published. His fame rests chiefly on his four great songs of the pre-Civil War South: *Old Folks at Home*, *My Old Kentucky Home*, *Massa's in de Cold Ground* and *Old Black Joe*. He could also compose in lighter vein songs of rollicking good humor, like *Oh! Susanna* and *Camptown Races*. The best of his sentimental ballads recall the charm of an age which is past—his hauntingly beautiful *Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*, his tender *Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming*, and his nostalgic *Beautiful Dreamer*. Other songs still heard today are *Old Dog Tray*, *Old Uncle Ned*, *Nelly was a Lady*, and *Nelly Bly*. His best works so

\*This article is based on an address given at the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association in Norristown, on October 24, 1947.

combine the qualities of poetry, melody, simplicity and sincerity that the resulting songs form a remarkable contribution to the music of our nation and of all mankind. He has been compared to Robert Burns of Scotland and Franz Schubert of Austria, yet there was something completely original about him.

The Stephen Collins Foster Memorial combines two qualities desirable for a memorial—sentiment and usefulness. It is, first of all, a mark of the deep appreciation Pittsburghers feel for Foster's spiritual contributions to American culture. Pittsburghers have long been proud of their city's material accomplishments; they can also take pride in the less evident, but none the less important accomplishments of their writers, musicians, and artists. Of this group Stephen Foster is the best known.

As one of the community buildings in the Civic Center of Pittsburgh, the Stephen Foster Memorial has come to occupy an important place in the educational and cultural life of the city. Eleven years have passed since the Memorial was dedicated on June 2, 1937. Since that time, more than eight hundred thousand people have attended the lectures, plays, concerts, classes and receptions held in the Memorial. The larger part of the building consists of an auditorium seating almost seven hundred. Below it is a large reception room. While the Memorial is owned and operated by the University of Pittsburgh, it is also available for use by community organizations of educational or cultural nature.

The west wing of the Memorial is devoted entirely to Stephen Collins Foster. It houses the Foster Hall Collection, the world's largest assemblage of material and information about the life and works of Stephen Foster. Here are the library of the Foster Hall Collection, an office, and a museum room in which are displayed Foster's music, manuscripts, and personal possessions. The Foster Hall Collection has been located in the Stephen Foster Memorial since June, 1937. Before that time it was in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Foster Hall Collection was founded, not by a Pittsburgher or by a musician, but by an Indianapolis manufacturer, Josiah Kirby Lilly. Through his generosity, his valuable collection was presented in its entirety to the University of Pittsburgh, in order that it may be viewed and studied by the American people. Much of the present remarkable revival of interest in Foster is due to the activities of Mr. Lilly. Through his collecting he has brought

to light hitherto unknown information and has acquired materials that might otherwise have been lost. Through his historical research work, he has compiled a complete record of Foster's many songs and compositions, and has helped to establish his place in American culture. Through his publications he has made important contributions to Foster bibliography. Through his gifts to libraries, schools, musical organizations, radio stations and individuals, Foster music and literature have been widely distributed and new interest in the composer has been aroused.

The American historian, James Ford Rhodes, devoted the first part of his life to business. When he became successful, he retired and spent the rest of his life on his hobby, the study and writing of American history. Mr. Lilly's work with Foster bears a certain resemblance to Rhodes' work in history. For many years Mr. Lilly had been deeply interested in Stephen Foster's music. As a young boy in a small Indiana town, he had fallen in love with Foster's songs when he heard college students singing them in his grandparents' home. During his long and active business life, he keenly enjoyed hearing Foster's music sung or played. But it was not until 1930, when he was about to retire from business, that he became actively interested in the collecting of material relating to Foster. Some time that year, he happened to hear played a set of excellent phonographic recordings of Foster's music. It occurred to him that it might be an interesting hobby to collect the early editions of these songs he loved so well. Acting upon the advice of one of his sons, a bibliophile, Mr. Lilly wrote to several dealers in Americana, from whom he acquired a few first editions and other early editions of Foster's songs. And then, on January 5, 1931, occurred an event which caused him to become a serious collector of Fosteriana, and to build up the most important collection in existence. On that day he acquired from a Boston dealer several hundred early editions of Foster music, including nearly one hundred first editions. He realized that he now had the most important collection of the music of America's great melodist that had yet been brought together. Yet it was obvious that it was far from complete. He had less than half the possible first editions. There must be many hundreds—possibly thousands—of early editions. His collection so far possessed no Foster manuscripts, no letters, none of Stephen's personal possessions, no pictures, no bibliography on the subject. The

