

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: SOURCES FOR THE REEVALUATION OF
GEORGE FREDERICK ROOT'S CAREER:
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY & A SECULAR
CANTATA

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Music scholarship has failed to fully assess the impact of the American composer George Frederick Root beyond his work in the church, classroom, and home. Most famous for composing “The Battle Cry of Freedom” and acting as music education pioneer Lowell Mason’s associate, Root’s other contributions to American music are often overlooked, particularly his body of secular cantatas for amateur choirs. This paper examines the commonly relayed biography of Root, Root’s place in American historiography, and the advantages of examining his own autobiography. Finally, this paper presents a case study of *The Haymakers* and its possible place in future studies of Root. By better examining his career, we see that George Frederick Root was a typical nineteenth-century American man and that he was also a composer notable for his ability to serve the musical needs of his audience. Root pioneered large-scale choral works targeted at amateur performers with his secular cantatas and, consequently, served a wider swath of American performers and listeners.

SOURCES FOR THE REEVALUATION OF GEORGE FREDERICK ROOT'S
CAREER: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY & A SECULAR CANTATA

By

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And now, if all our friends as well
Succeed the shelter gaining,
With joy we'll sing our harvest song,
And care not for the raining.

-- George Frederick Root, "Now Creaks the Heavy Wagon," *The Haymakers*

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Introduction

The name George Frederick Root (1820–1895) appears in nearly every general history of American music published since his death. But while he is mentioned frequently—usually in connection to his more famous contemporary Lowell Mason—Root’s own influence on American music has been almost completely ignored. Writing in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Dena Epstein and Polly Carder provide a typical example of how Root has been discussed in studies of American music. They describe him as a “layman’s musician, thinking of music primarily in terms of singing in the classroom, the church and the home.” While correct as far as it goes, the *Grove* article does not provide any insight into Root’s opinions about how music should be experienced, why he wrote in particular genres, or how he felt about his own place in American musical culture.¹

Careful consideration of Root’s career shows that his influence extended well beyond the classroom, church, and home. He was, on the one hand, preoccupied (like other men of his generation) with issues of American masculinity. Simultaneously, he was a musical tradesman who found work as a performer, educator, composer, publisher, and critic. Through these two traits—American masculinity and musical tradecraft—Root managed to reach audiences both philosophically and aesthetically. While Epstein and Carder are correct in noting that Root most often wrote music for the classroom, church, and home, a more thorough examination of his output—

¹ *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. “Root, George Frederick,” by Dena Epstein and Polly Carder, accessed February 13, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

specifically his autobiography and his secular cantatas—reveals that Root sought to serve the musical needs of a much wider swath of American performers and listeners.

Root himself noted his desire to expand the reach of wholesome—almost sacred—music beyond the classroom, church, and home. After a false start, the composer himself acknowledged the value of a music that all people would sing, what he called “people’s songs”:

I saw at once that mine must be the “people’s song,” still, I am ashamed to say, I shared the feeling that was around me in regard to that grade of music. When Stephen C. Foster’s wonderful melodies (as I now see them) began to appear, and the famous Christy’s Minstrels began to make them known, I “took a hand in” and wrote a few, but put “G. Friedrich Wurzel” (the German for Root) to them instead of my own name. . . . It was not until I imbibed more of Dr. Mason’s spirit, and went more among the people of the country, that I saw these things in a truer light, and respected myself, and was thankful when I could write something that all the people would sing.²

The need for a more thorough study of George Frederick Root will be obvious to anyone with a passing knowledge of nineteenth-century American music. Root is often discussed in American music histories, but the conversation is normally limited to his Civil War popular songs or his efforts in conjunction with the pioneer of music education Lowell Mason (1792–1872). Consequently, as we shall see in chapter two, even though Root is not an unknown figure in music history he is most commonly only a footnote to Mason.

Historians’ neglect of Root centers around two failures: their inattention to his compositions beyond Civil War songs, and their ignorance of autobiography within the context of music historiography. Root is not unusual among nineteenth-century

² George F. Root, *The Story of a Musical Life: An Autobiography* (Cincinnati: John Church, 1891); reprint (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 83.

American musicians in this neglect. Musicologist Katherine K. Preston has lamented that there are many holes in our understanding of nineteenth-century American music:

There are huge gaps in our basic knowledge of 19th-century American musical life. Worse, many scholars—especially younger ones—are not even aware that the lacunae exist, and as a result unchallenged misconceptions have crept into our collective “knowledge” of the American cultural past.³

Further analysis of Root’s contribution to American music is necessary in order to begin work on a more complete American music historiography. American musicology should consider how it has arrived at its current state in order to make twenty-first century scholarship more comprehensive. As Preston writes:

Put simply, we have egregiously neglected the foundation of the intellectual edifice we are constructing as a discipline—and we do so to our intellectual peril. One of our goals as musicologists is to comprehend the music that surrounds us. In order to do so, however, we need to have a firm understanding of our musical and cultural history. And we do not yet possess this understanding.⁴

Preston’s article is a virtual call to arms for nineteenth-century studies:

It is wonderful that we have broadened our scholarly horizons, and that musicologists are tackling so many diverse and interesting twentieth-century topics. Much of this work is also important. But to continue to ignore the history of American music in the 19th century is intellectually dangerous. This is crucial, I believe, for the future of our discipline.⁵

This thesis will unpack and expand the scholarship centered on Root as one example of the neglected, nineteenth-century American musician (indeed, when Preston

³ Katherine K. Preston, “Standpoint: What Happened to the Nineteenth Century?” *The Bulletin of the Society for American Music* 31 (Fall 2005): 41–43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*

provides a list of neglected nineteenth-century American composers, she mentions George Root by name).

Chapter one will summarize and recontextualize Root's biography with a special focus on three aspects of his career: education, popular song, and the secular cantata. As historiography plays an important role in American musical studies, chapter two will examine Root's treatment in the major published scholarship, and analyze how influential historians have unfairly stressed certain aspects of Root's career, leading to an incomplete portrait of this musician.⁶ As Root's own autobiography will prove to be a major source for this study, a theoretical overview of such personal writing in the nineteenth-century is required. Consequently, chapter three will discuss the major functions of nineteenth-century autobiography as written by white middle-class men. The function of these self-reflective writings include self-discovery, moral development, and self-projection. As this thesis focuses on how Root has been treated in the literature, chapter two and three will also serve as literature reviews for George Root and autobiography respectively. Chapter four demonstrates how Root's autobiography embodies the patterns found in chapter three, and makes the case for expanding Root's reputation beyond that of an educator or Civil War song composer. Finally, chapter five will provide a model for better understanding the scope of Root's career by presenting a case study of one of his dramatic secular cantatas, *The Haymakers*. This thesis will, above all, demonstrate

⁶ On the need for a more thorough historiography of American music, see Richard Crawford, *The American Musical Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3–37.

that George F. Root, while perhaps not a remarkable composer in his musical style, was indeed notable in his ability to understand and serve the needs of his audience.

Chapter 1: More Than a “Layman’s Musician”

One of the primary purposes of this thesis is to recontextualize George Frederick Root within the framework of nineteenth-century American history. As such, it will be helpful to have a sense of how Root is usually treated in the current scholarship. The review of Root’s biography presented in this chapter follows that told in most histories of American music. Two major aspects of Root’s career—his work with music education pioneer Lowell Mason, and his success as a Civil War song composer—will quickly become apparent, and both are crucial in identifying the problems that have developed in Root scholarship. This chapter will also describe a lesser-known, but equally important, aspect of Root’s compositional output: the secular cantata.

Biography

George Frederick Root was born in Sheffield, Massachusetts on August 30, 1820, the first child of amateur musician parents. When Root was six years old, his family lost their home in Sheffield because of financial trouble, and they moved to Willow Farm in nearby North Reading. Root’s father Frederick was a militia captain in Sheffield and taught his children the importance of patriotism and service to one’s country.¹ These were values that would later resonate in Root’s life when he began to

¹ P. H. Carder, *George F. Root, Civil War Songwriter* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 7. This study, also available as a dissertation, is an excellent and comprehensive biography of George Frederick Root that provides extensive coverage of primary documents pertaining to his life, career, family, and friends. The present thesis does not aim to provide a complete biography including all of these sources. While Carder’s work is an exceptional collection and presentation of primary

compose patriotic songs during the Civil War. Root's mother, Sarah Flint Root, was an accomplished amateur singer and spent her young adulthood as a teacher in Andover, Massachusetts. A popular story, one that Root liked to recount, was that his parents had named him "George Frederick" out of respect for the great George Frideric Handel. Sarah's initial plan had been to name their son "Frederick Handel Root," but her husband wisely opposed the idea.

Root's father taught him to perform on the four-keyed flute, which he played at church when he turned eight years old. His father also took him to a music store in Boston where Root tried playing several other instruments. Root later wrote in his autobiography that by the time he was thirteen, he could play as many instruments as he was years old.²

By the time Root was sixteen, economic hardship had come upon the family again and his younger brother Ebenezer became very ill. Ebenezer went to Argentina to recover, and his father followed soon thereafter to tend sheep on his brother-in-law's land. George Root worked on the family farm in North Reading until he turned eighteen. While he was now the primary provider for his mother and seven younger siblings, music was always on his mind.

