This beautiful little building in which we gather tonight stands in the center of one of the dramatic cities of the world. People from southern and New England states, people from the west, and people from many nations on many continents live in this city. They have worked in the mills and factories; they have built the schools and churches; they have fostered the arts and sciences. They have made Pittsburgh the great metropolitan complex it is today.

Pittsburgh is home for many kinds of people. It means to them, and to others, many things. It means industrial leadership; technological efficiency; research laboratories; sound financial institutions; rivers and railroads carrying Western Pennsylvania's products to the four corners of the earth. And to those who cherish Pittsburgh's heritage of culture — learning and the arts — an important symbol of what Pittsburgh means is housed in this building and in the other buildings which are its neighbors — the Cathedral of Learning, the Heinz Chapel, The Carnegie Institute and Technological Colleges, the Frick Memorial, our regional Historical Society, universities and colleges and churches. I have named only a few.

But to those of us gathered here tonight it also means, at least for tonight, as it has meant for many years, Pittsburgh's own creator of songs, played and sung the world around — Stephen Collins Foster.

And what a distinguished concourse has met here since this building was dedicated thirty years ago! Theirs are the voices which echo down the years in this building tonight.

We hear the kindly voice of Mr. J. K. Lilly, the father of this Memorial, as he spoke the night of the dedication: "Whatever I have done here and in Indiana with others to honor Stephen Foster is only partial payment of an unpayable debt." His words are carved in stone in this building. We hear the high intense voice of Chancellor John G. Bowman when on that same occasion he said, looking up toward the roof of the building, "These very arches cry 'Victory' — the victory of poetry and song." And the voice of John Oliver, placing

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An address by Dr. Starrett, Director Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh Press, at the Thirty-Ninth Annual Stephen Collins Foster Memorial Program, April 25, 1966, in the Foster Memorial Auditorium on the college campus.—Ed.
Stephen Foster in American history. We hear again the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Will Earhart, who encouraged the school children and their teachers to know and love Stephen Foster. And there are clear echoes of choruses of school children that sang in this house the Foster songs. Never shall we forget how they loved singing, "Old Dog Tray — ever faithful." And there echo here the Tuesday Musical groups and soloists, who came on looking like a radiant flower garden and sang "Beautiful Dreamer," "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair," "Open Thy Lattice, Love," "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming."

Many voices echo here, voices of those who have come through the years to hear others sing and speak and to sing themselves the beloved songs. Some of the voices are silent now. Scholars, Metropolitan artists, mountain folk, voices trained and untrained, symphonic instruments and homemade ones, have come here to honor the Pittsburgh boy whose words and music sang from his heart directly to theirs.

I remember from earlier years speakers far more eloquent than I who have spoken profoundly of what Foster has meant to them. On one occasion Fletcher Hodges translated his annual report into a poignant tribute. And only a few years ago Stanton Belfour's talk made a litany of Foster songs. John Tasker Howard, Stephen's biographer; Walter Hancock, sculptor; Claude Rosenberry, revered teacher of music; Jesse Stuart, well-beloved Kentucky author — and many, many others of national fame have heaped their garlands of honor to Stephen, here on this platform. And we will have for remembrance after tonight the beautiful program of music by Jay Willoughby and Larry Keenan — a high moment for all time. And we shall not forget watching Mrs. Melady place a wreath before the portrait of Stephen Foster, her great-grandfather.

In the audience tonight are some who have come year after year — who came when the celebration was in January, wading through drifts and beat upon by icy winds — to honor Stephen. Why do they all come? Why have we come tonight? We come because we too are kin to Stephen. We are his "dear friends and gentle hearts." In spite of the years between, we live with Stephen in his simple river town of steamboats and racehorses and dreamers, and we like that.

In love and loyalty to "Old Black Joe," "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair," "Nelly Bly," "Old Kentucky Home," "Swanee River," and "Gentle Annie," we come again and again. We feel and know the fun of "Camptown Races," the westward marching courage of "Oh, Susanna," the wistfulness of the red rose — "Why Must the Beautiful
Die?,” the loneliness of “Swanee River, far, far away,” the longing for “Old Kentucky Home.” Super-sophisticates may say, “Foster was not a great poet,” but what poet would not be proud to have written the line, “The day goes by like a shadow o’er the heart.” Foster may be, as some say, only a writer of folk songs. Well, there are other folk songs and they fade away. Thank goodness they do! The magic of Stephen Foster’s songs lives on and will live on. And no one really needs to analyze why. To the bruised and lonely, Stephen’s words and his music have carried comfort and encouragement. Everyone has his favorite song or his own personal memories of Foster songs sung with others, in the moonlight on college campuses or on the old front porch steps at home or on the eye of battle in countries “far, far away.” These are memories of sharing tenderness and laughter and the realities that hold us together. In my own memory is enshrined a moment at my father’s funeral when, in accord with his request, a tenor voice sang “Gentle Annie.”

No doubt I have omitted many voices that echo in this beautiful building for you or many that echo from your own past. But perhaps you will agree that we always leave this building assured that Pittsburgh is a comfortable town, as genuine as it was for Stephen Foster — that in a world confused and belligerent — in a world that races to the moon, Stephen’s songs abide. Let us be glad with him that love and gentleness, merriment and courage, sorrow and compassion, the simple human virtues, on down the years still “maintain the fabric of the world.”