very incompleteness of his work so far was a challenge! He would build up his collection, fill in the vacancies, learn all he could about the man and his music, work carefully and accurately, and make his hobby a distinct contribution to American music and American history. He possessed, in the suburbs of Indianapolis, a small granite building used as a library and music hall. He placed his collection in this building, which was then named Foster Hall. The collection itself soon became known as the Foster Hall Collection.

The situation confronting a Foster collector in January, 1931, was one to delight the heart of a person who welcomed the presentation of problems both difficult and interesting. No comprehensive collection of Fosteriana existed. A few individuals, here and there, possessed small collections, but almost without exception these collections consisted only of sheet music. Not many of Stephen's rare and important letters and manuscripts had yet found their way into collections. The music division of the Library of Congress contained a valuable file of many of the first editions of Foster's works; it contained some letters, documents, royalty statements, Foster holographs, and other source material. The library's material could serve as a guide, to enable other collectors to plan their own work, but it was far from complete. In Foster's day copyrights were entered in the federal district courts, rather than in the copyright office of the Library of Congress, as they are today. This procedure was responsible for many gaps in the library's present records. There was no up-to-date check list of Foster's works. In 1915 the Library of Congress had issued a check list, but the discovery of new material had rendered it obsolete. There was no accurate knowledge of the exact number of works produced by Stephen Foster in the score of years he devoted to composition. Writers on the subject varied widely in their estimates: some stated as low as one hundred songs and compositions, others generously credited Stephen with a thousand.

Although there was a surprisingly large literature on the subject, a large proportion of it was of no value to the student. The greater part of it—newspaper and magazine articles—was either patently inaccurate or mere repetition of former publications, and therefore was almost worthless. But occasionally the research worker came upon material that was of genuine importance. Morison Foster's *Biography* contained a brief but interesting account

of his brother's life, and included about three quarters of Stephen's songs and compositions, many of which might otherwise have been lost. The biographical section of Morrison's book must be considered a series of biographical anecdotes, rather than a biography. Its importance lies as much in its presentation of the personality of the composer, as in its factual statements. Milligan's *Foster*<sup>1</sup> was an excellent pioneer study, keenly appreciative of Foster's place in American music. But it was written with the aid of comparatively little source material, and was now out of date. Through this maze of literature, some of it important, much of it unimportant, the student had to feel his way, separating the accurate from the inaccurate and attempting to see the true Foster behind the legends that were in danger of obscuring the man himself.

Mr. Lilly organized the work of solving his collecting problems in businesslike fashion. Not long after the collection was founded, he realized that his interest would soon pass the stage of a one-man hobby, and that assistance would be necessary. New acquisitions were accumulating, source material awaited study, certain problems requiring a technical knowledge of music had arisen. The specialized aid he needed was found in the person of Walter R. Whittlesey, an able research worker and musicologist of Washington, D. C., for thirty-five years a member of the staff of the music division of the Library of Congress. As the collection grew in size, other members were added to the Foster Hall staff, in both Indianapolis and Washington. The work was divided into the classifications of acquiring, research, cataloguing, mounting, and correspondence. At one time, eleven persons were engaged in carrying on the work.

