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THE MINSTREL OF THE ALLEGHENIES

HARVEY B. GAUL

Harvey B. Gaul (1881-1945) was a well-known Pittsburgh musician whose many activities are hard to catalogue. For twenty years he was music critic on the Pittsburgh Post, and for thirty-five, organist and choirmaster of Calvary Episcopal Church. He lectured on the arts, taught organ and composition, directed choral societies, conducted and wrote for a string orchestra, and put on festivals and summer opera in the parks. He was, above all, a prolific composer whose reputation rests primarily upon his work as one of the great contributors to the field of church music.

Dr. Gaul was born in New York and arrived in Pittsburgh in 1910 after extensive study abroad. A young composer himself, he became interested in Stephen Foster's life in the same city. In the course of his long association with Pittsburgh musical affairs he had made the acquaintance of descendants and friends of Stephen Foster, and of people who had known him. He had acquired a fund of Foster anecdotes and learned something of the various Foster legends. He had studied what literature was then available on the subject. As there was no recent biography at that period, an eastern publisher urged him to write one; and in the early 1930's he began work on the manuscript of "The Minstrel of the Alleghenies."

In 1934, the definitive Foster biography, John Tasker Howard's *Stephen Foster, America's Troubadour*, was published by the Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, and Dr. Gaul felt that the time was not

appropriate for the appearance of his own work. Accordingly, he postponed the completion of his manuscript, and it was not finished at the time of his death. Also, in the year before his death, Evelyn Foster Morneweck, niece of the celebrated composer, published her two-volume *Chronicles of Stephen Foster's Family* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1944), which presents a highly detailed account, not only of Stephen Foster, but also of other members of his family who played important parts in the life of this community.

After Dr. Gaul's sudden death, it was suggested to his wife, Harriet A. Gaul, that in order to preserve her husband's earlier work on Foster she might shorten it for possible publication in the magazine of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Honored by the opportunity she conferred with authorities on the subject. Before submitting the abridged material to the society's publications committee, Henry Oliver Evans, Esq., chairman, she requested the undersigned to edit the manuscript. The text has been left as much as possible as Dr. Gaul wrote it; most of the editing consists of footnotes.

Twenty years have elapsed since Dr. Gaul began his work. He wrote under considerable difficulties. There was little accurate source material then in Pittsburgh. Local legends were unreliable or contradictory. There was much biographical information that had not yet come to light. Consequently the editorial comments are based chiefly on new developments and discoveries of the past two decades—the 1930's and 1940's.

Dr. Gaul has presented a colorful picture of the city in which Stephen Foster lived. His is also a sympathetic interpretation of Stephen Foster, the composer, by another composer. It includes a critical analysis of Foster's strengths and weaknesses. Dr. Gaul's friends, who read these pages, will recognize his own colorful personality throughout the manuscript.

FLETCHER HODGES, JR., CURATOR
Foster Hall Collection
University of Pittsburgh

Chapter I: *Happy Birthday*

JULY 4, 1826, A HIGH HOLIDAY—Down on the river fronts in Pittsburgh colored roustabouts were tapping juba and piling up four-foot cordwood. Large lumber rafts were idling down the Monongahela with their shanty crews from West Virginia. Gawky craft, called arks, were lazing down the Allegheny from the Kittanning shores.¹ Lunkish side-wheelers from the lower Ohio were wheezing, whistling, sobbing, and bumping along the banks. Flatboats and packets threw out gangplanks. The point of the three rivers was alive with primitive navigation; steam and man power were at work.

Pittsburgh was already called "The Birmingham of America," the "coming Manchester," by the many English descendants living there. It was fast growing into a boom town as settlers poured into it and headed out into the Ohio country. It was the first and last big settlement on the western side of the Alleghenies, and beyond and below Pittsburgh were the roadless forests and the new homesteads bordering the great threads of rivers that led into the promised wealth of the unknown.

The ironmasters who represented the wealth of the district were patriots and declared a lay-off at the rolling mills on this Fourth of July. George Anshutz laid off his hands, and Christopher Cowan advised his chief clerk, Reuben Miller, to pay off the men and ease down the fires. There were a dozen rolling mills and puddling ovens at this time, with fanciful names such as "Vesuvius" and "Vulcan"; almost as many mills as taverns.

While there are people who say that Pittsburgh was entirely founded upon steel, coal, and some glassware, if innkeeper Jeremiah Sturgeon of the corner of Diamond Alley and Wood Street, and George Stewart, at the corner of Wood and Fifth, and innkeepers on every other corner could tell you all they knew at the time, they would have said that whiskey was part of the sure foundation of this old town that had begun as a fort and become the gateway to the West.

They were strong men and rough men, these early settlers, nothing effete about them. They liked their whiskey straight and plenty of it, and there wasn't a farmer in the surrounding hills who didn't have his

¹ Lumber rafts were more characteristic of the Allegheny River, and "arks" of the Monongahela.

demijohn behind the kitchen door nor a general merchandise store that didn't keep a row of bottles on the back-room shelf. There wasn't a roller or a puddler who didn't finish off the day with a glass full of whiskey, neat, and a great many began the day as they finished it.

