



# BULLWHIPS

## & BAD REVIEWS


*The colorful career of music man Henry Kleber.*

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by Jean Thomas

IN 1831, WHEN 15-year-old Henry Kleber came to Pittsburgh with his family from Darmstadt, Germany, the city had one music store, a handful of music teachers, and four fledgling choral organizations. Four years later, he began his Pittsburgh musical career as a music teacher at the Reverend Dr. Lacy's Western Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies on Stockton Avenue in Allegheny City (now Pittsburgh's North Side). For the next 60 years, Kleber would be a major influence on the city's burgeoning musical life in his multiple capacities as conductor, composer, music merchant and publisher, teacher, church organist, performer, impresario, and critic.

Jean Thomas, a flutist who for 15 years directed Pittsburgh's Dear Friends ensemble, which performs 19th century American music, studied Kleber's career as part of her Musicology dissertation (1989) at the University of Pittsburgh.





No. 116



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Kleber was a colorful and sometimes controversial figure whose actions and associations frequently drew the attentions of the local newspapers. An examination of his long career will foster a clearer understanding of the circumstances and contexts in which 19th-century Americans experienced music.

### Music Merchant

Most evidence points to 1839 as the year Kleber began musical merchandising. Not only did the 23-year-old organize the Pittsburgh Band, possibly the first brass band west of the Alleghenies,<sup>1</sup> and publish his first musical composition, but he also opened a piano salesroom under the name of "Ye Golden Harpe" at 103 Third Ave.<sup>2</sup> In 1846, the year after a disastrous fire in downtown Pittsburgh, Kleber was operating his business at 83 Third St. In 1855, his brother Augustus joined him as a partner and the business became H. Kleber & Bro.

Kleber, a slight man, was a forceful individual possessed of a fiery temperament with strong likes and dislikes and an intense love of music. He was described by a nephew as a cultivated man who spoke German, French, and Italian as well as English. However, his competitors saw him as brash, aggressive, self-promoting, and combative.

John Mellor, who had established his Pittsburgh music business in 1831, soon realized he had a formidable competitor. The Kleber name was appearing with increasing regularity in both the advertising and news columns (not always easily distinguished from one another) in local newspapers. One such "news" item reads:

We took great pleasure on Saturday in examining a large assortment of pianos from the celebrated manufactory of Nunn's & Clark, just received by H. Kleber. . . . We advise all the musical world to call and examine these pianos, confident that in so doing so they will experience a gratification of no ordinary kind.<sup>3</sup>

A few weeks after that story appeared,

**One of Kleber's downtown Pittsburgh storefronts during the mid-19th century.**

another newspaper ran an item extolling the virtues of Chickering pianos, claiming they were the only ones used by opera star Jenny Lind on her American tour, and informing its readers that John H. Mellor was the agent for Chickering pianos in Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup>

The two rivals quarreled publicly over everything from the virtues of felt versus leather piano hammers and exhibit space at the state fair to piano endorsements by visiting artists and the relative merits of Chickering versus Steinway pianos. Kleber acquired the Steinway franchise in 1856 after it had been turned down by Mellor, who lived to regret that decision. The Steinway firm was a progressive one that revolutionized the construction of grand pianos and eventually eclipsed the Chickering firm, which stuck with its traditional square grand.

For both firms, the piano was becoming the backbone of their business. In rapidly growing numbers of middle-class homes, the parlor piano served as the focal point of home entertainment. With the phonograph and radio not yet in existence, music-making was a function of family and friends.

Privately bound collections of sheet music attest to the wide variety of music performed in the home. Songs and ballads, dances and marches, opera and symphonic transcriptions, sonatas and concertos are all represented.

Throughout the 1850s, both the Kleber and Mellor firms regularly advertised their pianos and organs in Pittsburgh newspapers and those of surrounding communities, including Butler, Connellsville, Brownsville, Waynesburg, Beaver, Indiana, and McKeesport. Both frequently listed prominent customers, including heads of female seminaries, academies, and such public institutions

as the Western Pennsylvania Penitentiary (one Captain B. Birmingham). Both relied heavily on endorsements from local musicians such as Henry Rohbock, Jean Manns, and Victor DeHam as well as nationally known touring performers, including Maurice Strakosh and Maurice Gottschalk.<sup>5</sup>

Mellor's use of the Strakosh name precipitated yet another heated exchange after Kleber claimed that Mellor had "bought"





Strakosh's endorsement. It would appear, however, that Kleber was not always scrupulous in obtaining his own endorsements. Rohbock, a distinguished Pittsburgh pianist and teacher, dispatched a stern letter to Kleber in August 1855.