Many others, not directly associated with Foster Hall, assisted in the building up of the collection. Dealers in books and music who had Foster material for sale or exchange, fellow-collectors, and all persons interested in Stephen Foster were invited to communicate with Foster Hall. For their benefit an informal magazine, entitled *Foster Hall Bulletin*, was published and distributed gratuitously. This bulletin contained news of interest to the Foster collector: the discovery of new songs, reprints of Foster letters, and the establishment of memorials to the composer. Each issue

<sup>1</sup> Harold V. Milligan, *Stephen Collins Foster, a Biography of America's Folk-Song Composer* (New York, c1920).

contained a list of the songs still needed by the Foster Hall Collection, and the prices offered for them. The relatives of Stephen Foster aided in the work. Mrs. Jessie W. Rose of Pittsburgh, granddaughter of the composer, and Mrs. Evelyn Foster Morneweck of Detroit, daughter of his brother, Morrison Foster, rendered especially valuable service. Original letters and manuscripts, personal possessions of Foster, and other source material not obtainable elsewhere were added to the collection through their co-operation. Moreover, musicians, librarians, curators, students of Americana, sent information and material. Letters were received from all parts of the United States, from Canada and Great Britain, and material poured in from every quarter and in every form.

The result, after seventeen years of work, is a comprehensive collection of more than ten thousand separate items, carefully catalogued and prepared for preservation and use, including: original manuscripts; facsimiles of manuscripts in other collections; first, early, and modern editions of Foster's music; Foster's own possessions; books relating to the composer in whole or in part; songbooks containing his music; magazine and newspaper articles; pictures and portraits; phonograph records; broadsides; and miscellaneous Fosteriana.

One of the most fascinating of the Foster Hall studies has been the identification of original works of the composer, as distinguished from adaptations of his melodies. The number of *original* published songs and compositions discovered so far is 201. In addition to this number, there are over a hundred arrangements and translations which are not classified as original works. The determination of these figures has been a more complicated process than the mere counting of titles. It was early discovered that many of the songs credited to Foster were not actually original compositions. For example, a revival hymn, under the title of *I Love Him*, has been widely published. Foster was credited as the composer. A brief inspection shows that the air is none other than his *Old Black Joe*. Another hymn, *There's a Land of Bliss*, makes use of his *Old Uncle Ned*. A tribute to George Washington, *Mount Vernon Bells*, proves to be set to the air of Stephen's *Massa's in de Cold Ground*. A temperance songster contains *Then and Now*, to be sung to *My Old Kentucky Home*.

In all his Foster work, both in Indianapolis under his direct leadership, and in Pittsburgh under his continued sponsorship, Mr.

Lilly was determined that the Foster Hall Collection should be more than a mere museum of Foster relics. He had two other purposes in mind. First of all, he sought to keep alive the *music* of Stephen Foster. Then he wished to perpetuate the memory of the man himself, and have his contributions recognized. The Foster Hall publications were printed and distributed to serve these purposes.

The music of Stephen Foster has been edited by the Foster Hall staff for many uses. The most important was entitled *Foster Hall Reproductions of the Songs, Compositions and Arrangements by Stephen Collins Foster*. This work is a set of facsimiles of the first (or earliest obtainable) editions of Foster's complete works. Since it serves as an accurate check list, it is a valuable aid to the collector who wishes to know the "points" determining the first edition of a Foster song. One thousand sets of the *Reproductions* were published and presented by Mr. Lilly to libraries throughout the United States and Great Britain.

*Songs of Stephen Foster*, a collection of more than forty of the composer's best songs, is intended primarily for use in schools. Originally it was published by Mr. Lilly in Indianapolis, but a new edition is published annually by the University of Pittsburgh Press. This book has been widely distributed, not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Mr. Lilly felt that Foster's simple melodies provided children with a favorable introduction to the study of music.

