

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
26 January 1992

Local Musical Composers, 1976-date

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* NOTE – Article missing, copied from Jay's draft *

Local musical compositions form an important element of the musical heritage of Carroll County. Local history sources and surviving sheet music in the Historical Society's collection document more than thirty works written by over ten local composers.

A selection of religious music entitled "A Collection of Sacred Melodies" (1876) by J.W. Slaughaupt of Taneytown is the earliest extant example of locally published music. The small song book contained twenty-three hymns "designed for Sanctuary, Sunday-school and social worship." Slaughaupt wrote and composed most of the pieces. This work is an interesting product of a family better known for its several generations of chairmakers.

An affinity for music was often a family affair. The Shellmans of Westminster, former residents of the Society's museum house, are noteworthy. Mrs. Catherine J. Shellman included music in the select school taught in her home and each of her four children had an interest in music. Her eldest son Harry J. Shellman became a newspaper writer who occasionally wrote poetry and music. An undated manuscript composition "Old Glory," with music written by Edward Graves, is a patriotic piece.

Sisters Fanny and Mary produced the most significant works of the family. Fanny, a music teacher, and Mary, a writer, collaborated on several compositions. The sisters wrote "Gold is the Standard to Win" (1896) for the William F. McKinley presidential campaign and "Brave Cuba Shall Be Free" (1898) during the Spanish-American War. This latter work was performed during a theatrical production about the liberation of Cuba from Spanish rule. Some of their music was sold by their younger brother James M. Shellman, Jr, who operated a Westminster music and stationary establishment.

The decade of the 1890s produced a wealth of local compositions. In addition to the above mention works by the Shellmans, George B. Holsinger wrote "Westminster March" (1893) published by John T. Royer of Westminster. In the following year Anna E. Shriver wrote "Hayland Waltz" dedicated to her mother Mrs. William Shriver of Westminster.

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Uriah Grant Heltibridle of New Windsor was also active in this period. A barber by profession, Heltibridle also billed himself as a musician and composer. His fancy 1900 billhead noted that he was the author of the "coming song success 'Answer Me To-night' and the composer of 'Sunny Tennessee' and 'Crescent Club.'" Heltibridle later collaborated with B.D. Ackley and published a religious hymn, "His Blood Saves You and Me" (1909).

Important compositions were also published in the present century. The crisis of the Second World War inspired Philip S. Royer of Westminster to write "United Nations Victory Song" (1942). Royer dedicated his patriotic piece to Carroll County Schools superintendent Raymond Hyson and to the county's high school students.

Two original compositions were published in 1971. Long time member of the Westminster Band, John L. Schwigart, published "The Spirit of Conquest." Schwigart began working on the piece in 1935. The first version was dubbed "S.L.H." (Sounds Like Hell) by the members of the Westminster Band. Schweigart and the Band presented the finished composition in a special performance on July 25, 1971.

The passage of Confederate soldiers through Union Mills during the Civil War inspired George P. Gunther, Jr. to write "I'm a Union Man" (1971). The song takes its title from the defiant statement made by Andrew Shriver to a Confederate cavalryman in search of horses.

The musical compositions described above are representative of the music that was written and played in Carroll County. Undoubtedly there are omissions. Please contact the Historical Society if you know of additional music composed by Carroll countians.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Billhead, Uriah Grant Heltibridle, musician and composer, New Windsor, Md., 1900. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.