H. Kleber Esqu

My Dear Sir,

Reading the *Gazette* of 9th ... I perceived your advertisement in which you again use my name unauthorized. You must certainly remember, that I sent you a Letter several months ago, informing you of my determination of forbidding any one to use my name in connection with the Sale of Instruments. You promised me that, as soon as the advertisement had run out, my name should be discontinued; I did not see the advertisement in question, and yet you take the liberty to sign it for me. This is the second, and let it be the last time, that I request you to discontinue using my name.

I remain My Dear Sir with

the best of feeling

Your obdt. Serv't

H. Rohbock<sup>6</sup>

Obviously Kleber was not one to shrink from controversy; in fact he seemed to thrive on it. Louis Kleber, one of Augustus' sons who eventually entered the firm, recalled that his uncle kept the entire musical trade in constant worry of "verbal attack."<sup>7</sup> On one occasion, Kleber was not content with a mere verbal assault. On March 12, 1850, he had appeared as an assisting artist in a concert by Madam Bornstein-Ruth. Music critic John C. Schaad reviewed the concert for *West Pennsylvanisch Staats-zeitung*. The paper omitted some of Schaad's more caustic comments about Kleber in its published version of the review, but the *Pittsburg Evening Tribune* had no such compunctions and ran the full review:

We generally had to complain of Mr. Kleber's somewhat presumptuous appearance, and a kind of self admiration, which even would not become the greatest artist, and Mr. Kleber is surely far from believing himself an artist. Whatever may be his services in the cultivation of musical taste in this city, he may know that one of the most important characteristics of an artist is modesty.<sup>8</sup>

Henry and his brother Augustus were incensed, and determined to avenge the insults. Their encounter with Schaad was later described:

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.<sup>9</sup>

The whole affair was aired extensively by Pittsburgh newspapers over the next several days. The *Journal* came to the Kleber brothers' defense, whereas the *Tribune*, which had published the offending review, sided with Schaad.

## *Performer, Conductor, and Impresario*

Kleber's appearances as conductor and performer began a few years after he arrived in Pittsburgh and continued until the late 1860s, when his expanded business activities occupied most of his time. In the late 1840s, the Kleber brothers organized a male quartet, in which both sang tenor. Even in his later years, Henry Kleber apparently had an appealing voice, which "was still velvety and he could run up to high C like a stripling. It was said of him that he was the finest tenor ever to come over the mountains in those early days."<sup>10</sup>

The Kleber name appears on concert programs as conductor of his brass band and other instrumental ensembles, as tenor soloist, as member of a vocal ensemble, and occasionally as pianist or organist. Henry's wife, Christiane, as well as his brother, Augustus, often participated in concerts along with him (see figure 1).

Among the many concerts organized by the indefatigable Kleber featuring himself and other Pittsburgh musicians were benefit performances for charitable organizations and causes. A year after his highly publicized run-in with a music critic, Kleber was once again the subject of journalistic scrutiny concerning the allocation of proceeds from a concert he organized to benefit the Orphans' Asylum. Claiming that only \$5 of the \$300 proceeds actually went to the orphanage, the *Chronicle* scolded: "If charity concerts are to be given in the name of charitable institutions but for the benefit of outside popinjays, those who suffer the infliction should know where and to whom their charity has been appropriated."<sup>11</sup>

But in another newspaper, Kleber was defended: "Every charity concert that has been given in this city for the last fifteen years has been either projected by him or he has given it all the aid in his power without price."<sup>12</sup> The story further explained that ticket sales amounted to only \$164, while expenses came to \$100 to pay the 17 performers, plus \$53.75 for hall rental and printing bills, leaving just \$10.75 for the orphanage.

Throughout his career, Kleber was active as an impresario for touring artists as well as for local musicians. His linguistic abilities stood him in good stead with European performers, the mainstay of the American concert stage during the mid-19th century, who regularly included Pittsburgh on their tours.<sup>13</sup>

During the Civil War, Kleber organized one of the many benefit concerts held in conjunction with the Sanitary Fair, a huge exposition held to raise funds for medical relief for Union soldiers. He also composed "Relief Polka," which he dedicated to the Ladies of the Committee of the Pittsburgh Sanitary Fair.<sup>14</sup>

## *Composer*

Kleber's first published composition was a song, "Early Love Can Never Die," copyrighted in 1839. (Stephen Foster's first published piece came in 1840.) During the 1840s, when he was teaching private lessons and serving as organist first at St. Paul's Cathedral and subsequently at Third Presbyterian Church on Third Street,<sup>15</sup> Kleber reportedly wrote and produced works with orchestral accompaniment. However, none of these scores

survive. Most of his published piano compositions from this decade — “Pittsburg Brass Band Quick Step,” “Duquesne Grand Waltz,” “Weston Gallopade” — are probably transcriptions of music originally written and performed by his band.