They were not drunkards, few of them were dissolute. They not only could hold their liquor—they worked it out, literally. It takes a certain sort of man to stand up in front of a puddling furnace and do his eight-hour trick, and it takes another sort to bend over all day and dig soft coal. Pittsburgh was settled by an admixture of Scotch-Irish-English-Welsh who were strong of thew and stronger of stomach. Therefore the taverns sprang up wherever there was a smokestack, and had their signs repainted every year.

The ironmasters, most of whom had begun as mill-men, also drank, although not so much during office hours. They went to work at seven in the morning, ordered their carriages to call back at noon, went home for lunch, and put in a long afternoon of business mixed with drinking. Not one ironmaster, but many; not dissipated men, but distinguished citizens, pillars of the church, stalwart supporters of civic enterprise, and in the main, magnificent men. They drank as they worked and kept long and conscientious hours at both. Terrific work and Calvinism both rang the curfew on a sporting life. But they had diversions—horse-racing and cock-fighting. Steamboat racing was carried on further down the Ohio, as it was considered dangerous near the crowded water front of Pittsburgh.

Many families had fast horses, the Fosters among them, and many a farmer above Grant's Hill raised game cocks; if not fighting birds, just plain "ornery" farmyard roosters with Smithfield Street spurs to help them out. As to nose-breaking, a good fight was a good fight and there was a regular Donnybrook Fair every time the descendants of the Irish gathered for a horse race.

Down at the race course, below Grant's Hill, they were planning for the various heats, that hot July afternoon in 1826. It was to be a great Independence Day. Men were sitting in high-wheeled sulkies, breathing their horses, scraping them down with a barrel hoop, or trotting them around the plain near the old Dutch Church. There were ironmasters who said they thought a "fast four-minute heat" was of more importance than anything in the world—except the temperature of a blast furnace. It is well to remember this when we hum the strains of

Foster's *Camptown Races*, with its horsey "doo-dah." The composer born that July day got his information first-hand at the race course on "the plain."

If the rivers, the race tracks, the cock pits, and the picnic groves knew no quietude that Fourth of July, the downtown streets below Grant's Hill were silent. Only the rumble of an occasional Conestoga wagon rolling down the Philadelphia Pike, or the jangle of pack-horse bells, or the three-horse busses going out the Frankstown Road to the "grand barbecue" jarred the silence. Some men had crossed the "kivvered bridge" over the Allegheny, some had come by ferry; rivermen, loggers, lumbermen, drovers, puddlers, miners, cotton-spinners, and dignified merchants in high beaver hats, all bound for Foster's Grove.

According to the editor of the *Gazette* it was "a day not likely to be forgotten by any man," but our reason for not forgetting it was hardly in his mind when his paper went to press. He wrote of the semi-centennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, for word had come that the whole nation was to observe this fiftieth birthday. William Foster, a leading citizen, had arranged the Pittsburgh celebration on his own place, on the hills above Washington's Crossing, near the Allegheny River. But news traveled slowly in those days, dispatches came only by saddle-bag over the mountains from Virginia, or down the river by packet, so it was two weeks before the men gathered for the barbecue knew that on that day John Adams, second President of the United States, had died, and that the noble Thomas Jefferson, philosopher and third President, had breathed his last.

Men knotted themselves together and discussed their pet project, the new canal that was to be built at the expense of the state. Others debated the wisdom of sending men to Panama, a far-off place they shipped to by way of New Orleans. Out of earshot of the impassioned speeches shouted over their heads in Foster's Grove men grew apoplectic as they explained how they felt about the country while they wiped the perspiration off the inside of their beaver hats. And promptly at noon there was a cessation of all oratory. Down at the Arsenal the cannons boomed, the veterans volleyed their muskets, the band played, the fifes squeaked again, and everyone sat down to enjoy the barbecue.

There was a silence as men grabbed for their pieces of roast ox. Negro slaves and bond servants waited on table and passed mountains of bread which was made into mouth-filling sandwiches. Wonderful eat-

ing at the Fosters, better victuals than they had last year, so they said—plenty! And pounded the table for beer.

But William Barclay Foster asked to be excused for a minute—there was something he had to attend to up at the house right that second, but for everyone to go right on eating, he'd be back in a while, and they'd never know he was gone. So the barbecue went on while William Foster legged it home as fast as he was able.

Up the hill stood the lovely "White Cottage" and there was a great commotion going on; darkies running in and out, women relatives rushing about with grave faces. Eliza Tomlinson Foster, wife of William, host to the city, had given him another son.

Just as the guns were fired that noon, little Stephen was born. And if two great Presidents answered the last roll-call that same Independence Day of 1826, the greatest singer of his period came to take their places in a new world. He was the eighth² child born to Eliza and William, and they later baptized him Stephen Collins Foster. The other children stayed out of the way down at the barbecue their father had deserted, and enjoyed the watermelon.

2 Stephen Foster was the *ninth* child born to Eliza and William. If their adopted son, William Barclay Foster, Jr., the civil engineer, is included in the count of their children, Stephen was their *tenth* child. Eliza and William had ten children of their own, and an adopted son, making a total of eleven. Stephen's younger brother, James, born three years after himself, died at the age of one year, leaving Stephen the youngest child of the family.