Root visited Boston in 1838, a stopover on a longer journey by train. While there, he visited the music school of Artemas Johnson, known as Harmony Hall. Johnson would become Root's first formal music teacher, and soon offered him a position doing chores and menial work at his school for three dollars a week. Excited,

documents, it does not probe the issues of identity that will be considered in this thesis.

² Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 3.

Root traveled home to North Reading to tell his family the news. With his father still absent, Root had only his mother's support when he set out for Boston to begin a career in music. George Root would always remain emotionally connected to the farm in North Reading, and it was a place to which he would often return for solace and rejuvenation. However, once Root's father returned to Willow Farm in 1839, the younger man was no longer required to provide for his family. This allowed Root to focus solely on building a career in music. His brother Ebenezer also returned and later entered the music publishing business.

Immediately upon Root's arrival in Boston, he began piano lessons with Johnson who deemed them a top priority for the young musician. Johnson explained that the ability to play piano would afford Root many job opportunities in the city. Root was often frustrated, but eventually he found that he enjoyed playing. After six or seven weeks, a young man who sought piano lessons came to the studio and Johnson assigned Root to teach him. This was Root's first pupil. Johnson renewed his employment agreement with Root after the first two months, and he proposed that Root stay at the studio for another year. Root was happy in Boston and agreed to the plan.

Johnson soon urged Root to audition for Lowell Mason's chorus at the Boston Academy of Music. Root could hardly conceal his enthusiasm and wrote in his autobiography:

[I] was much surprised when Mr. Mason came to where I was sitting and asked me to join his choir—that famous Bowdoin Street Choir, the like of which has rarely been equaled, in my opinion, in this or any other country. I told him why I could not—that I was with Mr. Johnson, etc., but that invitation settled the voice question in my mind. I was going to sing. Lowell

Mason had wanted me in his choir, and that was as good as a warranty that I could succeed.³

Root, however, felt tied to Johnson and chose not to join Mason's choir.

Nevertheless, Mason—the leading church music figure in Boston—would soon become instrumental in Root's career as a music educator. As will be discussed in chapter two, scholars of American music have consistently grouped Root together with William Bradbury, George Webb, and a handful of other nineteenth-century music educators as part of a Lowell Mason school, so it is important to examine Mason's career in some detail.⁴

Lowell Mason and the Teaching of Children (1838–1852)

Lowell Mason was born in 1792 in Medfield, Massachusetts to musician parents. He spent much of his life proselytizing for congregational participation in church music and for the establishment of a music education curriculum in American public schools. He compiled numerous tune books with instructional materials, composed music, and arranged hymn tunes for use by educators. Mason is perhaps best known for his application of European principles in teaching, and for his support of European choral styles above more obviously American compositional techniques. Nevertheless, despite the magnitude of his achievements, it would be wrong to represent Mason as the sole pioneer of American music education.

³ Ibid., 14.

⁴ Sondra Wieland Howe, "Music Teaching in the Boston Public Schools, 1864–1879," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 40 (Winter 1992): 316–28.

In the eighteenth century, a traditional style of choral singing developed in New England. Children and young people were sent to singing schools where they learned the fundamentals of singing plaintunes, anthems, and fusing tunes. Much to the chagrin of some later educators, these songs were rife with parallel fifths, unconventional treatment of dissonance, and other basic violations of good European voice leading. This style of singing, well represented in the works of composers such as William Billings (1746–1800), was, in fact, the best example of an American style of choral composition until the early nineteenth century.

A prime example of an eighteenth-century American plaintune is “Chester” (c. 1770) by Billings, a strophic piece for four vocal parts. This composition provides three basic features representative of early American plaintunes: irregular alternation of consonance and dissonance, parallel fifths, and a secular text. Billings wrote the tenor melody first, followed by the bass, treble, and counter voices. This arrangement is striking. A standard European choral setting of the period might have had four interdependent voices moving mainly homophonically, but Billings’s voices are mostly independent and they interlock more polyphonically, though not as smoothly as comparable European pieces.

A defining feature of “Chester”—and one that would draw the ire of later composers—is its glaring use of parallel fifths and octaves (the first phrase of “Chester” contains four successive parallel fifths between the treble and tenor voices):

Chester

William Billings

TREBLE
Let ty-rantsshake their i - ron rod, And Slav' - ry clank her

COUNTER
Let ty-rants shake their i - ron rod, And Slav' - ry clank her

TENOR
Let ty-rants shake their i - ron rod, And Slav' - ry clank — her

BASS
Let ty-rantsshake their i - ron rod, And Slav' - ry clank — her

7.

Example 1. “Chester,” William Billings.

A final noteworthy feature is the piece’s independence from Europe in its explicitly anti-British text, which includes the treason-inducing notion of “enlisting God on New England’s side in her quarrel with the mother country.”⁵ The opening words of the plaintune suggest that God will deliver New England from the tyranny of Britain, and as Richard Crawford points out, such writing was indicative that the “prohibition against nonbiblical texts was becoming a thing of the past.”⁶

Let tyrants shake their iron rod,
And Slav’ry clank her galling chains,
We fear them not we trust in God,
New england’s God for ever reigns.

Lowell Mason was part of a movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century to correct the choral style of William Billings with its less than devout text, violation of European voice-leading rules, and irregular alternation of consonance and

⁵ Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: Norton, 2001), 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*

dissonance. Champions of the new style advocated for an “ancient music,” which borrowed from the compositions of European masters like Joseph Haydn and George Frideric Handel. Of course, music composed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was hardly “ancient,” but the reformers maintained that these works had withstood the test of time and that American composers should turn to these European masters as models. In doing so, American musicians would be able to elevate the quality of music making in their country. In Boston, musicians founded the Boston Handel and Haydn Society (1815) to improve American performances of sacred music and promote the performance of European masterworks.⁷ It was this group of musicians that published Mason’s first tunebook, the *Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music*, which enjoyed considerable success.

There are two persisting images of Mason and his dedication to the European principles that help contextualize the discussion of Root’s biography. First is Mason’s status as a tunebook compiler who would borrow motives and melodic gestures from the European masters, fashion new tunes from them, and then attribute the result to the European composer. Through this process, Mason’s new and accessible music took on the cultural value of a European masterwork, even though it was actually homegrown. Richard Crawford points out that this sometimes made the distinction between Mason’s compositions and his arrangements unclear.⁸ For example, Mason attributed “Antioch,” widely known as the tune of the Christmas carol “Joy to the World,” to Handel. While Handel wrote no such tune, Mason’s new melody, which

⁷ Ibid., 142.

⁸ Ibid., 143.

appears in the tenor voice below, does borrow from Messiah by cobbling together the chorus “Glory to God” (at the text “Joy to the world”) and the instrumental obbligato from the recitative “Comfort ye my people” (at the text “and heav’n and nature sing”).



Example 2. “Antioch,” Lowell Mason, mm. 1–15.

The second persisting image of Mason is his work as an educator. Mason aimed to achieve a well-informed American public who appreciated and accepted European models of music as its own. His educational system was supposedly based on the European *Pestalozzian* method, though to what extent that is true remains unclear.⁹ This method was primarily child-centered, and it arranged education into four spheres: home and family, vocational, community, and education as pathways to God.¹⁰ Mason also believed in the ability of music to inculcate basic morality in young children. If a child sang in school about respecting his parents, praying before bed, and finding satisfaction in his work, Mason believed that child was then more

⁹ Arthur L. Rich, “Lowell Mason, Modern Music Teacher,” *Music Educators Journal* 28 (Jan. 1942): 22–24; Wilfried Gruhn, “Is Lowell Mason’s ‘Manual’ Based on Pestalozzian Principles? An Inquiry into the Controversy of Methods in the Nineteenth Century,” *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 14 (July 1993): 92–101.

¹⁰ Gruhn, “Is Lowell Mason,” 93–94.

likely to actually perform those actions in his life. Mason desired all American children to be morally educated in this manner, with music at the core of that pursuit.

Many historians have been critical of Mason because he made a sizeable living teaching children, compiling and publishing tunebooks, and training new teachers to work under him using his own educational system. Some have even argued that the financial gains he received from his work detract from his authenticity as an education reformer.¹¹ Crawford points out that Mason's professional experience as a bank officer likely had much to do with his financial success, and that his initial aim as a musician was probably to generate revenue rather than to serve a philosophical need. His status as a part-time professional musician provides additional support for this belief. Even so, historians continue to criticize Mason for his lack of authenticity.¹²

A second reason Mason's influence has been met by historians with reservation is his influential role in American music reform. While his work in establishing a music education system in the United States was important and long lasting, his actions to replace a distinctive American music with European hymns and anthems ultimately delayed American composers from finding their own national identity. Mason's principle that European harmony was the only correct option meant that American composers turned their sights toward European composition styles. It

¹¹ Carol A. Pemberton, "Revisionist Historians: Writers Reflected in Their Writings," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 35 (Winter 1987), 214–15.