The early 1850s were Kleber’s most prolific years as a composer. According to the catalog of his 120 known works,<sup>16</sup> he composed at least 40 pieces between 1851 and 1854. Then his output diminished markedly: only eight compositions are listed for the next five years. The decline in the number of compositions coincides with Kleber’s move to more spacious quarters for his music store and his acquisition of sole rights to the sale of Steinway pianos. But Kleber never gave up composing completely; he continued to produce occasional compositions almost to the end of his life. Like many other music merchants, he also became involved in music publishing, first as a kind of auxiliary to a major national publisher and then as an independent local publisher.<sup>17</sup>

Kleber’s output as a publisher consisted principally of dance pieces for piano, issued as sheet music. “This was about the only form of music appreciated in the early days of Pittsburgh,” observes his nephew. “He, however, could and did compose in the classic style for use in his home and in my father’s home.”<sup>18</sup> While this remark does not reflect the full scope of musical life in Pittsburgh, it does indicate the wide market for music that was relatively easy to perform and was associated with music played in public by bands of the time. Kleber’s compositions from the early 1850s were probably aimed directly at the home market for piano sheet music. Some of these achieved national popularity and were reissued several times (although probably not 125 times as claimed by the publisher of “Rainbow Schottisch”). Major sheet music collections throughout the country all include Kleber compositions; those occurring most frequently are “Coral Schottisch,” “Rainbow Schottisch,” “Signal March,” and “Spirit Polka,” all dance-type pieces for piano.

Kleber’s compositions from the early 1850s, a period when the parlor piano was the center of home entertainment, were probably aimed directly at the burgeoning market for piano sheet music. Some of his pieces achieved national popularity and were reissued several times (although probably not 125 times as claimed by the publisher of “Rainbow Schottisch”). Most major sheet music collections throughout the country include Kleber composition; those occurring most frequently are “Coral Schottisch,” “Rainbow Schottisch,” “Signal March” and “Spirit Polka,” all dance-type pieces for piano.

By the 1870s, when all things French were becoming fashionable, young women began to fill their collections with imported Parisian salon music, pieces far more elaborate and technically demanding than the piano dance pieces of previous decades. Kleber, always in step with the times, briefly turned his hand to this style, turning out a few pieces he identified as “a pensee musicale” or “a morceau de salon” to appeal to this latest vogue. But more straight-forward dance and march music remained his forte. His “Greater Pittsburgh March” was published in 1894, just three years before his death.

Kleber’s vocal compositions, though fewer in number, display

more variety. “How Dear to Me the Hour” and “Al mio Cardellino,” dedicated to his daughter Ida, are in the Italian operatic aria style that was a mainstay of the concert stage and parlor. “Katy Darling’s Farewell to Dermot” is an answer song to “Katy Darling,” one of the most popular songs of the day with its Irish text set to a melody by Donizetti. “Will No Maiden Marry Me” is a delightful comic piece; “I Take Your Hand in Mine, Willie” is a sentimental song characteristic of the era.

According to the custom of the time, Kleber’s title pages often include the name of a dedicatee. Some are members of well-known Pittsburgh families; others are pupils, family members, and colleagues, including Stephen Foster.

### *Kleber and Foster*

Kleber’s most fruitful composing years came during the time when Stephen Collins Foster, his younger colleague, was making his mark as a songwriter. The Kleber family lived on Sandusky Street in Allegheny, a short walk from Foster’s home. Foster’s rented office on Wood Street in downtown Pittsburgh was close to Kleber’s Third Street store, a gathering place for musicians and artists. Accounts differ about the extent to which Kleber influenced Foster. Augustus Kleber’s son, Louis, recalled many years later that his father told him that Foster “came to the store two or three times each week talking with my Uncle about his (Foster’s) songs.”<sup>19</sup> Henry’s daughter Ida claimed the visits were almost daily. (Both relatives were children at the time and would not have actually witnessed Foster’s visits).

