HENRY KLEBER, EARLY PITTSBURGH MUSICIAN

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Our historians have too often neglected the many musicians and musically inclined men and women of Pittsburgh for other aspects of the developing metropolis. Perhaps one of the chief reasons for the neglect has been the thunder of our hammers and the din of trade which have overwhelmed the trembling, modest lisings of the Muses, for it is true that Apollo himself would scarcely have swept his lyre within the acoustic limits of our giant mills. But Pittsburgh has always had its men and women who made music, and these men and women have time and again aided the city. Through their innumerable musical concerts and soirées they have provided needed means for the upkeep of many charitable institutions, for the assistance of persons in distress, and for the support of our churches and other religious institutions. The history of Pittsburgh abounds in such examples. And these same men and women may have been more influential in the material advancement of Pittsburgh than at first appears. Through associations in music have come acquaintanceships, friendships, and understandings which have effected changes in the lives of the most astute and the most humble among our citizens. The so-called power of music is not alone in the immediate emotional uplift of a performance.

Henry Kleber, as a vocalist, organist, teacher, composer, publisher, conductor, business man, and director of musical affairs, was a part of Pittsburgh’s music, for sixty-five years, and for most of these years he was an active participant in the city’s musical life. This gentleman came from Darmstadt, Duchy of Hesse, Germany, where he was born on May 4, probably in the year 1816. However, we should note here that the years

1 Read at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on its annual “University of Pittsburgh Night,” May 26, 1942. Mr. Baynham is principal of the elementary schools in Crafton, Pennsylvania, and his article is drawn from a study of “Pittsburgh Music, 1758–1858,” made by him as a candidate for the doctor’s degree at the University of Pittsburgh.—Ed.

2 Frank J. Kleber to the author, November 20, 1941; C. C. Mellor’s “Copies of Newspaper Articles,” Introduction, 3; Daily Post (Pittsburgh), February 21, 1897; Musical Courier (New York), February 24, 1897.
1811 and 1818 have also been given as the time of his birth. He was a direct descendant, it is claimed, of the noted General Jean Baptiste Kléber who was abandoned by Napoleon in the Egyptian campaign and assassinated in 1800. Henry Kleber’s boyhood was spent in Germany, and he came to Pittsburgh with his father, mother, and brother almost certainly in 1832. Three years have been given for his arrival, 1830, 1831, and 1832, but it appears that the father first came to America in 1830, and was here alone for about a year, after which he returned to Germany and brought his family over in 1832.

The new musical setting in which sixteen-year-old Henry found himself in 1832 was different from that which he had left in Germany—but it was not so unmusical as some of us today may think. By 1832, the city had already had an interesting musical development, and we should like to do justice to it here if it were possible to compress such an account into a short paper. It cannot be done; but for a better understanding of the work of Henry Kleber and for the sake of trying to correct some false impressions concerning the early music of Pittsburgh, we should say something. Some of our best-informed musicians within recent years have expressed the belief that Pittsburgh had little of musical consequence before the 1840’s, that the first musical band west of the Allegheny Mountains was organized in Pittsburgh about 1840, and that the music of Pittsburgh before 1840 was largely in the hands of men of Germanic descent. None of these assumptions appears true. Pittsburgh had heard Bach, Handel, and Mozart rendered by its own musicians as early at least as 1807, and in the 1830’s it had four active major choral organizations devoted to sacred music, performing such music as that of Webbe, Ros-

3 Macmillan’s Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 951; Harvey Gaul, “Henry Kleber, Pioneer in Music,” as told by the late Dr. Frank L. Todd and Pauline Kleber Spring, in Pittsburgh Musical Forecast, July, 1936. The data for the latter article was originally prepared by Louis P. Kleber, according to a letter written by him to the author on July 25, 1941. He said: “My cousin, Mrs. Ida Kleber Todd, requested me at that time [1936] to prepare the data for that article. Her husband, Doctor F. L. Todd, then passed it on to Mr. Gaul. I, being the oldest of the children of my Uncle Henry and my father Augustus Kleber, and having been associated with them in business for forty years, was in a position to get first-hand information.”