¹² Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 142.

was not until the twentieth century that American composers began to re-explore what it meant for music to sound American.

While this belated development cannot be blamed entirely on Mason, it is important to note that his singing and teaching institutes were extremely influential and affected most music educators across the United States. It was also within this system that George Root found his first foothold as an American music educator, and it was to this system that Root contributed as he pursued his own career in music education.¹³

By 1840, Root had entered Mason's employment as a singing class assistant and was promoted in 1841 to a coaching position in the teachers' classes. He also taught vocal technique classes. These first years in Boston were prosperous for Root and he enjoyed some modest notoriety around the city. He played the piano and organ for several churches, took on private pupils, and coached church choirs.

Root explains that the success he found in Boston was due to Mason's revolutionary curriculum, and to the fact that the Mason school faced almost no competition from other educators:

I must explain that music was in a very different condition then from what it is now. It was just emerging then from the florid but crude melodies and the imperfect harmonies of the older time. Lowell Mason had but just commenced what proved to be a revolution in the "plain song" of the church and of the people, and his methods of teaching the elementary principles of music were so much better and so much more attractive than anything that had before been seen that those who were early in the field had very great advantage. We had no competition and were sought for on every hand.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 142.

¹⁴ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 26–27.

Root's hard work paid off in 1844 when the educator Jacob Abbott asked if he would like to come to New York to implement Mason's music education techniques. Abbott and his brothers had opened a private school for young middle-class ladies and Root agreed to instruct the school's choir. He met Mary Woodman soon after moving to the city and married her in 1845.

In New York, Root quickly expanded his influence and reputation. In addition to his school choirs at the Spingler Institute (Abbott's school) and Rutgers, Root instructed private classes of blind pupils and young adults, and led various church choirs, proving his breadth in music education. All of these groups rapidly became successful, but Root nonetheless became frustrated with the lack of new, high-quality music to teach his students. In order to address this deficiency, he took it upon himself to write his first instructional book, *The Young Ladies' Choir* (1846):

After a while I began to find it difficult to get proper music for my girls at Rutgers and Spingler to sing, and it took so much time to select what was needed and cost so much to get copies enough, that I felt that something must be done in the way of preparing music especially for them.¹⁵

In December of 1850, Root's health began to deteriorate because of his relentless work ethic, and he suffered from stomach ulcers. He sailed to Europe for a vacation with the purpose of restoring his health. Root's European tour took him to Paris and London, where he took singing lessons from Giulio Alary and attended as many recitals and concerts as he could, including those of Louis Moreau Gottschalk and Hector Berlioz. This was an important trip for Root, who had admired the work of European composers since boyhood. He often wrote about his experiences abroad

¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

and it hardly seems coincidental that he began writing more sophisticated music upon his return.

In 1852, after his homecoming, Root convinced Mason to establish the first Normal Musical Institute in New York, a convention for music teachers to learn pedagogy over a short period of time in an intensive manner.¹⁶ Mason liked the idea and entrusted Root to establish and organize the events. Over the next twenty years, Root and his associates from the Mason school held Normal Institutes all across New England and the Midwest. A notable institute was held in Chicago in 1872 during which Lowell Mason died at the age of eighty.

Root's background and education as a music teacher proved vital to the next period of his career, during which he worked mostly as a song composer and music publisher. His accumulated experience and published educational repertoire (including textbooks and secular cantatas) prepared him for success in popular songwriting; he had, by then, cultivated a perspective on what sort of music the American public desired.

¹⁶ "Normal schools" were established in the sixteenth century and typically refer to schools dedicated to educating teachers in best practices for pedagogy. Mason, Root, and their associates intended for their Normal Institutes to provide basic pedagogical training to music educators (experienced and aspiring) over three or four months at a time. Many educators chose to participate despite having years of experience. Activities included seminars in music pedagogy for groups and individual students, private vocal and piano lessons, sight-singing lessons, and participation in the institute choir. Recitals and concerts were often given and new textbooks were available for purchase.

The Civil War and the American Parlor (1852–1871)

Sometime around 1850, Root began publishing parlor songs under the pseudonym “Wurzel,” German for “root.” A few of these songs were moderately successful, including “There’s Music in the Air” (1854) and “Rosalie, the Prairie Flower” (1855). It is unclear why Root chose to compose his first songs under this pseudonym, but some historians suggest that he was embarrassed by his initial sheet music publications.¹⁷ It is also possible that Root wished to lend more credibility to his works since he was still unknown as a composer. Lowell Mason’s influence on American attitudes toward music may have convinced him, at least initially, that an association with German composers, spurious or not, would be an advantageous one.

Root’s real popular success as a composer, however, came with the beginning of the Civil War in 1861. Root’s song “The First Gun is Fired! May God Protect the Right!” was published and issued only three days after the battle at Fort Sumter, beating all other potential song composers to publication. It was because of this quick and topical publication that Root’s name became immediately associated with Civil War songs. The huge and sustained popularity of these songs explains why Root has been remembered chiefly as a Civil War song composer. Among his successes were

¹⁷ Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music From the Pilgrims to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1906), 155; H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 66. Chase and Hitchcock both suggest that Root believed his abilities above the level of American parlor song. Both historians also write that Root looked down on easier composition. This is a theory that could have been obtained from an incomplete reading of Root’s autobiography in which he states that he initially “looked down upon” that sort of composition. Root never mentions his choice to use a pseudonym nor does he attempt to contextualize that choice. This interpretation will be revisited in chapter two.

“Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!” (1864) and “Just Before the Battle, Mother” (1864). His most popular song was “Battle Cry of Freedom” (1862), which was written in response to President Abraham Lincoln’s second call for troops:

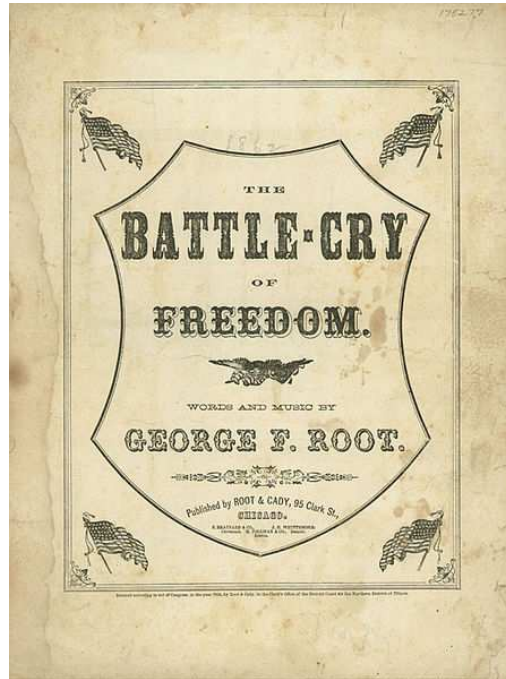


Figure 1. “Battle Cry of Freedom,” George F. Root, 1862.

Root admitted that he was initially insecure about his status as a song composer, and that he had some difficulty reconciling this genre of music with his higher aspirations. He wrote in his autobiography that, despite his reservations, by the time he gained a little success he had changed his attitude towards the song publishing business as a whole. Root acknowledged that once he embraced popular song composition, the quality and quantity of his output increased. He also began to use his own name on his publications.

Root had a particular advantage when he entered the publishing business in the late 1850s. His younger brother Ebenezer had already found a niche in the Chicago market for a music publishing house of Root & Cady. Ebenezer eventually

offered his older brother a share in the company, and Root moved his family to Chicago in 1860. The musician had now essentially abandoned classroom teaching, and the move to Chicago proved to be a successful one as the brothers' publishing company thrived during the Civil War. The Chicago *Tribune* expressed its delight in a local news column with Root's decision to make Chicago his new home:

We are glad to learn that Mr. Geo. F. Root is to become a resident of Chicago. While establishing himself as a composer, he devoted himself largely to teaching in New York, in which few, if any, have ever been more successful. Having established by his Normal Musical Institute, his music books and popular ballads, a world-wide reputation, it is doubtless a matter of little importance to himself where he resides, since he is hereafter to devote himself mainly to the compilation of music books . . . the writing of songs, ballads, etc., which he may reasonably expect will circulate all over the Union. As an indication that he has really cast anchor here, we may be allowed to say that he became a partner in the music house of Root & Cady on the 1st inst., which was the second anniversary of that firm's successful business.¹⁸

The firm of Root & Cady came to dominate the music publishing industry in Chicago between 1858 and 1871.¹⁹ The ease in having his songs published and widely distributed was, of course, instrumental in Root's popular song success.

Tragedy, however, struck the firm in 1871, when its building was consumed by the Great Chicago Fire. The firm rebuilt and continued to enjoy some success, but Root decided to remove himself from the partnership and focus solely on song and cantata composition. He did, however, continue to contribute songs and occasional columns about composition or music education to Root & Cady's monthly periodical, *The Song Messenger of the Northwest*.