Chapter II: *Root, Branch and Flower*

About one hundred years before Stephen Collins Foster was born his great-grandfather, Alexander Foster, settled in the other end of the state, in Lancaster County. He was from the River Foyle, a Londonderry man, born in 1710. He came to New Jersey at the age of fifteen with his mother and later they decided to try Penn's Woods. Alexander was of sturdy fiber, prospered, and had nine children whom he brought up in the rigors of John Calvin's creed.

The oldest of his three sons was James, the grandfather of Stephen Foster. James took to wife Ann Barclay. They removed to Berkeley County, Virginia, and it is through his grandmother, Ann Barclay, that Foster was related to the Honorable John Rowan of Bardstown, Kentucky: one of the first senators from his state, in whose home Foster is alleged to have composed one of his finest songs.³ This house is now turned into a Foster shrine.

About 1782 James Foster, with a group of Scotch-Irish people, crossed the mountains and settled in the hills near Canonsburg, twenty miles from what is now the city of Pittsburgh. He was one of the original trustees of Dr. McMillan's Canonsburg Academy, the first outpost of learning on the far side of the Alleghenies, destined to become Jefferson College, and afterwards Washington and Jefferson, relocated at Washington, Pennsylvania; a college as Presbyterian today as it was when it was hacked out of forest timber a hundred and fifty years ago. It was to Jefferson College that Stephen Foster was sent, in due time, and where he was so miserable that he decided to give up higher education.

William Barclay Foster, son of James Foster and father of Stephen, was born in Virginia, and after attending the Canonsburg Academy went to work at the age of sixteen in the newly incorporated borough of Pittsburgh. Up to this time it had been Fort Pitt. and in 1796, when William Foster arrived, a portion of the former Fort Duquesne was still standing. Iron ore had been discovered in Fayette County, coal was being dug from the hills, and the natives had gathered in rebellion against the government because of the whiskey tax.

³ This highly controversial subject—the place of composition of *My Old Kentucky Home* and the history of the song—will be discussed later.

William Foster got a job with Anthony Beelen and Major Ebenezer Denny, river chandlers, purveyors of general merchandise to the settlers and the border trade. As the years went on he proved his worth and was admitted to full partnership. In 1816 Major Denny became mayor of the city, and later on Stephen's father became mayor of Allegheny.

The Conestoga wagons came in; six-horse teams with bells jangling. On the rivers were the flatboats and lumber floats bound southwest for Wheeling, Marietta, Cincinnati, Nashville, Natchez, and if the raft held together, New Orleans. It was William Foster's job to accompany these loads twice a year and make the sales and adjust the swaps. The men returned overland with large parties, strongly armed against Indians and piratical whites. Once, taking ship from New Orleans to New York, his vessel was chased and captured by buccaneers off the coast of Cuba, and the men aboard were rescued by a Spanish man-of-war and brought back to port. Merchandizing was a perilous occupation.

On one of his trips over the mountains William met in Philadelphia a young lady who was to become his wife and the mother of Stephen Foster. She was Eliza Clayland Tomlinson of Wilmington, Delaware, and she was visiting her aunt, Mrs. Oliver Evans, wife of the inventor. The Claylands had come from England and settled on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in 1670. The Tomlinsons were also early Maryland and Delaware settlers. They were loyal patriots, and accomplished people. Colonel James Clayland was a distinguished officer in the Revolution, and Joseph Tomlinson, the president of Augusta College in Kentucky. Morrison Foster, brother of Stephen and his first biographer, says that "much of the musical and poetic genius of Stephen was derived from this branch of the family."

Nothing is recorded of their courtship, but when William Foster married Eliza Tomlinson she was visiting relatives in Chambersburg, halfway between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. For their wedding journey in the year 1807 they set out by horseback on the hundred miles through forests and mountains over the so-called "military road." The young wife later wrote of this arduous two weeks' trip and of her joy in being welcomed at the home of Major Denny, her husband's partner, where "the light that blazed from the fire, the vermilion hearth, the plain, rich furniture, the polished stand with lighted candles in candlesticks resembling burnished gold, made an evening scene that fell gratefully on my pleased sight. Upon the sofa lay the tall and military

figure of the Major, a gentleman of the old school, easy and dignified in his bearing, a soldier who had served his country well under Washington at Yorktown, and Harmar, St. Clair, and Wayne in the subsequent Indian campaigns."

Major Denny was just that, an upstanding, gallant figure—even when lying on a sofa!

Pittsburgh of this period was not an intellectual community; there was plenty of rowdiness down on the river banks and around the iron furnaces, but it was becoming reasonably civilized. The sound of the broad ax may have been heard in the near-by forests, but the drone of the schoolroom was also in the air. Colonel John Neville had settled there, and Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Bayard: right on down through the regimental commands until the catalogue stops with three trained doctors, surgeon's mates all, with John Wilkins, Jr. leading the list. There were cultivated women with whom Eliza could associate, women who could discuss the intricacies of the "Snake Fence" and "Flower Basket" quilt patterns, as well as make tallow dips.

It is said that when Louis Philippe and his brothers, Beaujolais and Montpensier, came to visit Colonel Neville, they expressed surprise at the ease and elegance of their entertainment. Though at a later date, Dickens, on his arrival, expressed himself differently. At any rate, this was the sort of community where Eliza Foster cast her lot, made her home, and raised her children, including Stephen. That she was a devoted wife and mother her subsequent letters and journal show. She made her wax-flowers and hair-flowers, cross-stitched her ottoman covers, and finished in 1820 a fragile sampler with the fragrant motto:

These violets scent the distant gale,
They grew in lonely bed;
So real worth new merit gains
By diffidence o'er spread.