The closest professional relationship between Kleber and Foster probably occurred in the early 1850s, when each dedicated a composition to the other and collaborated on an arrangement of a German art song.<sup>20</sup> But there is scarce evidence to support the assertion by a Kleber niece that “Foster would jot down things. Kleber would add to them and make them more musical.”<sup>21</sup> Louis Kleber submitted notation for a note-change his uncle was responsible for in the chorus to Foster’s “Old Folks at Home.” He also credits his uncle with persuading Foster he had chosen a poor name for the river featured in “Old Folks.” At any rate, “Pedee” was crossed out on Foster’s manuscript and “Swanee” was written in above.<sup>22</sup>

What seems clear is that Kleber played the role of mentor at some point and remained a friend throughout Foster’s life. He made loans on occasion and encouraged Foster to move to New York when he began to experience difficulties in his songwriting career. When news came of Foster’s death there, the family requested Kleber to make arrangements for the music at the funeral services. Kleber was also among the performers, singing an air from a Handel oratorio.

### *Kleber & City Musical Organizations*

Over the years, Kleber acted as a moving force in the development of a number of new musical organizations in Pittsburgh, beginning with the brass band he organized in 1839. He was a charter and lifetime member of the Frohsinn Singing





**Wife Christiane Mann Kleber often teamed with her husband in concert as a singer and pianist.**





**In composing and publishing his sheet music, Kleber specialized in arrangements that could be played in the home without specialized training.**

Society, an all-male singing society organized in 1850.

In 1853, he became active in the Pittsburgh Philharmonic Society, an organization patterned on Philharmonic societies in cities such as New York and Philadelphia. Philharmonic societies included both musicians and musical patrons, and performances featured both instrumental and vocal compositions, as did most 19th-century so-called classical concerts. Kleber served several years as accompanist for rehearsals and performances.

By the 1870s, Kleber was involved in local musical organizations more as a patron than a performer. He was among the founders of the Gounod Club, organized in 1872 for the purpose of presenting operatic literature. He was similarly involved in the Mozart Club, a successor to the Gounod Club, which disbanded after its leader left town.<sup>23</sup>

### *Kleber's Family*

Other members of the Kleber family were also active musicians, although none approached the multiple roles filled by Henry Kleber. His wife, Christiane Manns Kleber, who frequently appeared with him in concert both as a singer and pianist, composed as well,<sup>24</sup> as did her brother, Jean Manns, a teacher and performer. Their daughter Ida, to whom Kleber dedicated one of his songs, was an accomplished singer. In later years, she recalled the family's home entertainments attended by friends and neighbors. On one occasion, the Kleber and Manns families presented their children in a musicale that included piano duets, songs, and excerpts from two Offenbach operas, complete with costumes, scenery, and special lighting.

By 1890, Henry Kleber's son Oscar and two of Augustus Kleber's sons, Louis and Frank, were active in managing the affairs of H. Kleber & Bro., Limited, which now employed 20 persons in the retail operation.<sup>25</sup> The firm had also begun manufacturing its own pianos, which it sold along with pianos and organs from other makers. Other merchandise included banjos, guitars, mandolines, cornets, music boxes, band instruments, books, and sheet music.

Henry Kleber apparently enjoyed robust good health throughout his life until a sudden attack of "grip" brought about his death in 1897 at the age of 80.<sup>26</sup> By that time, Pittsburgh had grown from a frontier town to a major industrial city of 238,000<sup>27</sup> with a thriving musical life. The city boasted a fledgling symphony orchestra, literally hundreds of choral groups (43 German groups alone), 33 music stores, 105 music teachers, and dozens of bands and orchestras.<sup>28</sup> Through his myriad musical activities, Kleber had actively promulgated this growth and influenced its direction. Over the years, his public concerts had entertained and enlightened audiences with a variety of musical styles. He provided instruction to many musical amateurs and employment to professionals. He offered encouragement and advice to the young Foster. He introduced local audiences to prominent international performers. He promoted musical activity in the home through the sale of sheet music and, more importantly, pianos and other instruments. He fostered interest and participation in public musical life through the organizations



# "The Pittsburgh" Greater MARCH

COMPOSED

AND DEDICATED TO

E.M. Bigelow Esq.

BY

## HENRY KLEBER.

• AS • PLAYED • BY •

Innes' Famous 13th Regiment Band.

PUBLISHED BY

H. KLEBER & BRO., L'T'D.

PITTSBURGH, PA.

Copyright 1894 by H. Kleber & Bro. Pittsburg Pa.



Posed for a  
fanciful family  
portrait with wife  
Christiane and  
daughter Ida.





he helped found. His own compositions enjoyed national as well as local popularity.