5 Fortescue Cuming, Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country, 66 (Pittsburgh, 1810).
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sini, Haydn, Pergolesi, Cherubini, and Beethoven, and giving an occasional oratorio. Music was taken seriously in the 1830's in Pittsburgh, and one may even say that the latter half of the thirties witnessed the climax of a musical period in the city. Almost immediately thereafter it passed through a transition to emerge with a much broader appearance than before. Henry Kleber had a part in the transition, and it has been both stoutly claimed and just as strongly denied that he was responsible for a new musical style which came to the city.

The promising outlook for music in Pittsburgh during 1831 may have helped the elder Kleber decide upon this city as the future home for his family. His son Henry was already a fair pianist, and one of the young musician's first positions after coming to Pittsburgh was in the music store of Smith and Mellor on Fifth Street, where he played pianos for prospective customers. 6 It is claimed that he had studied with one Franz in Germany, but whether this refers to the famous Robert Franz, who was but one year older than Henry, is uncertain. 7 In 1835, Henry became a teacher in the Western Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies, the elite young ladies' school of Pittsburgh, which was under the superintendency of the Reverend Doctor Lacey and which was located about where today Webster Avenue crosses Roberts Street. 8 For a time, also, he taught in a seminary located near where the town of Woodville now stands. 9 By 1836, he was participating in concerts, and thenceforth, for over twenty years, he increased and extended his musical activities until they included almost every phase of music and he had become one of the foremost figures in the musical life of Pittsburgh.

Before Henry Kleber was twenty-three years of age he began to compose music. One of his compositions, a song with piano accompaniment, was entered for copyright at the United States copyright office on February 27, 1839, and in the same year he organized the musical band which has been called the first band west of the Allegheny Mountains. 10 This group was not the first musical band organized in Pittsburgh, but it may have been the first composed entirely of brass instruments. This organiza-

6 Musical Courier, February 24, 1897; biography of John H. Mellor, 78.
7 Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 951.
8 Musical Courier, February 24, 1897; Harris' Pittsburgh Business Directory, 1837, advertising section; Leland D. Baldwin, Pittsburgh, the Story of a City, 237, 386 (Pittsburgh, 1938).
9 Thurston, Allegheny County's Hundred Years, 306.
10 Daily Post, February 21, 1897; Musical Forecast, July, 1936. William Evens' "Scrapbook," 1:136 (1840), states that the band was organized the previous year.
tion had an interesting existence. In the beginning it was nurtured by Henry Kleber, who also arranged much of its music. In April, 1840, it played at the first concert of the Allegheny Sacred Music Society, with the members seated near the windows and the instruments pointed out the windows to reduce the overwhelming tones to a minimum. After about fourteen years, Kleber turned the band over to Nicholas Young, with whom he occasionally collaborated in music, and the organization became the "celebrated Young's Brass Band," or the "Band of the Duquesne Greys." In 1861, the band, under George Toerge, marched off to war with the Duquesne Greys and a group of "three-months men." Then followed a year in which the organization appears to have been disbanded, but it was reorganized by the Toerge brothers, and with augmentation became the celebrated Great Western Band. Later it came into the hands of Charles and John Gernert, and it is said to have been the organization from which the Pittsburgh Symphony developed.

In 1840, Henry Kleber became organist in St. Paul's Cathedral, a position he held for ten or thirteen years, and within the next five years it is highly probable that he had Stephen Collins Foster as one of his pupils. About this same time he became acquainted with one Signor U. Giamboni, who had once been a pupil of Rossini in France and who possessed an excellent baritone voice. From him Kleber received some excellent voice training, and the voices of the two men, the tenor of Kleber and the baritone of Giamboni, were frequently blended at public and private concerts.

For the opening of the first Kleber music store, several dates have been given, and the speaker has searched diligently to establish the true date. The store, almost certainly, was opened in the furniture wareroom of J. W. Woodwell and Company, 83 Third Street (now Third Avenue), in the early fall of 1846, possibly late in September. It offered for sale music, small musical instruments, and Nunns and Clark pianos for which