A sentiment she might have inscribed to the songs of her famous son.

However, up to the time of Stephen's birth, and in fact until his own death, it was the name of William Barclay Foster that was prominent in the community. During the War of 1812 he was appointed Quartermaster and Commissary of the United States Army. When the Army of the Northwest appealed to the government for supplies and equipment, so that they might continue the conflict, the government returned word that there was no more money. But Foster took his own money, extended his personal credit, procured the supplies, and sent

them to the men at the front. All he received from the government was an agreement to pay.

When the British laid siege to Washington, captured it, and burned the capitol, they then turned their forces and fleet toward Louisiana, with the intention of taking New Orleans. Appeals came to Pittsburgh to forward clothing, blankets, foodstuffs, guns and ammunition for the relief of Jackson's army, but no money was sent with the order. Again Foster borrowed from the bank, procured the supplies, and sent them down river on the packet "Enterprise," on December 15, 1814.

The "Enterprise" was commanded by a pioneer boatman, Captain Henry M. Shreve, a pilot who knew every shallow and sand spit between Pittsburgh and the Gulf. On that cold December night with the rivers achuck with ice he called back to Foster on the wharf: "I'll get there before the British or sink the boat." He shoved off and reached New Orleans on the fifth day of January, three days before the battle with the British, and thereby saved Louisiana. When the dangerous journey was over, Captain Shreve discharged his cargo, ran the boat down the Mississippi past the British batteries to Fort Philip, returned upstream, and engaged in the battle of the eighth of January, serving at the sixth gun of the American batteries.

This historical voyage is one of the outstanding events in inland river lore. There had never been navigation in the upper Ohio during December because of the ice floes. But although William Foster was accounted in those days a wealthy man, and his argosies usually returned him a profit, in the case of dealings with the War Department of his period he only won glory. His son Morrison reports that the government was "often indebted to him for as much as \$50,000."

A final adjudication of his accounts made it necessary to refer the items to a jury, who returned a verdict in behalf of the plaintiff without leaving the courtroom, but that judgment still stands unpaid on the records of the United States Court at Pittsburgh.

Even with his inability to collect what was due him, William Foster was well enough off in that period to pay \$35,000 in 1814 for a tract of 171⁴ acres covering a number of hills on the Liberty Road overlooking the Allegheny River. He had expected to name the district "Foster-

4 According to Evelyn Foster Morneweck, the land consisted of 121 acres.

ville," but following the news of the death of Captain Lawrence on his boat, the "Chesapeake," Foster named the town Lawrenceville for the hero whose dying command was "Don't give up the ship!"

Soldiers passing through Pittsburgh during the War of 1812 often died there and were forthwith buried in the "Potter's Field." To Foster, himself a quartermaster and the son of a soldier, this was intolerable. He donated a tract of land in his town of Lawrenceville to be a burial ground for soldiers. A granite shaft stands there with an inscription on one side: "In honor of American soldiers who lie buried here. We will emulate their patriotism and protect their remains." And for many years it was used in just that way.

However, the War of 1812 gave Pittsburgh impetus in more ways than soldier cemeteries since the first cannon which were made on contract for the fleet on Lake Erie were manufactured in the foundry of Joseph McClurg. The government needed a new base of supplies so it was decided to purchase a piece of ground near the foundries, and William Foster and Colonel Woolley were appointed to choose the site for an arsenal.

Why not use part of the property that Foster had just bought for speculative purposes? Why not, indeed, agreed Foster. At an expenditure of \$300,000 the Allegheny Arsenal was erected on the Philadelphia Turnpike piece of Foster's land and was opened ceremoniously by Colonel Woolley and his lady in 1814. This was where the guns were booming when Stephen was born on the Fourth of July, for high up on the hill, where the Liberty Road straggled along, Foster had built his homestead, the "White Cottage," about 1815. And while it may have been white, from the painting of it that has been preserved, it was rather pretentious to be called a cottage.

William Foster was a step ahead of the rest when he built the first out-of-town house. Others followed him, but he was the first to live a suburban life and commute by carriage, which he did for several years until he succumbed to the lure of Allegheny. Or perhaps it was his finances that succumbed. From his doorstep he could see the river over to the north and down below were the smokestacks that followed it toward the setting sun. He could watch Pittsburgh growing into the metropolis it was one day to become.

When the family moved out to the country, as they called it, there

were three little Fosters, William Barclay, Jr., Charlotte, and Ann Eliza. Then came four other little steps at almost two years per step, Henry, Henrietta, Dunning, and Morrison, with the new baby, Stephen, born on July 4, 1826. A later brother, James, did not live, and Stephen remained the baby for many years.⁵ It was said that William "took after" his father, and certainly he became as well known in his own generation, and was always the staunch support of the family, beginning where and when his father left off. His mother leaned on him, calling herself "the proud mother of the best of sons," in spite of the fact that Stephen and his sisters were said to have inherited her gifts, and gentleness.