¹⁸ *Tribune*, December 3, 1860.

¹⁹ Dena J. Epstein, *Music Publishing in Chicago before 1871: The Firm of Root & Cady, 1858–1871* (Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1969), 17–30.

What is most important about this period of Root's life is that he gained enormous popularity through the publication of his Civil War songs. A keen sense of timing and the advantage of having a brother in the music publishing business allowed Root to beat other song composers to the Civil War market. As a result, George Root was a household name by the end of the war and anything he published was eagerly purchased in large quantities. By the end of his life, he had published over 200 songs for the sheet music market.

The Secular Cantata: Singing Beyond the Classroom, the Church, and the Home (1848–1860)

The literature on George Root usually focuses on these two aspects of his career: music education and song composition. But there was an intermediate, transitional period that took place after his initial attachment to Mason and before he struck out for Chicago. Perhaps it is not coincidental that this period was dominated by a different genre: the secular cantata. It was these pieces that Root wrote to challenge his amateur groups and to expand their repertoire. Despite their importance at the time, these compositions are rarely discussed in American music scholarship, and constitute a significant facet of his career that distinguishes Root from other contemporaneous song composers.

Root composed his first cantata, *The Flower Queen* (1852), for his New York pupils after his recuperative trip to Europe. Since Root intended this work only for his classroom pupils, its initial publication was limited. The piece proved, however, to be popular with amateur vocal groups, and Carder estimates that there were over 500 performances mounted of *The Flower Queen* in the first four years after its

publication.²⁰ Root churned out several other cantatas including *The Haymakers*; *Columbus, the Hero of Faith*; *Under the Palms*; and *David the Shepherd Boy*.

Root acknowledged his surprise when he discovered how widely performed his cantatas were, but he did have some frustrations with copyright laws. Many choirs purchased only a single score and then taught themselves these pieces by rote, and so Root did not find the genre particularly profitable. Furthermore, the secular cantata fell out of favor by the early twentieth century. Possible reasons for this decline include the increasing irrelevance of their thematic material, the decreasing interest of Americans in works that blended popular and classical elements, and the rise of professional ensembles in American cities performing more difficult works.

Dena Epstein writes in the liner notes for the only recording of Root's most successful cantata, *The Haymakers*, that these works are significant not only for their role in Root's legacy, but also for their existence in American music at a time when such large-scale pieces were not yet regularly composed by Americans.²¹ The earliest American operas by George Bristow and William Henry Fry were not widely performed, and no American composers produced large-scale oratorios. Jacklin Stopp asserts that Root was one of the first widely recognized American composers to produce such works, following the example of the lesser-known composer James C. Johnson, also a product of the Mason school and brother of Root's first formal music

²⁰ Carder, *Root*, 36.

²¹ Dena J. Epstein, liner notes to *The Haymakers, An Operatic Cantata, Part the Second* (Recorded Anthology of American Music: New World Records, NW 234, 1978).

teacher, Artemas Johnson.²² Root lived with the Johnson brothers during the time he was in Artemas's employment, thus raising the possibility that he learned about the secular cantata from them.

Epstein blames the lack of secular cantata scholarship on a persisting theory in American music history: a theory that separates music into the classical and popular, what Joseph Horowitz calls the "high/low stratification."²³ Epstein insists that Root's cantatas enjoyed immense popularity at a time when these distinctions were not particularly relevant to the American musical experience. Epstein and Stopp point out that the secular cantatas were forgotten almost immediately following their inception because of the dichotomy that this binary system created:

The theories of American musical history that postulate two streams of development—the "cultivated," or "genteel," and the "vernacular"—make no provision for a work that was neither consciously related to European models nor strictly popular, but drew on the English glee while using indigenous themes to appeal to American performers and audiences. It appears the American music history, like Root's approach to composition, is more complex than has been recognized: *The Haymakers* represents an aspect of American music that has been completely overlooked.²⁴

The charm and appeal of Root's secular cantatas were due entirely to the breadth of musical genres he used to create them. The audience was likely to hear songs reminiscent of an Italian aria, a Handel oratorio chorus, an Irish folk song, an English glee, and a Bach chorale all in one large work. Interestingly, this appeal lessened as the nineteenth century drew to a close and America experienced, according to

²² Jacklin Bolton Stopp, "James C. Johnson and the American Secular Cantata," *American Music* 28 (Summer 2010), 228–30.

²³ Epstein, liner notes to *The Haymakers*; Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall* (New York: Norton, 2005), xv.

²⁴ Epstein, liner notes to *The Haymakers*.

Lawrence Levine, a sacralization of culture.²⁵ This shift was likely instrumental to the cantatas' popularity decline. As Root's secular cantatas constitute such an important and overlooked portion of his output, *The Haymakers* will be the focus in chapter five.

Root's Later Years (1871–1895)

Root spent his later years editing educational music books and song collections. He also continued to write secular cantatas, often collaborating with his novelist daughter, Clara Louise Burnham, and his oldest son, Frederick. Finally, Root served as editor of *The Song Messenger* and also contributed periodically to the *Chicago Herald* as a music critic. In 1872, Root was awarded an honorary musical doctorate from the University of Chicago.

George Frederick Root died at his family's vacation home in Bailey Island, Maine in 1895. His daughter, Clara, wrote the first obituary published about her father, and her tone is decidedly one of love that betrays a desire to defend her father against possible critics:

Of the wonderful ripening and beauty of my father's character in the last years it is impossible to speak. Not only did those nearest him refresh themselves at the ever-purifying fountain of his life, but even those who in the slightest degree came in contact with him proved by their spontaneous testimony the wisdom of Emerson in teaching that let a man say what he will, what he *is* will thunder above his speech.²⁶

²⁵ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 199), 146–60.

²⁶ Clara Louise Burnham, "The Last Days of George F. Root," pamphlet, 1895, Polly H. Carder Collection on George F. Root, Special Collections in Performing Arts, Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Burnham's obituary also presents various images of her father that reflect the American values we will discover as we examine his autobiography in chapter four. She highlights Root's emphasis on the importance of family, appreciation and love of nature, tireless work ethic, American patriotism, Protestant piety, and his spotless reputation among his peers. For example, she describes her father's ardent patriotism: "between our house and my brother's is a flagstaff, and to raise and lower the eighteen-foot flag was my father's daily pleasure; to keep a watchful eye upon it, and preserve it from a too-rough wind, his daily care."²⁷ Upon describing his funeral, she writes that "the flag he helped to save was draped about the casket, and on his breast was the decoration of the Loyal Legion."²⁸ Despite the fact that this obituary was penned by his daughter, it is clear that Root was highly respected by his peers and that his work as a performer, educator, composer, publisher, critic, and writer were all vital in preserving his legacy after his death.

Conclusions

The biography of George Frederick Root that has found its way into general histories of American music portrays him as a "layman's musician."²⁹ Most historians choose to describe Root as a Civil War song composer and an important American music educator who did little else. As we shall see in the next chapter, this limited biographical portrait has been repeated and perpetuated in nearly every major history

²⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²⁹ Epstein and Carder, s.v. "Root, George Frederick," *Oxford Music Online*.

since Root's death in 1895. Such a summation of Root's career, while factually correct, is deficient and provides no context or appreciation for the other contributions he made to the development of music in America. In order to expand on those biographies and provide an accurate assessment of Root and his work, it is necessary to turn to his autobiography and other works which will be presented in chapters four and five. Before doing this, however, chapter two will contextualize each major historian's goals concerning Root and address how his biography has been presented in American music history since his death.

Chapter 2: A Root Historiography

American music histories have consistently dealt with George Frederick Root by first presenting a short biography, then discussing his career in music education with Lowell Mason, and perhaps finally providing a summary of his Civil War songs. The nuances of and influences on his life, the breadth of his musical career, and his compositions outside of war songs have consistently been neglected. In the end, Root appears to be only two things: a disciple of Lowell Mason and the most successful Civil War song composer. This chapter will place Root in American music historiography to provide a more complete understanding of how he has been portrayed over time. It will also consider the impact that these trends in scholarship have had on our understanding of Root's biography.

Historians have clearly found it easier to discuss Lowell Mason than George Frederick Root. There are three factors that contribute to this phenomenon. First, it is quite easy to paint Mason as the trailblazer of American music education. Mason was the first to write widely distributed textbooks and the first to establish his own successful music program for students in Boston. This sense of originality makes it easy to place Mason at the head of a chronological trajectory of music education, while Root appears only as a follower.

Second, Mason's relatively one-dimensional career makes it easy to quantify his contribution to American music history. While Mason had his hand in many aspects of the music business—from composing to teaching, and from retailing to arranging—all of his activities were related to education. Root, on the other hand, was involved in many different aspects of the music business beyond education, including

song composition and criticism. Root's multifaceted career has made him much more difficult to categorize than Lowell Mason, and his contributions have thus often been neglected.