Under Mr. Lilly's sponsorship, a medley of Foster melodies for concert band was prepared by Luis Guzman of the United States Marine Band. This work was presented to American high school and college bands. With the co-operation of the Pan-American Union, the medley was presented to bands throughout Latin America. With the assistance of the State Department, the medley was presented to European bands. In addition to his band arrangement, Mr. Guzman made Foster arrangements for orchestra and for chorus.

Phonograph recordings of Foster melodies were made under Mr. Lilly's sponsorship, and were presented to libraries, individuals, and radio stations.

The Foster Hall staff has participated in the preparation of several biographies of the composer. One of the first Foster Hall



projects was the republication of Morrison Foster's biography of his brother Stephen. In 1934, John Tasker Howard's definitive biography, *Stephen Foster, America's Troubadour*, was published. Mr. Howard spent many months in Indianapolis, using the material in the Foster Hall Collection in preparing his book.

Research in the Foster genealogy brought the Foster Hall staff in close touch with many of the Foster relatives, including his daughter, Marion Foster Welch. Until Mrs. Welch died in 1935, she provided a link between her father and the present. To the best of our knowledge, there is no one alive today who knew Foster personally. If such a person now exists, Foster Hall's research work has not yet located him. Since Stephen Foster died 84 years ago, the possibility of any of his acquaintances being alive today is extremely small.

Some years ago, the writer of this article interviewed an elderly Confederate veteran in Louisville who claimed to have known Foster in that city. The old soldier's mind was not clear. During the course of the conversation he stated that he might have known Foster in Cincinnati, rather than Louisville—but he was not sure of the exact time or circumstances. If the veteran was not completely confused, any acquaintance between the two must have taken place in Cincinnati. The connection between Foster and Louisville is very slight.

Such incidents have helped to make the Foster Hall staff sceptical about occasional reports received that a "personal friend" of Stephen Foster is still alive. The staff always investigates reports of this kind, but they prove to be based either on false stories or the hazy memories of well-meaning people whose ages are approaching four score and ten.

Had Mr. Lilly's Foster work been started earlier, he would have had the privilege of meeting the poet, George Cooper, one of the close friends of Stephen's last years, about which so little is known. Cooper died in 1927, some four years before the founding of the Foster Hall Collection, taking with him to the grave all that he knew about Stephen. I have talked to a son and daughter of George Cooper, and have studied some of his notebooks, but have found that with the exception of one interview with Harold Vincent Milligan, Cooper left on record little trace of his friendship with America's great melodist.

Interest in the genealogical background of Stephen Foster, and in the activities of his family, brought about the publication of *Chronicles of Stephen Foster's Family*, by his niece, Evelyn Foster Morneweck of Detroit. This two-volume work was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 1944.

Foster Hall has always been a non-commercial institution. No charges are made for its services to schools, radio stations, or motion picture studios. (The motion picture *Swanee River*, produced in 1939, which was based on Stephen Foster's life, made use of material from the Foster Hall Collection.) Writers and students are welcome, and assistance is given to them in the preparation of articles, books, or theses.

Protecting libraries and other collectors against fraud is another Foster Hall service. Occasionally spurious Foster music appears on the market. Forged Foster manuscripts and letters periodically make their appearance. The Foster Hall staff has issued warnings about such frauds, and has helped to trace certain forgeries to their source.

Following the trail of Foster research has been fascinating work, which has taken Foster Hall staff members to many parts of the country. Hunting copyright records in the files of the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C.; attending a German Saengerfest in St. Louis which presented Foster melodies; seeing the preview of a new Foster motion picture in Hollywood—these are typical experiences of our research workers.

In an effort to interpret Stephen Foster as a living composer, rather than as a legendary figure rapidly becoming obscured by the mists of time, representatives of Foster Hall have studied his life through visiting the various localities associated with the composer's career. This has involved determining the sites of houses where the composer lived or offices where he worked, studying source material in the local libraries, and talking to citizens whose ancestors might have known Foster or who had heard legends about him. Separating fact from legend is often a difficult task, and it is occasionally impossible. It can be definitely proved, for example, that the Florida tradition stating that Stephen Foster composed *Old Folks at Home* on the banks of that state's famous stream, the Suwannee River, is absolutely without foundation. On the other hand, the legends which link Foster and his *My Old*

*Kentucky Home* with Bardstown, Kentucky, can neither be definitely proved nor disproved. No satisfactory solution to the mystery of this part of Foster's life has yet been found, and at this late date it seems unlikely that it ever will be found.