Kleber was clearly an economic beneficiary from the thriving musical activity he initiated and supported. While he sometimes appears to be a self-promoter, anxious to keep his name and his merchandise in the public eye, he was much more than just a music merchant. An observation from one of Foster's biographer's lends perspective: "The music business thrives only because music means more than business. For many people, it is a . . . natural accompaniment . . . of work, worship and social and political intercourse."<sup>29</sup> As Kleber thrived, so did the musical life of countless Western Pennsylvania citizens. ❀

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Edward G. Baynham, "Henry Kleber, Early Pittsburgh Musician," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 25 (Sept.-Dec. 1942), 115-16, describes the band's subsequent existence under other leadership.

<sup>2</sup> *Musical Courier* 3 (Nov. 13, 1885), 38-39. Local historians do not all agree on 1839. Harvey Gaul, ed. "Henry Kleber, Pioneer in Music," *The Musical Forecast* (July, 1936), 7, refers to an 1843 opening of a store on Third Avenue; and Baynham, "Henry Kleber," uses 1846 (the year Kleber moved the business to 83 Third Street) as the initial date.

<sup>3</sup> 1851 news clipping, Mellor Musical Scrapbook, vol. 2, Music and Art Department, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

<sup>4</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 1851, Mellor Scrapbook, vol. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Mellor Scrapbook, vol. 1 and 2.

<sup>6</sup> Mellor Scrapbook, vol. 2, 83.

<sup>7</sup> A. M. Foerster, "Outlines of Musical History in Pittsburgh," *Musical Forecast* (Feb. 1923), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Baynham, "Henry Kleber," 117.

<sup>9</sup> Baynham, "Henry Kleber," 117-18.

<sup>10</sup> Gaul, "Henry Kleber," 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Pittsburgh Chronicle* clipping, Mellor Scrapbook, vol. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Evening Tribune and Express* clipping, Mellor Scrapbook, vol. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Among those he played host to were the actor Edwin Booth; pianists Hans von Bulow, Anton Rubinstein, Louis Gottschalk, and Sigismund Thalberg; conductors Luigi Arditi and Theodore Thomas; and singers Maria Malibran, Christine Nilsson, Carlotta Patti and Adelina Patti.

<sup>14</sup> The only known extant copy is in the Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

<sup>15</sup> Gaul, "Henry Kleber, Pioneer in Music," 7. No such works are extant.

<sup>16</sup> Jean W. Thomas, "Henry Kleber, Nineteenth-Century Pittsburgh Musician: Catalog to His Known Works," University of Pittsburgh, 1985. Kleber's total output was around 180, according to Baynham, "Henry Kleber," 120.

<sup>17</sup> It was a practice of major publishers such as Oliver Ditson of Boston and Firth, Pond, & Co. of New York to list a number of regional music stores along with their own imprint on sheet music covers. "H. Kleber & Co." appears frequently on music published by the latter. Eventually the Kleber firm began to publish its own music after Henry's sons and nephew were running the business.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Louis P. Kleber, age 86, to Fletcher Hodges, 1939.

<sup>19</sup> Louis P. Kleber to Hodges.

<sup>20</sup> Foster dedicated his "Village Bells Polka," 1850, to Kleber; the following year Kleber dedicated "Spirit Polka" to Foster. An 1851 edition of Franz Abt's "In the Eye Abides the Heart" credits the translation to Foster and the musical arrangement to Kleber.

<sup>21</sup> Ida Kleber Todd interview by Louis Kleber.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Louis P. Kleber. The manuscript is on display at the Stephen Foster Memorial, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>23</sup> From its Pittsburgh correspondent, the *Music Trade Review of New York* picked up an item that mentioned immorality within the club. Its leader, Clement Tetedoux, resigned in a huff and decamped to Chicago, more or less permanently. The final soiree was conducted by an assistant and the club soon folded. Its niche was at least partially filled by the recently organized Mozart Club.

<sup>24</sup> Copies of three of her published compositions are extant: "Dream of Home," "Have You Not Seen the Timid Tear," and "The Wanderer's Evening Hymn."

<sup>25</sup> *Allegheny County Pa, Illustrated*, 1896, 189.

<sup>26</sup> See *Pittsburgh Bulletin*, Feb. 27, 1887, 17, for obituary.

<sup>27</sup> Not including adjacent Allegheny City, with its population of 105,287.

<sup>28</sup> *Pittsburgh City Directory*, 1897, and Baynham, "History of Pittsburgh Music," 296.

<sup>29</sup> William Austin, *Susanna, Jeanie and The Old Folks At Home* (1975), 27.

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### Mary Schenley's Picnic House

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