11 Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, December 30, 1853; Thurston, Allegheny County’s Hundred Years, 306.
12 Pittsburgh Leader, September 16, 1888; Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 951; Frank J. Kleber, letter, November 20, 1941; Musical Forecast, July, 1936; John Tasker Howard, Stephen Foster, America’s Troubadour, 107 (New York, 1934); Mellor, “Copies of Newspaper Articles,” Introduction, 2. Giamboni, a former Italian opera singer, had somehow drifted to Pittsburgh where he was earning his living by making chocolate.
13 Many dates are given for the opening of the first store—1841, 1843–1845, 1845, 1846, and 1848. Of these, 1845 is named more times than any other, but 1846 appears to have the strongest support. The earliest newspaper reference to the Kleber store is one
Henry Kleber was then sole agent in Pittsburgh. Kleber was present at his store for only two hours each day during 1846, but by 1848 he had become an annoying competitor of John H. Mellor. And in that year occurred the first clash of the two business rivals. This was interestingly aired in the newspapers to the possible business advantage of both stores, and from this dispute and from others that followed, the heads of both firms became irreconcilable business enemies. Kleber, it appears, considered controversy a legitimate means of publicity.

The year 1850 witnessed three events of some importance in the life of Henry Kleber. He became a charter member of the later celebrated Froshinn Society. He moved his store from Woodwell's to 101 Third Street, and he was arrested for flogging a music critic. The last of these attracted wide attention, and it excited considerable newspaper comment in which Kleber was both commended and condemned for his violent action. The flogging came about in the following manner: on March 12, Henry Kleber sang at the concert of a visiting artist, Madame Bornstein-Ruth, in Wilkins Hall, and in the audience was one John C. Schaad, a music critic for the *West Pennsylvania Staats-zeitung*. Schaad wrote a review of the performance, but the *Staats-zeitung* did not print some portions of the review because they were highly offensive to Kleber. However, about one week later, the entire review was printed by the *Pittsburgh Tribune*. Among the most offensive portions was one which said that Mr. Kleber had presented a "presumptuous appearance and a kind of self admiration" during the performance which was unbecoming even to an artist. At the time the review appeared in the *Tribune*, it was claimed by Kleber that the author, Mr. Schaad, was going about Pittsburgh boasting of his intention to write the Kleber firm out of business and to ruin Kleber.

All this incensed Henry Kleber, his brother Augustus, and their friends

found in the *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser* of October 6, 1846, and that year is also given by C. C. Mellor in his life of John H. Mellor, 78, and in the introduction to his "Copies of Newspaper Articles," 3.

14 *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, October 22, 1846.
17 So far as is known, no entire issue of this newspaper exists today, and even its name has been almost forgotten. It was called the *Pittsburgh Evening Tribune and Express*.
very much, and Henry and Augustus determined to avenge themselves. Each procured a cowhide whip and waited for an opportunity to use it upon Schaad. Henry met Schaad at the corner of Fourth and Wood Streets on March 19 and struck him several times; and on the same day, but without knowing of the former attack, Augustus met him on Market Street and struck him again. Henry and Augustus were both arrested the same day, and later were fined one hundred dollars each by Judge McClure. Schaad, we should say, later became librarian of the Young Men's Library and Mechanics Institute which eventually became the Pittsburgh Library.

In 1853, Henry Kleber became an active member of the Pittsburgh Philharmonic Society, a large and ambitious organization founded in 1852, and for a time he served as its accompanist. In 1853, also, he became organist in the Third Presbyterian Church on Third Street. In 1854, he and Stephen Collins Foster were the foremost composers in Pittsburgh. The two men must have come to know each other very well during the first half of the 1850's. In these years both produced some of their most popular compositions, each dedicated a polka to the other, and both wrote music for the poems of a fellow-townsmen, Charles P. Shiras. During these years, also, the only translation of a foreign-language lyric by Stephen Collins Foster was published with music arranged by "H.K." The biographer of Foster, John Tasker Howard, says that the "H.K." undoubtedly meant Henry Kleber.

Henry Kleber was ten years older than Stephen Collins Foster (born July 4, 1826), and although the world-famous composer may have needed no aid in creating his melodies, he seems to have respected the opinions of Kleber in preparing his manuscripts for publication. The wording of Old Folks at Home is said to have been changed slightly