While Stephen was a small boy, his father served several terms in the legislature in Harrisburg for the purpose of promoting the canal over the mountains which would shorten the time between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. It was not an easy journey to the state capital in those days; it was a six-day wagon trip. For his labors and understanding of the project he was appointed first collector of the Pennsylvania Canal. The part that William Foster, Sr. played in the development of Pittsburgh has not been remembered as well as the history of his illustrious youngest son. Twice mayor of Allegheny, legislator for three terms in Harrisburg, Quartermaster of the United States Army, and collector of the canal, he was a creator and developer of the country.

William Barclay Foster, Jr., his mother's staff, left home at the age of seventeen,⁶ the year Stephen was born. Being an adventurer like his father, he joined a surveying party that visited "The White Cottage" while laying out the route of the new canal. This was the beginning of a successful and prosperous career. From lineman he rose to civil engineer, and after working at Kiskiminetas and in Kentucky became chief engineer of public works for Pennsylvania, including canals and railroads. In 1847, at the age of thirty-eight,⁷ he was made one of the two chief engineers of the newly westering Pennsylvania Railroad, and at the time of his death, in 1860, was its first vice president and one of the most esteemed men in the state.

In recounting the life of Stephen Foster, it is impossible to do jus-

5 Two other children of Eliza and William died in infancy, making a total of eleven children, including their adopted son, William, Jr.

6 Since William Barclay Foster, Jr., was born about 1806, he was approximately twenty years old when he left home.

7 William, Jr., was about forty-one years old at this time.

tice to the stories of the rest of this large and important Pennsylvania family. But it is well to remember that he never stood alone, having their support, and their love. His accomplished oldest sister, Charlotte, died very young, contracting cholera while visiting in Louisville. Ann Eliza lived to be seventy-nine, the wife of Reverend Edward Y. Buchanan, rector of Christ Church, Meadville, Pennsylvania, and afterward of Oxford Parish, Philadelphia. He was the brother of President James Buchanan. The third daughter, Henrietta,⁸ first married Thomas L. Wick of Youngstown, Ohio, and had three children by him. After his death, she married Major Jesse Thornton, Commissary of the United States Army, and died in Germantown, Pennsylvania, at the age of sixty.

Morrison Foster of Edgeworth, the family chronicler, also married twice, his first wife being Jessie Lightner, a famous beauty and "sweet singer," to whom he said Stephen invariably appealed to try out each and every song he wrote. After her death, Morrison married Rebecca Snowden, daughter of Francis L. Snowden and granddaughter of Hon. John M. Snowden, who, as mayor of Pittsburgh, had attended the barbecue dinner the day Stephen was born. Morrison Foster died in Grove City, Pennsylvania, in 1904, full of years and respected by all. Henry Foster married and had two daughters, and his death in 1870 was one of the tragic annals of Allegheny County. He was employed at the Eclipse oil works near Sharpsburg, and two tanks, struck by lightning, exploded, scattering flaming oil. His charred body was found in the office of the building from which he had not been able to escape. Dunning Foster chose to remain single, and achieved the name of one of the smartest men on the Ohio River. He owned and operated packets plying between Pittsburgh and New Orleans, but died rather young in Cincinnati, in 1856.

But the story of Stephen cannot be told in one paragraph, nor page. The genealogy of the family, however, from Alexander of County Derry down and up to the time when Stephen Foster became a national figure, is that of a sturdy tree, strong of root and strong of limb, and bearing, finally, the disconcerting flower of his genius.

8 Henrietta was actually the fourth daughter. She had another older sister who died in infancy.

Chapter III: *They Try to Bend the Twig*

In Stephen Foster's case, so far as education was concerned, the tree did not incline. The twig kept springing back into its own way of growing. He ran away from the first school to which he was sent, and the last.

In the childhood of other geniuses one is able to trace their predilections almost from the cradle, but Stephen's early years are chiefly interesting as a picture of the times. He was in and out of various schools and kept his parents busy finding him another. Not that he couldn't bear studying, he could study all day if left alone. What irked him was what other youngsters enjoy, work in a group.

Small private schools were the rule at that period. Almost any lady who had a small back room could advertise in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* and gather in the neighbors' children. After a few months' tutelage with his sister, Ann Eliza, in the summer of 1832, which the family spent in the near-by communal settlement of the Harmonites, Stephen, at six,⁹ was sent to a school in Allegheny run by a Mrs. Harvey and her daughter. But his brother Morrison reports (and he was there) that when Stephen was called upon for the alphabet he became enraged and "like a Comanche Indian he bounded into the road and never stopped running and yelling until he reached home."

There is no record of anyone spanking him and sending him back. What is related is that he was again taken over by his sister, Eliza, until the following year when she was married. After which excitement, his mother took him on a steamboat trip to Kentucky.

Early in the thirties¹⁰ the "White Cottage" and much of the acreage in suburban Lawrenceville was sold, and the family moved across the river to the favorite town of the ironmasters, growing Allegheny. At first, on the banks of the Ohio opposite Smoky Island, and then in a three-story brick house near the Allegheny bridge, Stephen began to put his roots down in the city that later claimed him as its own. There was always something for boys to see in this neighborhood: the Conestoga wagons going west into southern Ohio, the rumbling coaches headed

⁹ According to Stephen's brother Morrison, Stephen was five years old at this time.