The third reason that historians have found it easier to discuss Mason than to explain Root is a simple and practical one: Mason's personal papers and correspondence have largely been preserved and are available for study. Root's papers were destroyed when his brother's publishing firm, Root & Cady, burned in the Chicago fire of 1871.¹

Root in American Music History

Richard Crawford opens his detailed survey of American music history, *The American Musical Landscape*, with a chapter about the fundamental trends of American music historiography titled "Cosmopolitan and Provincial: American Musical Historiography."² He writes that the persisting problems within American music scholarship center on the lack of historiographical study. This lack is entirely due to the disagreement among historians as to exactly "what the history of American music *is*."³ Crawford explains that he aims to partially rectify this problem by providing a general account of the major histories and their goals since the eighteenth century. Crawford further states that historians are mostly at odds with one another because there is a lack of continuity among their works when choosing which music

¹ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 154–55.

² Crawford, *The American Musical Landscape* (Berkeley: The Regents of the University of California, 1993): 3–37.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

and composers to include. He explains that this trend has been present since the very beginning of writing about American music history and it is unlikely to change as plurality of choice is a fundamental American trait:

[Our historians' freedom] is present from the beginning of the writing of American music history. And it reflects the strain of randomness that, over nearly a century and a half of serious study, has run through histories of American music. That that mission, even now, remains something of a pioneering endeavor—a trip whose route and destination are up to the traveler—testifies to the field's schismatic legacy.⁴

As Crawford explains, historiography provides scholars with the chance to question existing answers to historical questions and to consider the framework each writer has put in place for his own review of American music history. Furthermore, historiography can broaden the possibilities for future surveys of American music by illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of the “chain of dependence,” a term Crawford coins to describe the necessity of relying on earlier histories to form a scholarly tradition.⁵ Each history naturally builds on the example of the ones that were written before it.

Drawing on Crawford's survey, the following fourteen histories will be used to assess when perceptions of Root's biography shifted, the language used to discuss him, and how he is treated in relation to Lowell Mason. These volumes cover the span of Root's life through today's scholarship.

⁴ Ibid., 5–6.

⁵ Ibid., 37.

Date	Author	Title	Mentions Root?
1846	George Hood	<i>A History of Music in New England</i>	No
1853	Nathaniel Gould	<i>Church Music in America</i>	No
1889	William Mathews	<i>A Hundred Years of Music</i>	Yes
1890	Frédéric Ritter	<i>Music in America</i>	No
1904	Louis Elson	<i>The History of American Music</i>	Yes
1908	W. L. Hubbard	<i>The History of American Music</i>	Yes
1915	Arthur Farwell and W. Dermot Darby	<i>Music in America</i>	Yes
1931	John Tasker Howard	<i>Our American Music</i>	Yes
1955	Gilbert Chase	<i>America's Music</i>	Yes
1964	Wilfrid Mellers	<i>Music in a New Found Land</i>	No
1969	H. Wiley Hitchcock	<i>Music in the United States</i>	Yes
1983	Charles Hamm	<i>Music in the New World</i>	Yes
1998	Michael Broyles, Dale Cockrell	<i>Cambridge History of American Music</i>	No
2001	Richard Crawford	<i>America's Musical Life</i>	Yes

Table 1. American Music Histories.

Early Histories of American Music

George Hood wrote the first expansive American music history in 1846, when Root was still in his mid-twenties.⁶ As his subtitle, “Sketches of Reformers and Psalmists,” suggests, Hood focuses primarily on sacred music and hymnody. The opening sentence of the book summarizes Hood’s goal, which was to provide a

⁶ George Hood, *A History of Music in New England: With Biographical Sketches of Reformers and Psalmists* (Boston: Wilkins, Carter, 1846).

historical review of music's role in the church. By and large, the church was the sole venue in which Americans could expect to regularly hear music before the nineteenth century:

The history of music in New England, for the first two centuries, is the history of Psalmody alone; and this is so intimately connected with the history of the church, that he who would fully know the one, must understand the other. As religion waned amid the prosperity and specious errors of a growing country, so music was neglected; and as it revived, the voice of song was renewed.⁷

Hood is not wrong in his assessment of American music prior to the nineteenth century. Even Lowell Mason's influence was primarily situated in the church at this point.

Nathaniel Gould's *Church Music in America* (1853) is a similar work, though Gould focuses mainly on the education of sacred music performers and the development of those particular schools, teachers, and musical societies.⁸ Coincidentally, Gould's volume was published by Root's first formal music teacher, Artemas Johnson. Root would have already left Johnson's tutelage at this point, however, since the book was published when Root was already thirty-three years old. This and the fact that Gould was involved in the Boston music education scene means there might have been a place for either Root or Mason in his book. Gould, however, does not discuss either musician. As a seeming explanation for his choice, Gould mentions that his historical parameters exclude any living composers:

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Nathaniel Gould, *Church Music in America, Comprising Its History and Peculiarities at Different Period, with Cursory Remarks on Its Legitimate Use and Its Abuse; with Notices of the Schools, Composers, Teachers, and Societies* (Boston: A. N. Johnson, 1853).

Owing to the difficulty of gaining satisfactory information, we may have omitted some of those who deserve a prominent place; and may also have, notwithstanding all our scrupulous care, made some errors in statements. We have mentioned some modern authors who are not living; but of living authors, we say little or nothing.⁹

Indeed, Mason's name is cited only briefly when Gould discusses the changes in Boston public school education around 1838.¹⁰

Frédéric Louis Ritter's *Music in America* (1884) was the first history of American music to even discuss Lowell Mason.¹¹ Ritter summarizes the central goal of his book by explaining that he will consider church music in America, as well as all other forms of the art, and their key composers, performers, and societies:

It has been my endeavor, in writing this book, to place before the American musical student and sincere musical amateur, a faithful mirror of past musical life in the United States, to accentuate that which is in accordance with a true art spirit, or which promises to grow in the right direction, and bring forth good fruit; to expose to the strictures of impartial criticism that which is puerile hollow, pretentious, fictitious, and a great hindrance to progress; to give their justly merited due to those musicians who, by means of great exertions in the interests of higher musical culture among the American people, deserve the grateful remembrance of the present, more musically advanced, generation; to dispel, as far as possible, the errors and false views still entertained in Europe regarding musical affairs in America.¹²

Ritter mentions the early attempts at writing an American music history, but criticizes Hood and Gould for not fully accomplishing the task. In reconsidering American music history, Ritter is the first to place Mason as the forefather, or

⁹ Ibid., iv.

¹⁰ Ibid., 236.

¹¹ Frédéric Louis Ritter, *Music in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884).

¹² Ibid., vii–viii.

“master-mind,” of American music education.¹³ This is an interesting occurrence mainly because Ritter was a French immigrant to the United States and was not musically educated in Boston, which would be where knowledge of Mason would most likely be expected. Root is mentioned nowhere in the volume.

These early works by Hood, Gould, and Ritter are fairly comprehensive, despite the authors’ difficulty in obtaining historical material during the nineteenth century. Simply, the United States had not made enough music, and certainly not enough original music, to complete an extensive history, especially one considering stylistic trends and developments. Rather, these histories act as repositories for endless facts about particular figures and events. What is most important to note about these early works is that the practice of recording American music history developed simultaneously with Mason and Root’s careers, making it difficult to trace exactly when their respective influences became widely recognized.

Root in Early Histories of American Music

William Smythe Babcock Mathews gives the first published biography and discussion of George Root in his *A Hundred Years of Music* (1889).¹⁴ Mathews’s book is structured as a sort of dictionary with a series of entries about particular composers, performers, educators, pieces, and places. His entry on Root reads like an obituary, which is odd given that Root was still alive. It is also interesting that Root’s autobiography was published in the same year as Mathews’s history because the

¹³ Ibid., 255.

¹⁴ William Smythe Babcock Mathews and Granville L. Howe, *A Hundred Years of Music in America* (Chicago: G. L. Howe, 1889).

content of this entry evokes many of the same themes as Root's autobiography, particularly patriotism and morality. Mathews opens his account with a justification as to why he has included Root in this history even before his death, thereby creating a sort of living obituary. He explains that Root will soon be gone and his importance forgotten unless he is included in this story of American music:

[Root] is simply one of those personages who have so grown into American life, and particularly musically cultured life, that it seems natural to regard him, through his work, as a personage to whose association we have become insensibly familiar, and whose worth and importance we shall probably never pause to think over, until sooner or later, and all too soon, we may one day be reminded that a life has gone out from amongst us over into the better and brighter existence of the great majority, in which each will feel that he has in some way, near or remote, as it may appear, sustained a personal loss.¹⁵

Of course, the fact that Root would probably live long enough to read this passage certainly factored into Mathews's decisions on how to portray the composer. As Root's career came to a close and his health began to decline, it is logical that Mathews and other historians would begin writing articles praising the composer. Mathews's praise of Root's compositional genius and moral standards illustrate that the general public opinion of Root at the time of his death was probably a positive one, an opinion that Root would have been pleased to read. Mathews describes Root as a man with "high Christian character and spotless integrity."¹⁶ He also carefully chooses his language to represent Root as a partner of Mason, rather than a disciple.¹⁷ Consequently, this particular history is an anomaly among its peers in its treatment of

¹⁵ Ibid., 68.