18 Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, January 12, 1854.
19 Minutes of the Pittsburgh Philharmonic Society, March 1, 1853; Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, June 19, 1854; Daily Post, June 19, 1854; Pittsburgh Leader, September 16, 1888; Frank J. Kleber, letter, November 20, 1941; Musical Forecast, July, 1936.
20 Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, July 13, 1851, and issues 1852-1854, especially August 7 and September 13, 1852, November 7, 1853; Daily Post, May 21, 1850, and issues 1852-1854; Howard, Stephen Foster, chap. 8, app. 2. In this period Kleber produced the Rainbow Schottische, Coral Schottische, Hamburg Polka, Moonlight Mazurka, and others that had a wide sale, especially in later years; from Foster came Old Folks at Home, Masta's in de Cold Ground, My Old Kentucky Home, Old Dog Tray, Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair, and others.
21 Pages 189, 398.
through Mr. Kleber's advice, and *Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming* appears to have received Kleber's suggestions. It is highly probable that in the Kleber store on Third Street Henry Kleber played and sang with Foster many of the latter's earlier compositions before they were sent to the publisher.\(^22\)

In the summer of 1855, Augustus Kleber entered the Kleber firm as a partner. The firm then became H. Kleber and Brother, and its location was changed to 53 Fifth Street. The following year, the firm acquired the sole agency in Pittsburgh for the Steinway piano and introduced that instrument to this city. Henry Kleber boasted in later years that he had brought the first piano of this make over the mountains in a covered wagon. The first public use of a Steinway piano in the city seems to have been at a concert of Henry Kleber and Giamboni in Lafayette Hall on December 30, 1856. The Steinway agency was to prove very lucrative for the Kleber brothers.\(^23\)

In 1864, the Kleber firm purchased a store on Wood Street, just above Fifth Street, on property now occupied by the Farmers Deposit National Bank. In the same year Henry Kleber directed the music and sang at the funeral service of his old friend Stephen Collins Foster in Trinity Episcopal Church.\(^24\)

Most of Henry Kleber's time after 1864 was occupied with affairs related to his music store. He no longer taught, but he still attempted composition. However, although some of his compositions attained a wide sale and popularity in subsequent years, they were principally those which had been written and first published about 1852. Two of the most popular of these were compositions for the piano, entitled the *Rainbow Schottische* and the *Coral Schottische*. Both attained a wide sale in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In 1867, Henry Kleber directed the first performance in Pittsburgh of Gounod's *Messe Solonelle*, at the Cloister in Mt. Washington.\(^25\) He and his brother Augustus were the tenors, and his wife, the former Christiane Manns, presided at the organ. We should say, also, that Mrs. Henry Kleber was likewise a composer, and some of her compositions are still in


\(^23\) *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 14, 1855, December 10, 1856; *Musical Forecast*, July, 1936.


\(^25\) *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, August 12, 1900.
existence. Henry Kleber is said to have been one of the founders of the well-known Gounod Club in 1872, of the Troubadours in 1874, and one of the key-men of the Mozart Club in 1878. The Mozart Club continued to give concerts for over forty years, or until 1919. He served for many years as music critic on the old Pittsburgh Commercial. He was responsible for bringing to Pittsburgh some of the leading musical artists of his day, and he served as host to many visiting musicians because of his musical interest and because of his ability to speak four languages.26

In his lifetime, Henry Kleber produced some 180 musical compositions and arrangements. A number of his compositions may be seen in the possession of his nephew, Frank J. Kleber, in Saxonburg, Pennsylvania. Among his compositions was at least one symphony, and a few of his manuscripts, or copies of them, are still in existence in various places.

As a composer he confined himself largely to light dance music. As a vocalist he seems to have specialized in a Donizetti-Bellini style, but he is said to have sung quite well. Throughout his last years, he was always interested and helpful in the musical affairs of both Pittsburgh and Allegheny, and he continued his music store until his death. However, after about 1890, he left his interests in the store largely in the hands of his sons. His brother, Augustus Kleber, died in 1887, but Henry, it was said in 1891, still bore his years so gracefully that their weight was imperceptible to the closest friend. However, six years later, on February 20, 1897, Henry Kleber, already having lost his wife in death, passed away at his home, 183 Sandusky Street, Allegheny, leaving the Kleber reputation and business to the hands of his sons and the sons of his brother, Augustus.27 The firm was continued until its liquidation about twenty-seven years ago.

26 Musical Forecast, July, 1936; Frank J. Kleber, letter, November 20, 1941. It is sometimes assumed that the Mozart Club lasted but forty years, or until 1918. However, the author has in his possession a program of the "Messiah" concert of the club given on January 21, 1919, in its "Forty-first Season."
27 Frank J. Kleber to the author, April 21, 1942; Musical Courier, February 11, 1891; Daily Post, February 21, 1897.