The several biographical controversies concerning Foster's life begin with his birthplace in Pittsburgh and follow him to his very grave. His birthplace is no longer in existence. The cottage now exhibited in Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan, as "The Birthplace of Stephen Foster" was purchased in Pittsburgh, after insufficient research work, and was moved to Greenfield Village as an important Foster relic. It now can be stated definitely that this is *not* the birthplace of Stephen Foster. The Greenfield Village house was built about 1828, two years after Foster's birth. The Foster birthplace, known as the "White Cottage," was torn down in 1865, and replaced by a brick house, which is still standing. Since 1914 the City of Pittsburgh has maintained this house as the Stephen Foster Memorial Home, and since it stands on the exact site of the "White Cottage," at 3600 Penn Avenue, it is the closest approach to Foster's birthplace. Ironically enough, Pittsburgh has shamefully neglected this memorial in recent years, and is even now preparing to abandon it, while the spurious birthplace in Greenfield Village is given the best of care.

The Foster family moved often. Following their footsteps from Pittsburgh to Allegheny City, to Youngstown, Ohio, and back again is difficult and confusing. This frequent change of residence characterized both Stephen's school days and his married life.

During 1840 and 1841, Stephen Foster attended two schools in Bradford County, Pennsylvania—Athens Academy at Athens and Towanda Academy at Towanda. This beautiful region of the Commonwealth seems to have inspired Stephen Foster's musical genius. It was here, as a boy of fourteen, that he wrote his first composition. Just below Athens the Chemung River flows into the Susquehanna. This lovely spot is known as Tioga Point. In honor of it, Stephen composed his *Tioga Waltz*, for flutes, which was performed by himself and school friends, at the Athens commencement in April, 1841.

There is a great deal of Foster tradition in Bradford County, and some source material. The Foster student who makes use of the records in the Tioga Point Museum in Athens and the Brad-

ford County Historical Society in Towanda will find that his efforts are well repaid.

The Foster trail next takes us to Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, where Stephen's brief and unhappy college career took place. For approximately a week in the summer of 1841, he attended Jefferson College, before homesickness and lack of stability brought him back to Pittsburgh. The old college building is still standing, but the institution itself is no longer at Canonsburg. Jefferson later was united with Washington College, a few miles away, to form the present Washington and Jefferson College.

Cincinnati, where Foster lived from 1846 to 1850, has much basis for her claim that the happiest and most formative years of his life were those spent in that city. It was a vigorous, growing young city of the West, combining the streams of several American cultures with a strong German element. Cincinnati was interested in business; she was also interested in art and music. Stephen's genius blossomed in such an environment, and it was there that he began to write songs in earnest.

He was employed by a firm of steamboat agents whose office was on the Ohio River levee. Parts of this section of Cincinnati have not changed greatly; if the visitor turns his back on the Cincinnati of the automobile and the locomotive, and gazes across the broad Ohio, he can visualize the Queen City of the West as it was in the days of its greatest glory, when Stephen Foster lived there and composed his songs.

Through the research and the publications of Dr. Raymond Walters, President of the University of Cincinnati, we have learned much about Foster's years in that city. Cincinnati's interest in the composer is reflected in the establishment of several memorials to Foster.

The closing years of Foster's life were spent in New York City. Much has been written about the period 1860-1864, but most of it is based on the lurid stories of irresponsible journalists, more interested in the spectacular than the factual. Foster Hall staff workers have searched the records of Bellevue Hospital, where Foster died on January 13, 1864, and the city records. These searches have disclosed entries concerning his tragic accident and the coroner's inquest which followed. There is little other source material covering the tragic years in which Foster knew loneliness, poverty, and despair.