¹⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁷ Ibid., 70.

Root, viewing him as an agent aligned with, but independent of Mason's influence. It must be noted, however, that Mathews likely knew Root personally. The author studied music and worked as an educator in Boston during the period in which Mason and Root's influence would have been greatest. Therefore, this entry likely takes on its personal quality because the two men were at least acquainted.

Despite Mathews's example, Root is described in subsequent works as a "disciple" of Lowell Mason, and he is treated primarily as a Civil War song composer until 1955. It is also notable that after Mathews, newly published works would deal with a deceased Root, making the writing and perspective significantly different than toward a living subject. The questions of which music to include in biographies and which were the most resonating portions of his career seem to have been answered by most historians in the same manner: Root was a follower of Lowell Mason and he was a Civil War song composer.

Louis C. Elson is the first historian to portray Root as simply a music educator and a Civil War songwriter in *The History of American Music* (1904), the music volume in a series of histories about various American art forms.¹⁸ Elson writes that he aimed to provide a comprehensive and inclusive history, taking into consideration old and new music:

In this "History of American Music," the second of the series, the author has told of the beginnings, the foreign influences, the changes, the methods, the personal endeavors, that have gone to the making of our present music. Many of the events here narrated occurred but yesterday or are happening to-day, and hence have little perspective for the historian.¹⁹

¹⁸ Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1904).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, v.

A notable feature of this volume is Elson's exclusion of Root from key chapters, including "Operatic, Cantata, and Vocal Composers" and "American Song-Composers." Root only appears in "National and Patriotic Music." Here, Elson states that Root was "one of the disciples of the Lowell Mason system, already described."²⁰ He goes on to call Root "one of the enthusiastic 'convention leaders,' who followed Lowell Mason in this early method."²¹ Aside from this particular language, Elson engages only briefly with Root's biography and, curiously, even less with his Civil War songs. He then moves on to discuss Henry Clay Work, a popular songwriter who was an important contemporary of Root. Elson summarizes his opinion of Root's work by saying that "neither Work nor Root would be called trained composers in these latter days, when the highest and largest forms of music have been attained by our native musicians."²² It is clear that, for Elson, Root was not a very important musical figure in America, probably because Elson was musically educated in European traditions.²³ It seems that it is here, in Elson's history, that Root's career was reduced to that of an educator and songwriter.

W. L. Hubbard's *History of American Music* (1908) provides a little more information about Root than Elson does, but it is mostly still limited to certain facts of his biography. Hubbard's book is, in reality, simply an updated version of Elson's

²⁰ Ibid., 161.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 161.

²³ Ibid., 325.

volume. Root is not mentioned in the opening chapters on “American Composers” and “Music in the Public Schools” although there is an extensive discussion of Mason.²⁴ Root first appears in a chapter on “Popular Music,” where Hubbard gives a few brief paragraphs of biography and credits Root with being one of the first American musicians to see the potential of popular music:

In writing for the people he would invariably consider the difficulty of the intervals and the intricacy of the accompaniments. That is why there is always found such simplicity in all his harmonies. He was a born composer in this field and he reaped a well deserved success.²⁵

Hubbard does mention Root briefly in other parts of the book, always in relation to church music, music education, and Civil War songwriting.

Arthur Farwell and W. Dermot Darby’s *Music in America* (1915) likewise deals with Root as a music educator (who drew on a “fellowship” with Mason) and as a Civil War song composer.²⁶ Like Ritter, Darby was not American by birth (he was Irish). He also spent a considerable amount of time studying and organizing information about America’s orchestras rather than popular music or education.²⁷ Darby does discuss Root’s pedagogy, but of course places it in the shadow of Lowell Mason. Specifically, he calls Root an “exponent” of Mason’s educational system and

²⁴ W. L. Hubbard, ed., *The History of American Music* (Toledo: Irving Squire, 1908).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁶ Arthur Farwell and W. Dermot Darby, *Music in America. The Art of Music* 4 (New York: National Society of Music, 1915).

²⁷ Deane L. Root, “Introduction: Toward a History,” *American Orchestras in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Spitzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6–7.

says that he “followed Mason in his method of diffusing music among the masses.”²⁸ This assertion of subordination is similar to what Elson used in his writing. Apart from his Civil War songs, this volume does not mention any of Root’s other compositions.

Like his predecessors, John Tasker Howard mentions Root initially in conjunction with Lowell Mason and the establishment of the New York Normal Institute in *Our American Music* (1931).²⁹ Later in a chapter on “Songs of the Civil War,” Howard discusses Root for nearly three pages. He writes that before the war, Root’s reputation was mainly built as a “writer of gospel hymns and ballads.”³⁰ Howard also breaks Root’s popular song output into three main categories: sentimental songs, war songs, and sacred songs. He gives a fairly comprehensive biography outlining Root’s early education, his work with Mason, his composition, and his publishing success. Like his predecessors, Howard clearly considers Root an extension of the Mason school: “Root was definitely of the Lowell Mason, Webb, and Bradbury school, with strong evangelical tendencies, as far as his sacred music was concerned.”³¹ Howard also declares that Root was merely a popular song composer with no significant works: “He wrote no great music, and nothing in the larger forms,

²⁸ Darby, 329.

²⁹ John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music: A Comprehensive History from 1620 to the Present* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1966).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

except for a few cantatas for mixed voices.”³² Finally, Howard credits Root with persuading Henry Clay Work to try his own hand at composing war songs. In short, Howard manages to include every deprecating aspect of earlier historians’ assessments in his discussion of Root.

It is clear that the general tendency of early American music histories is to describe Root as a follower of Mason and a popular song composer. The common language used includes words like “product,” “disciple,” and “follower.” Almost all of these historians include Root in their works, most likely due to his still recent death in 1895, but none treat him expansively, with the exception of Mathews. This common description of Root as the purveyor of Mason’s legacy persisted well into the twentieth century.

Root in Late Twentieth-Century Histories

Richard Crawford states that Gilbert Chase is an important presence in American music historiography mainly because he was the first historian to treat American music as a phenomenon independent of Europe.³³ This shift is important to a study of Root’s place in historiography. Beginning with Chase, historians began to consider the development of American composers as mostly free from European influence. As a result, Root is treated quite differently in histories from this point forward. He is now given a somewhat higher place in the canon because he did not emulate European composition in the majority of his work. Though subsequent

³² Ibid.

³³ Crawford, in his foreword to the third edition of Chase, xv.

historians (with the exception of Crawford) do not devote as much physical space to a discussion of Root, the manner in which they speak about him is decidedly different than their predecessors.

Chase's *America's Music From the Pilgrims to the Present* (1955) gives a broader view of Root's biography than any of its predecessors.³⁴ Other historians dismiss Root solely because he did not try to imitate European classical music, but Chase does not. As was customary with historians before his time, Chase initially mentions Root as an educator in conjunction with Lowell Mason, but he quickly diverges into a broader discussion of Root's career. Chase argues that Root was influential because he capitalized on middle class aspirations for social elevation common in the mid-nineteenth century.

Chase is also the first historian to assert that Root's use of the pseudonym "Wurzel" may have actually been due to embarrassment rather than a need for musical legitimacy. Historians before Chase believed that Root chose this pseudonym to lend European, especially German, credibility to his compositions. Chase disagrees and writes that Root's autobiography proves that the composer was simply embarrassed by his newfound status as a parlor song composer and wanted to preserve his reputation as an educator.

Chase then asserts that Root was an outlier in American nineteenth-century music because he had much success across the board with his musical endeavors including publishing, composition, and education. Finally, Chase makes the

³⁴ Gilbert Chase, *America's Music From the Pilgrims to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966).

connection that Root's experiences in Europe may have prompted him to compose his large-scale cantatas, and he gives a thorough description of *The Haymakers*. Chase, however, does not imply that Root's compositional development was dependent upon European models, but rather that he directed the spirit of those composers into his works. In the end, Chase seems to think that Root's lasting influence lies in his versatility as a businessman. As we shall see, this occupational diversity is a theme revisited by later historians. Chase's history serves as the turning point in Root historiography, signaling a shift in the tenor of the language used to describe the composer's contributions to American music.

Wilfrid Mellers did not follow Chase's example in his *Music in a New Found Land* (1964).³⁵ It should be noted that Mellers was a British historian writing abroad in Europe about American history, so it is unlikely that he heard much nineteenth-century American music. Rather, he focuses primarily on twentieth-century composers and musicians. He writes that all music prior to the twentieth century should be considered "pre-history" and spends no time discussing any of it.