¹⁰ The "White Cottage" was sold on September 6, 1827. The Fosters lived for a while after this date in Pittsburgh, and moved to Allegheny in the spring of 1832.

north to the Western Reserve, and all the traffic in and out of Pittsburgh in 1833.

There came to Allegheny Town the respected and Reverend Joseph Stockton of Meadville, Pennsylvania, an old friend of Stephen's father. He arrived to be pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, but soon became principal of Allegheny Academy. Naturally, Foster sent all his sons to him, Stephen among them—the most restless under the rod. But two years later this regime was interrupted, due to hard times in Pittsburgh, by the whole family¹¹ moving to Youngstown, where the son William owned property, and where their daughter, Henrietta, soon married Thomas Wick, amid congratulations from both cities. A year later, on returning home, they moved into another house belonging to the same son, who was evidently investing in real estate, this time on Allegheny Commons, a choice location. Great houses nudged elbows around a common park where cows were pastured, and where benches still await the neighbors under spreading trees.

Stephen was ten years old in this year of 1836. Times were difficult for his father all through the thirties, but the boy was kept in school wherever the family lived. June of that year found "Mit" and "Stevy" learning Latin under the beneficent influence of the Reverend Nathan Todd, another divine, who eked out his livelihood with teaching. We are told that Stephen had a "faculty for reaching far ahead and grasping the scope of a lesson without apparent effort," and from the same pen (Morrison's), that he "preferred to ramble among the woods and upon the three beautiful rivers of his home." As Mr. Todd was a scholar who gave his time to the pursuit of Latin and Greek roots, rather than truant boys, Stephen's wanderings were overlooked both by him and the lad's parents. They had learned to ask for "forbearance in his case"—recognizing early that the twig could not be bent.

All schoolmasters recognize the Foster type; they meet it every day. Why he went to the woods for solace instead of the hustling riverfront or canal basin is characteristic. Stephen was the sort who "preferred to ramble with his books and pencil, alone and thoughtful."

He also had a flair for histrionics. At the age of nine he organized the boys of the neighborhood into a group called the "Thespians," who gave performances in a carriage-house. The gate money taken in by the

11 Stephen's father remained in Pittsburgh to enter merchandising as partner in a general store.

young Robinsons, Cuddys, Kelleys, and Fosters was used to attend the Pittsburgh Theatre on Saturday nights, where they absorbed more material. Stephen was chief comedian and songster, and, as such, was awarded a set sum of the "take"—an acumen he sometimes failed to show in later years.

The songs the boys sang at this time, the mid-thirties, were the blackface hits such as *Old Zip Coon* and the ubiquitous *Jump Jim Crow*. Pittsburgh was one of the fountain sources, Cincinnati another, of the burnt-cork circle. One need not speculate on where Foster got his material for his later successes, it was spread before him. Only a few years prior to his birth well-to-do citizens owned slaves, and bondservants were still common. The river boats carried negro stevedores and firemen, the wharves all had colored rustlers and loafers hanging about, and much of the household help was colored.

There are many references to dancing masters in the old annals, among them, a notorious Mr. Pise, a West Indian Frenchman, who taught the waltz and polka to the elite. When he left Pittsburgh he neglected to take along a mulatto girl known to be his daughter. Her name was 'Lieve, short for Olivia, and she became nursemaid to the Fosters when Stevy was a small boy. After the custom of the period, she was a "gift" from Mrs. Thomas Collins, wife of a well-known attorney, and Mrs. Collins was intimate with Mrs. Foster—so much so that Stephen carried the name of Mrs. Collins' son who had died just before Stephen was born.

'Lieve was a "Howlin' Methodist," as were many of the Pittsburgh colored folk, and occasionally took Stephen to hear the prayin' and exhortin' and de ol' time songs. Later he would have learned where to take himself for there were many meetin' houses. Or if he did not wander "up de hill" to the ramshackle lean-tos called churches, he could have heard the croonin' at his own kitchen door. The family had a bond-boy, Thomas Hunter, whose mother was a house servant at the Fosters. Since her childhood days on the "Eastern Shore," Stephen's mother was used to colored help.

Had he wanted to listen to the rivermen he could have heard fragments of labor songs brought up from the South: "totin' songs" they called them, snatches for pulling the hawsers, warping the boats, "walkin' the coal," piling the cordwood. The negro laborers were all vocal. We know that Stephen had not only heard but had, himself, sung *Old*

Zip Coon in childhood (the tune is that familiar shuffle, *Turkey in the Straw*). As early as 1827 George Dixon popularized John Clements' *Coal Black Rose*. It was Thomas D. Rice, coming up from Louisville, who brought the stage Negro to the boat stops, and Pittsburgh. Undoubtedly, the "End Men" gave the boy as much inspiration as the authentic Negro with whom he was already in contact.

The guitar was probably Stephen Foster's earliest instrument. He was efficient on both guitar and flute, and there are references to the clarinet. But an anecdote that claims he plucked harmonies from the strings of a guitar at the age of two may be discarded, for a baby's fingers are not strong enough. However, he understood it thoroughly when he began at eighteen to write for the minstrels.

