social historian. The well-captioned photographs elevate it to double duty as coffee-table material for occasional browsing, in addition to its serious nature as a chronicle of the blending of workplace and residence as related to the railroad industry.

**Doo Dah!: Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture**

by Ken Emerson


by Lynne Conner

In *Doo Dah!: Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture,* author Ken Emerson analyses Stephen Foster’s lingering musical legacy through a variety of culturally-informed filters: race; class; economics; and finally issues of taste and style in American society. By looking at Foster through these filters, Emerson provides a clear narrative structure not only for telling Stephen Foster’s life story, but, more importantly, for helping to put to rest the myriad pieces of misinformation about America’s first professional musician that have collected over the 20th century. Two years ago, when I began researching his life for a theater project, I was astonished to discover only a small handful of Foster biographies — all of them written before 1952. Among them was Morrison Foster’s self-serving *My Brother Stephen,* published in 1932. Morrison Foster was the song-writer’s older brother, and there can be no ignoring his blatant public relations agenda—an agenda that resulted in the white-washing of many critical aspects of Foster’s personality and experiences. Other Foster biographies, including Harvey Gaul’s *The Minstrel of the Alleghenies* (besides being out-dated and old-fashioned) use *My Brother Stephen* as a primary source. The result of this paucity of solid documentation and critical analysis is that Foster, who died young and left very few personal records, has been for many years a repository for too much praise, or too little.

With the publication of *Doo Dah!,* Stephen Collins Foster has at last been given his due: a biographically-driven analysis notable for bringing contemporary standards of historiography to bear on this remarkable man’s life and art. Well-written, interesting, and sometimes illuminating, *Doo Dah!* is neither a paean to the songwriter, nor a condemnation. It attempts rather to look critically, thoughtfully and imaginatively at the evolution of the use and the meaning of Foster’s music in American culture. Along the way, it also manages to talk insightfully about larger issues of our society, most notably race relations in the 19th and 20th centuries.

As Emerson makes abundantly clear in his introduction, it is entirely appropriate that a Foster biography should become the site for a discussion centered on American race relations. He points out that through the years, Foster has been used as a poster boy for progressive thinking and practice (argued by those who Lynne Conner is Director of Stages in History, the History Center’s resident theatre group. see his plantation songs as compassionate evocations of slave life) and as a perpetrator of racism (argued by those who see his plantation songs as exploitive of African American culture). But Emerson also points out the ironic fact that in his day, Foster wrote about the lives of Southern slaves with an unusual level of compassion and pathos while at the same time belonging to the anti-abolitionist Democratic party. To his credit, Emerson recognizes that it is just this kind of inherent contradiction that makes Foster such a fascinating subject.

*Doo Dah!* goes beyond the issue of race to other discussions, most notably Emerson’s suggestion that Foster’s life as an artist serves as the prototype for the tortured American pop icon. Foster had an unstable and largely unhappy childhood and an even more unstable adulthood that included bouts of severe depression, chronic alcoholism, and unyielding economic crises. More provocatively, Emerson points out that, like his rock-n-roll descendents (most notably Elvis Presley), Foster took elements of black culture and used them to create a new pop form for white consumption. Anyone interested in contemporary approaches to cultural studies will appreciate these strains of research and analysis in this much-needed study of the life and art of Stephen Foster.

**Main Street Revisited: Time, Space, and Image Building in Small-Town America**

by Richard V. Francaviglia


by Philip Langdon

Until a quarter-century ago, no self-respecting town could have done without its Main Street. That central thoroughfare, whether beautiful or drab, was where you found the community’s leading institutions: sober-looking banks; old, established churches; retailers that attracted customers from throughout the hinterland; public buildings like the library and the post office — and maybe even the high school, if the board of education hadn’t blindly decided to build a new school on some dull-as-dishwater acreage at the edge of town.

It’s no secret what happened. Main Street gradually gave up most of the things that once made it the powerful, magnetic center of daily life. And yet, in the face of all the sharp reductions in its functions, Americans still feel great affection for the traditional, tightly built Main Street — a convivial place capable of bringing together every segment of the populace, from the elite to the eccentric. Richard Francaviglia, a history professor and director of the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies and the History of Cartography at the University of Texas at Arlington, has studied small towns and their centers for more than three decades, and his new book explores the changes Main Street has Philip Langdon’s most recent book is *A Better Place to Live: Reshaping the American Suburb,* recently released in paperback by the University of Massachusetts Press. He is a writer and editor in New Haven, Conn.