H. Wiley Hitchcock's *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (1969) mentions Root only briefly.³⁶ He is discussed after an introduction to Stephen Foster's music and only in regard to his Civil War songs. Hitchcock then gives a very brief one-paragraph biography and mentions Root's education background with Lowell Mason. Hitchcock's longest remark about Root's career regards his use of

³⁵ Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music* (New York: Stonehill Publishing, 1964).

³⁶ H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969).

“Wurzel” as a pseudonym, which Hitchcock interprets as patronizing instead of as an embarrassed action:

An amusing and revealing footnote to Root’s career: having decided to try for some of the popular household-song market occupied by Foster but taking a patronizing attitude toward it, Root sought a pseudonym; in view of the adulation of German musicians at the time, a German translation of his own name was the choice: Friedrich G. Wurzel.³⁷

It is unclear whether Hitchcock thinks that Root’s action was patronizing to his peers or to the people who bought his music. Whichever the case, Hitchcock does not tell his audience exactly what this “footnote to Root’s career” reveals. At the very least, Hitchcock’s comment may prompt the reader to consider new perspectives on Root’s career.

Charles Hamm’s *Music in the New World* (1983) also treats Root fairly minimally.³⁸ Root is first mentioned in a chapter about Stephen Foster and “Indigenous American Song.” Hamm briefly credits Root later in the chapter with publishing the first Civil War songs. He then provides a basic one-paragraph discussion of “The Battle Cry of Freedom,” something that no other historian did before. This song analysis suggests to the reader that there is something to be gained from examining Root’s music in addition to his biographical outline.

Interestingly, Hamm does not mention Root as an educator at all despite a chapter devoted to Lowell Mason’s influence on American music education. In Hamm’s opinion, Root was a composer who actually “progressed” from the emulation of proper and scientific music of European composers to model himself on

³⁷ Hitchcock, 66.

³⁸ Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: Norton, 1983).

Foster.³⁹ This is an assessment of Root that has not been seen before in American music history. If Root and Foster are even connected to each other, it is merely as peers and contemporaries. Like the other historians writing after Chase, Hamm has brought these minor and new perspectives to how Root's career should be discussed.

Michael Broyles (1998) discusses nineteenth-century American art music in the *Cambridge History of American Music*, but he does not mention Root in any capacity. Dale Cockrell explores folk and popular music of the same period, but he also does not mention Root.⁴⁰ Broyles chooses to focus on what "art music" meant to Americans. Cockrell explores how Americans used popular and folk music to organize their emotions about important events such as the Civil War. This approach to scholarship could be applied to Root's biography, but there is nothing attached to him specifically. This neglect could be because of Root's lack of contribution to the American classical music canon, or because his popular music is not distinctive enough for Cockrell to include in his study.

Richard Crawford provides the most expansive study of Root in his *America's Musical Life: A History* (2001).⁴¹ Crawford begins, like the majority of his predecessors, with Lowell Mason's influence on Root's education and early career. Unlike other historians, Crawford states that Mason was responsible for creating the foundation for Root's career. This language establishes Mason as Root's mentor, but

³⁹ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁰ David Nicholls, *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴¹ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life*.

also does not cast his shadow over Root's career. As further evidence of the mutually beneficial relationship, Crawford points out that Root regularly defended Mason against his critics for his ability to make money very quickly as a musician. Root unfailingly believed and stated that Mason's intentions to serve and educate the masses were honorable even though he had much financial success, something that he mentioned even in his own autobiography. Crawford paints Root as a lover of the classics who was also a practical man with a realistic sense of his own musical abilities. He explains that this is what led to Root's pursuit of popular music. This study provides an entirely new interpretation of Root's career because it attempts to take his personal feelings about his own music into account rather than simply outline a few significant events of his life.

Root in Local and Topical History

If George Root is largely ignored in sweeping histories, he is certainly not forgotten in local and topical American music histories. In fact, there may be more discussion of Root as a multifaceted musician in these histories than in the larger national music histories. Topical histories allow views of Root's influence beyond his status as a composer while local histories highlight exactly how far and to where his influence traveled.

Dena Epstein, co-author of the Grove article on Root, discusses his career throughout her study of the Chicago music publishing industry (1969).⁴² Epstein constructs an impressive summary of his involvement with the Root & Cady publishing company, but she only represents Root as a layman's musician, the same

⁴² Epstein, *Music Publishing in Chicago*.

terminology that she and Carder use to describe him in the *Grove* article. There is also a significant amount of information in this study regarding Root's early career and publishing history before he joined Root & Cady.

Jacklin Stopp uses Root's work in her study of the American secular cantata in the nineteenth century.⁴³ Stopp surveys the origins of secular cantata in the United States and some key composers of these works. She uses a discussion of Root to illustrate the Protestant themes often present in the librettos of seemingly "secular" cantatas. Stopp's evaluation of Root's place in secular cantata will be more carefully discussed in chapter five.

Like topical histories, many local music histories treat Root more creatively than general national ones. A survey of local history can also show exactly how far Root's influence spread during the nineteenth century. It is expected that Root would appear in music histories of various Midwestern states and across New England as these were the areas where he was primarily active, emanating from his Boston and Chicago periods. What are surprising are the mentions of his music in state histories much further away.

For example, William Osborne's *Music in Ohio*, a history of prominent musical figures and events, mentions Root's work as early as 1859, much earlier than any national history.⁴⁴ Root's hymns and his educational influence (along with Mason and Bradbury) are mentioned in Osborne's chapter "White Gospel Song." The only

⁴³ Jacklin B. Stopp, "The Secular Cantata in the United States: 1850–1919," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1969): 388–98.

⁴⁴ William Osborne, *Music in Ohio* (Kent State: Kent State University Press, 2004).

logical explanation for discussing Root in the chapter is that he collaborated with Mason and Bradbury to create some church music in his early career, perhaps leading to the notion that he was a “white gospel song” composer. Osborne also attributes Ohio’s Normal Musical Institutes in the 1870s to Root. Root is then mentioned in conjunction with Ohio popular song composer Benjamin Russell Hanby, with whom he worked at Root & Cady. Finally, Root is mentioned during Osborne’s discussion of the John Church and Company publishing firm in Cincinnati.

In New England, Root is mentioned by George Thornton Edwards in *Music and Musicians of Maine* (1928).⁴⁵ The short biography that Edwards gives describes Root mainly as an educator. Edwards then provides a brief discussion of the success of *The Haymakers* in Maine and comments that several performances were staged in Portland. Beyond his abilities as an educator, Edwards praises Root for his conducting abilities. He also writes that Root was often a guest director at the Penobscot Society, a music club in Maine similar to the Boston Handel and Haydn Society. Mason and his singing classes are also described in *Rhode Island’s Musical Heritage*, suggesting that Mason’s influence would by default have included Root in these areas.⁴⁶ Many of the Normal Institutes were held in New England during the mid-nineteenth century, so Root’s appearance in these volumes is hardly a surprise.

⁴⁵ George Thornton Edwards, *Music and Musicians of Maine* (Portland: Southworth Press, 1928).

⁴⁶ Carolyn Livingston and Dawn Elizabeth Smith, *Rhode Island’s Musical Heritage: An Exploration* (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2008); Louis Pichierri, *Music in New Hampshire 1623–1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

Ernst C. Krohn's *Missouri Music* (1971) includes Root within small biographies of prominent musical figures in Missouri.⁴⁷ Krohn lists Root as the teacher of Kate Brainard, Henry Martyn Butler, and James M. North. Some of Root's most performed songs are also indexed in this book. Though Krohn's study was written in the 1970s, the figures discussed were all prominent Missouri musicians during the nineteenth century and Root's influence was clearly instrumental in their work. This confirms Root's reputation in the South.

Albert Stoutamire's discussion of Root in *Music of the Old South* is limited to Richmond, Virginia, but this is somewhat surprising considering Root's general status as a composer of Union war songs.⁴⁸ Of course, songs were often passed between the North and the South before and during the Civil War, but Root's music was clearly more sympathetic to the Union than to the Confederacy.⁴⁹ As a result, Stoutemire discusses Root and Mason's leadership of music education conventions in Richmond during the 1850s instead of as a song composer. He also provides a personal account by Marian Harland that describes her family's fondness for "Mr. Root": My father invited Mr. Root 'to make our house his home while he was in our city.' [Mr. Root's]

⁴⁷ Ernst C. Krohn, *Missouri Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971).

⁴⁸ Albert Stoutatmire, *Music of the Old South: Colony to Confederacy* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1972).