A more convincing story of Stephen, age seven, is of his trip across town with his mother to Smith and Mellor's music store on Wood Street. All kinds of things were sold in the music stores of that day, and tired of twiddling kaleidoscopes while his mother chatted over the counter with John Mellor about her own interests, Stephen picked up a flageolet and to everyone's surprise had picked out *Hail Columbia*—in "perfect time and accent." It was probably the old penny, tin-whistle type with six holes, and quite possible.

At "The Point" many men boasted "firsts"—one pioneer's glory being the claim to having brought the first goldfish over the Allegheny mountains. John Mellor, organist of Old Trinity Church, brought the first piano, a Chickering, in 1831.¹² His advertisement in 1838 reads: "Wholesale Dealers in German and American Pianofortes, German and French fancy articles, Looking-glasses, Jewelry, Dominoes, Music Boxes—at the lowest prices. N. B. Pianofortes tuned and repaired." From the day Stephen walked into his shop with his mother, until his last days, John Mellor remained the friend of Stephen Foster.

But all the early pianos were not imported. There was a German craftsman, Frederick Blume, who guaranteed to please in the way of domestic-built instruments. Part of his advertisement reads: "The undersigned most respectfully makes known to the ladies and gentlemen of Allegheny that he has finished two pianos which may be seen and tried

12 Some forty years earlier, General Richard Butler shipped a piano over the mountains as a present to his daughter Mary in Pittsburgh. This instrument has long been on display in the museum of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

at his house in St. Clair street, Pittsburgh, second door from the Allegheny bridge."

Pianos were coming in, the theaters were placing them and they were appearing in the mansions on the Commons and Ridge Avenue. Most analysts agree, however, that there was no piano in the Foster home when Stephen was beginning to write music as he is repeatedly said to have gone elsewhere to use one.

His brother Morrison claims that Henrietta and Eliza Ann played the piano as young ladies, but they were married and gone before Stephen would have begun, and perhaps their piano went with them—or was abandoned in the family's many movings. The Fosters took music in their stride but failed to appreciate the talent of the youngest brother. They were of Puritan stock, busy wresting a living from the new developments in transportation. The only one of them who spoke his language was old Uncle Struthers in Ohio, husband to William Foster's sister, Mary, whom Stephen often visited, but neither did he display any interest in Stephen's bent. Brother William, for all his affection, Dunning for all his consideration, and Morrison for all his adoration, never helped him to study music.

They could have done so had they been concerned, as there were music teachers in Pittsburgh. The town had emerged from the backwoods and there were church choirs aplenty and men who conducted them. Father Rapp had marched into Harmony with his hymn singers and marched out again down the Ohio. There was a choral society of sorts. Thanks to the Moravians, Haydn's *Creation* had been heard on the other side of the mountains, and the thunders of *The Heavens are Telling* were not unknown along the Allegheny banks. The Mozart Society advertised its second concert at Trinity Church, Pittsburgh, for June 12, 1838, with a program that included Haydn, Handel, Pergolesi, and Beethoven.

In 1832 Henry Kleber had sauntered down Grant's Hill to open a music shop, "The Sign of the Golden Harp." First he taught music at Mr. Lacy's private school and then at Mrs. Holstead's, and later branched out for himself and became the town's leading professor. He organized a musical society and the colorful band of the Duquesne Grays. Each year he would go to Philadelphia and New York to purchase new quadrilles and gavottes that were snatched up from his counter. Finally Stephen drifted into his hands and Kleber recognized his

talent. He said of Stephen that he "could make up tunes better than he could play them."

According to Morrison Foster, "Stephen needed only elementary instruction for his rapid brain and quick perception scorned the slow progress by the beaten path and he leaped forward . . . by the force of his great musical genius."

Which is very pretty, but nowhere substantiated, as he never showed more than a beginner's feeling for the piano. No, Stephen may have had a few piano lessons with Henry Kleber at the "Sign of the Golden Harp," but there the matter ends. The balance of his musical education he grabbed out of the air. He learned how to write accurately, grammatically, and somewhere he learned harmony, but as for studying the "work of the masters" as was afterward claimed, that may be dismissed along with other loving family fictions.

All that the family tried to do was to keep him in school and even that proved impossible. In 1837 Stephen and his mother made one of their visits to Uncle Struthers, who had a farm in Poland, near Youngstown.¹³ One of his famous letters is penned from there: "Dear father, I wish you to send me a comic songster for you promised to. If I had my pensyl I could rule my paper or if I had the money to buy black ink—but if I had my whistle I would be so taken with it I do not think I would write at all." This must have been soon after he had tried out a "whistle" at Mellor's.

Two years later most of the family were in Poland, father, mother, Stephen and Morrison, with Henry working in Youngstown, where Henrietta lived, and where William, Jr., had married her sister-in-law, the charming Mary Wick. But this romance which united the two prominent families for the second time was short-lived, as Mary died of consumption in 1838, a few weeks after her marriage, and William was at this time located in Pennsylvania.

For a while "Mit" and "Stevy" attended a free school in Youngstown, boarding at the same place as their brother Henry. But Henry was taken over by William to work on the new canal project in the

13 The visit was probably not to Uncle Struthers' farm at Poland, but to the home of Stephen's sister, Henrietta Foster Wick, in Youngstown.

East;¹⁴ Morrison returned to Pittsburgh; and again the problem arose as to what they should do with Stephen. When William joined the family for Christmas, 1839, he offered to take his youngest brother back with him and let him study at Towanda Academy, or at near-by Athens in Bradford County. He evidently attended both places. William was then chief engineer of public works in Pennsylvania and the only one of the family able to help financially.