The Foster student can wander along the Bowery in the sordid region bordering Chinatown and can find the site of the New England Hotel at the corner of the Bowery and Bayard Street, where Stephen was living when he was mortally injured in a fall. This site is not many miles from the Hall of Fame where, seventy-seven years later, Stephen was to receive posthumous honors.

The tradition that Stephen Foster was buried in a potter's field in New York City is absolutely without foundation. He is buried in Allegheny Cemetery, Pittsburgh, in the Foster family lot. For years this spot has been a shrine, and many memorial programs have taken place here.

One phase of the Foster subject which has given the staff much satisfaction is the study of memorials and tributes to the composer. For half a century following his death, Foster's name was almost forgotten, even though his songs became increasingly popular. In recent years his significance has been appreciated, and there has been a Foster renaissance. One result of this renaissance has been the establishment of many Foster memorials throughout the nation. These memorials have varied greatly in size, form, and use. An auditorium, an amphitheatre, several schools, five bridges, two hotels, a Liberty ship which saw war service, a Mississippi River steamboat, a Pullman car, a park, a street, and a highway all bear the name of Stephen Collins Foster. Many musical organizations are named after him. There are Foster monuments, statues, busts, and plaques. There is a Stephen Foster stamp and a Stephen Foster half-dollar. There are several varieties of flowers named for him.

The Foster Hall staff has not only collected all available information about such memorials; it has occasionally assisted in their establishment. Mr. Lilly presented Foster memorials to Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, and New York, and his staff took part in the dedication of others.

No more thrilling event stirred the hearts of admirers of Stephen Foster than his election to the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, on the campus of New York University, in November, 1940. The Foster Hall staff organized a letter-writing campaign on behalf of Stephen Foster early in 1940. Hundreds of people wrote to the American citizens serving as electors, urging them to consider Foster's contributions to his country's cultural heritage, when

casting their votes. When the results of the election were announced, Stephen Foster was the only successful candidate in the field of 141 nominated earlier in the year.

Dedication exercises were held at New York University, on May 27, 1941. A bronze bust of Foster, the work of the Philadelphia sculptor, Walker Hancock, was unveiled by Mrs. Jessie W. Rose of Pittsburgh, Stephen Foster's granddaughter. Mr. Lilly, the chief donor of the bust, formally presented it to the Hall of Fame.

The growth of the Foster Hall Collection, once quite rapid, is now slow and steady. The phase of acquisition is virtually complete. Occasionally hitherto unknown source material is discovered and purchased, but such discoveries have become exceedingly rare. A year has elapsed since the last important acquisition. At that time, a set of Foster material, consisting of a Foster manuscript, letter, pictures and other documents was found in Syracuse, New York. Certain evidence indicated that this set had once been the property of George Cooper, but nothing was known of its history. The very rarity of such discoveries at present adds to their great interest.

Writing, editing, publishing and distributing material about Stephen Foster, based on the sources in the Foster Hall Collection, are the chief activities of the Foster Hall staff at present. Such activities fulfill Mr. Lilly's belief that the collection should be more than a mere museum of Foster relics. It should keep alive Foster's music and honor the composer of the songs.

The managing and scheduling of the Memorial's auditorium and social room occupy a large proportion of the time of the staff. The University of Pittsburgh feels that an intensive use of the memorial to Stephen Foster is one way of keeping his memory green. A structure of stone and steel can provide a worthy memorial to a man. But in Stephen Foster's case, his own simple, sincere melodies provide his own memorial; he will live on in the hearts of the American people.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE—Josiah Kirby Lilly, beloved founder of the Foster Hall Collection, died in Indianapolis on February 8, 1948. He was a large-souled man, of remarkable accomplishments in several fields of endeavor.