So, in January, 1840, they packed up his little rawhide trunk and sent him off with his oldest brother in a two-horse sleigh for the wintry journey across two states.

To the lad it was a momentous trip—as to anyone. Stopping at night in the far-apart taverns, they traveled the Kittanning Pike, the Buffalo Trail, and the corduroy road that followed the Susquehanna to the state line. As he was an official, William had friends in every town. A boy could learn lots about the Abolition Party, Secession, and States' Rights just by listening to the talk in the taprooms. And there was always a warm brick in the feather bed where he buried himself until it was time to get up and break the ice in the wash-pitcher. Stephen remembered that three hundred mile trek the rest of his life. It was the school at the end of the adventure that he didn't like.

He had been left in Towanda while William was off attending to some business matter and wrote his brother that he preferred to stay there and study with an ex-teacher he had met, a Mr. Vosberry, rather than to be sent to school at Athens, "that lonesome place." He goes into how much cheaper this would be, and even promises to pay no attention to his music until after eight o'clock at night! He may have been at Athens for the last term of 1840, when he had arrived in the winter, or he wouldn't have known how lonesome it was. But whether he liked it or not one finds his name in their first printed roster of teachers and students issued by that co-educational boarding school for the year '41.

The two-story building was of classical Greek design, common in the East and South but unfamiliar in the hills of Pennsylvania. Four pillars supported the front, and above the roof rose the bell tower. That bell was a source of great interest to Stephen and the cause of much

¹⁴ Henry did not go east to Towanda, Pennsylvania, to work with William, Jr., on the North Branch Canal, until the summer of 1840, several months after Stephen had gone to Bradford County to enter school.

morning anguish when it called him to classes. The original building had been erected at Athens before 1800. Stephen walked wondering under the portals of the "New" Academy, finished in 1814. This was an old established school as schools rated in his day. Under the esteemed headmaster, Professor John G. Mervin, the boy was set to work on philosophy, grammar, and arithmetic, but he complained to William that these subjects did not keep him busy so could he take up Latin, or bookkeeping? And to please send his new waistcoat, and, above all, order a fire for his room!

Perhaps Stephen preferred Towanda because the town had a brass band, but soon he was practicing on the flute with a group of boys at Athens. Several distinguished men who were schoolmates of Foster have gone on record for those days. William W. Kingsbury, later senator from Minnesota, speaking before the Bradford County Historical Society, at Towanda, tells of how they played truant together, and how remarkably Stephen played the flute. Others speak of his generosity, his engaging shyness, his preference to be alone, and how he couldn't sleep unless in perfect quiet. John A. Perkins, writing from Fresno, California, for the 100th anniversary of Athens Academy in 1897, sets the date for the *Tioga Waltz*, Stephen's first authentic composition. He says it was written for a school exhibition given in the Presbyterian Church on April 1, 1841.¹⁵

He should know, as he was one of the three players of the flute who took part. The others were James H. Forbes and William Warner. Morrison Foster writes of this piece as if it had been given for commencement and as if Stephen made a fourth player—an unusual combination. And in this case Johnny Perkins is the boy who "was there."

"The *Tioga Waltz*" was, at any rate, preserved by the devoted Morrison, but not published for more than fifty years. Its name is taken from Tioga Point,¹⁶ where Athens Academy is situated. Written, as it was, at the age of fifteen,¹⁷ it has a certain juvenile charm. When the little orchestra of three flutes finished off that resounding octave of

¹⁵ Information that has come to light recently indicates that the date was probably later in the month than the first of April.

¹⁶ Tioga Point is the name given to the junction of the Susquehanna and Chemung rivers, a few miles south of Athens. Athens Academy was located at Athens, rather than at Tioga Point.

¹⁷ Stephen was fourteen, rather than fifteen, when he composed the *Tioga Waltz*.

empty C's, Stephen Foster first knew the ovation given to a composer.

It is doubtful if Stephen was in this school at commencement of the year '41. For soon he had gone back to his brother in Towanda and was playing clarinet in the band. This happy time ended by his being summoned back to Pittsburgh (or sent home) early in the summer, for in July he was starting all over again to attend another school, Jefferson College at Canonsburg. This was the former academy his father had attended, founded by his grandfather, James Foster,¹⁸ and which caused Stephen to give up education in despair.

They had put him on the coach with great hope, and he drove down the Black Horse Pike twenty miles through the South Hills below Pittsburgh. On arrival he wrote William with enthusiasm, telling of the 230 students and reminding him to send some money so he could join a literary society and pay for his wash. But he didn't stay long enough to get an answer to the letter.

Two formidable brick buildings comprised Jefferson College and the site was, as Stephen wrote his brother, "very pretty." An old photograph shows some young gentlemen lolling about the board fence—probably discussing Jeffersonian democracy. Here were sent the sons of the squire, of the clergy, and of the ironmasters, to imbibe what they could of learning and Presbyterianism. Stephen would naturally have found, and made, friends.

Without consulting anyone, or saying goodbye, within a week he had repacked his bag and left.

(To be Continued.)

¹⁸ James Foster was one of the original trustees of Jefferson College, but was not the founder.