⁴⁹ Caroline Moseley, "'When Will Dis Cruel War be Ober?'" Attitudes toward Blacks in Popular Song of the Civil War," *American Music* 2 (Autumn 1984), 6.

bonhomie, intelligence, and general attractiveness of manner and disposition had endeared him to us all.⁵⁰

Some states that are even more surprising than Missouri for their inclusion of Root are Hawaii and Florida. A particularly interesting occurrence is in George Kanahlee's *Hawaiian Music and Musicians*.⁵¹ Kanahlee points out that one of the most famous Hawaiian folk songs, "Aloha 'Oe," bears a striking resemblance to the chorus of Root's song "There's Music in the Air." Since this Hawaiian anthem was composed in the nineteenth century, some historians believe that Queen Lili'uokalani may have adapted Root's chorus for her own use. Kanahlee disputes this and asserts that Root may have imitated the queen's song instead. This discussion at the very least suggests that Root's music was known or heard in Hawaii, Whether or not Root was aware of Hawaiian folk music is still unclear. Root's name is simply cited in Housewright's *A History of Music & Dance in Florida* within a group of composers who wrote popular songs in the collection of music that was often played across the state in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵²

These local histories are crucial to the study of American music history because they show the breadth of Root's influence on American music. National histories can only make certain generalizations about Root's career, but local histories actually prove these generalizations. The eminent, Oscar Sonneck pointed out that

⁵⁰ Marian Harland in Stoutemire, *Music of the Old South*, 217–18.

⁵¹ George S. Kanahlee, *Hawaiian Music and Musicians: An Illustrated History* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979).

⁵² Wiley L. Housewright, *A History of Music & Dance in Florida, 1565–1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991).

national histories cannot possibly use the local newspaper data and other documents available as primary source material to prove generalizations about American music, due to their scope. Instead, he highlighted the task of cataloging and preserving the information found in local documents. He asserts that only the “logical and discriminating interpretation of facts from the evolutionary bird’s-eye view” would provide the basis for sound, reliable, and useful history.⁵³ He bemoans the lack of adequate American music history sources, arguing that American historians only like to “wax eloquent” on music in the last fifty years without considering the larger implications of that music:

To wax eloquent over the relatively tremendous expansion of our musical activities during the last fifty years is very well and good, but such retrospective reminiscences, comparisons, estimates, etc., do not necessarily produce even sound local history, unless informed by the proper historical perspective. This quality they too often lack, with the result that the American eagle struts about in these pictures, more than life-size.⁵⁴

Conclusions

Sonneck did not write any specific histories of Root, but his ideas here are important to the study of Root historiography. A simple compilation of facts, which is what most American music histories provide about the composer, does not do justice to Root’s life or begin to assess his influence on American music history. The tendency of American music historians to portray Root’s presence as a music educator in Mason’s shadow and a Civil War song composer is limiting, at best, and

⁵³ Oscar G. Sonneck, *Suum Cuique: Essays in Music*, (New York: Schirmer, 1916).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 129–30.

does not provide any context for Root's actual legacy or impact on music history. Likewise, while local and topical studies of Root's career provides a great deal of specific information, they do little to quantify his influence on American music as a whole.

As a result, since its inception, written American music history has short-changed Root. A relationship between broad national history and topical, local history is necessary in order to truly assess Root's influence on American music. In addition, Root must also be viewed through the lens of his autobiography and other personal writings in order to gain a more complete understanding of his motivations and aspirations as a composer. Only then can historians correctly and accurately place Root within the proper context of American musical development. The next chapter will provide a theoretical model for reading nineteenth-century autobiography in order to establish how Root should be studied and considered by scholarship in the future.

Chapter 3: Nineteenth-Century Functions of Autobiography

The historical sources discussed in the previous chapter do not consider the function of George Frederick Root's autobiography in their analyses of his career, even though autobiographical writing was quite common among young, white, American men in the antebellum and post-Civil War eras. Like many of his contemporaries from the late 1830s to the turn of the century, including such musical figures as American orchestra conductor Theodore Thomas, Root used the medium of autobiography to project a particular public image to his audience. Autobiographical writing, however, also served three main functions in nineteenth-century America: it was a means to self-discovery, it allowed for the reflection on and charting of moral development, and it served as a mode for self-projection. Root typifies each of these functions in his own autobiography, and by examining them, scholars can further expand the image that American music history has already crafted of the composer.

Daniel Cavicchi terms the process of writing autobiography "self-making" in his book *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum*.¹ Cavicchi, an American studies historian, evaluates the development of music listening in the United States during the nineteenth century by organizing and analyzing the information he collected from personal diaries, scrapbooks, and memoirs written by mostly white middle-class men living in urban centers. He uses his data to show how industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization played important roles in the development of the American musical identity. Cavicchi borrows from Michel

¹ Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

Foucault's theory of the "technology of the self" to explain the various functions that autobiography served for young men during the nineteenth century.² Cavicchi's extension of Foucault's theory holds that the act of writing autobiography serves to help the author examine and shape his own identity.

Thomas Augst, another scholar of nineteenth century America, uses Foucault's technology of the self to construct arguments about general nineteenth-century American moral knowledge in his book *The Clerk's Tale*. Like Cavicchi, Augst relies on journals and diaries to trace the importance of culture in a young man's personal moral development. Augst looks specifically at young, white middle-class men transitioning from rural to urban life, from jobs mainly consisting of manual labor to more intellectual occupations. He writes that the sorts of stories people tell about their own lives are indicative of an internal struggle to navigate one's moral place in the world:

To navigate the fluctuations of happiness requires mapping a topography of private and public, establishing values and boundaries that orient one's relations with others and with one's self. It requires that we learn to acquire those convictions on which the practice of moral life depends: convictions about the kinds of work for which we are suited, the kinds of social bonds to which we will commit ourselves, the kinds of stories we want to tell about our lives.³

By grafting the three main functions of autobiography onto Root's own writing, scholarship can expand the image of a composer who has been treated too narrowly.

² Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49.

³ Thomas Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 11.

At this point, it is important to carefully consider precisely how each of these autobiographical functions work.

Self-discovery

Augst proposes that young men used their personal diaries to help construct their identities in a new environment. Personal writing became increasingly *en vogue* in the early nineteenth century, and it follows that Root—a young urban man in the 1830s—would have participated in this trend. In fact, he mentions several times that others encouraged him to keep personal diaries. Keeping a diary was not just a way to track monumental events within a lifetime, but also served as a means to self-discovery over a period of intense life changes.

Augst argues that this ritualistic recording of weather, daily events, and acquaintances was a practice carried over by young men transitioning from agricultural life into urban life. Between 1800 and 1890 the United States population grew by some twelve times. By the end of the nineteenth century, a third of this populace was living in the country's major cities.⁴ Aside from immigrants, many of these people moving into cities were young white men leaving their family farms looking for work. Cities, of course, provided greater financial possibilities, but also eventually afforded access to modern life with electricity, telephones, trolley cars, and cultural opportunities.

⁴ John M. Blum, William S. McFeely, Edmund S. Morgan, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., and Kenneth M. Stampp, *The National Experience: A History of the United States* (Independence, KY: Wadsworth Publishing, 1993): 442.

The personal diaries—written by these men transplanted from rural to urban life—acted as urban farmer’s almanacs, used to measure lives by natural trends, like harvests and seasons:

Societies ceased to regulate their activities by the movements of the moon, the tides, and the seasons, looking instead to abstract conceptions of time for frames of reference and standards of measurement. . . . Without the steady rhythms of agricultural life to order their lives, the ambitious and insecure clerks who came of age in the market revolution carried their characters with them, in the pages of their diaries.⁵

Some of these young men even incorporated rural farm language and the use of weather observations to organize their diaries to their new urban lives. Others made use of travel language as these previously rural young men often doubted that they had anything worth writing down until they moved to the city: “There was ‘nothing worth noticing’ in a young man’s life, evidently, until he had left behind the predictable routines of childhood, broken away from defined roles and familiar comforts to face risk and uncertainty.”⁶ Augst also notes that the language these young men used to quantify their usefulness was now primarily economic, encouraging the new nineteenth-century idea that time was equal to money. The more money an individual passed, managed, or made was a direct reflection on how well his time had been spent. As William Hoffman, a young clerk, writes in his diary, time was capital:

I am strictly to discharge those duties which are strictly incumbent upon me with renewed vigor & habits that I have nurtured that are not of a desirable nature must be wholly discarded—& that only which is for my moral +

⁵ Augst, 48.

⁶ Ibid., 19.

intellectual enhancement be fed + thus I may lead a useful life + add muscle to my physical mental and moral enhancement.⁷

This practice would have resonated with Root, a young man from a rural town transitioning to urban life in Boston, aiming for financial success, and acting as the primary breadwinner for his family in North Reading. Furthermore, the American sense of the self-made man was dependent upon a man's successful transition from rural to urban life and his charting of that success. Cavicchi points out that documenting success ultimately appealed to a young man's societal, masculine sensibilities and aided in the discovery of his own manhood: "The idea of leaving home for the world of commerce became sharply significant—young men were leaving not simply to find work, but they were embarking on a discovery of their manhood, away from female influence."⁸

Augst also explores this issue and discusses the need for young men to strike out on their own as an indicator of their self-worth. He describes young Enos White from Weymouth, Massachusetts who writes of his self-emancipation from the family home in 1821 as the moment when his diary keeping suddenly begins to matter.

Augst quotes White and explains:

"This Day I leave my Father after having got him to consent to my being Free . . . I am now eighteen years and five months old with one decent suit of clothes and fifteen dollars in change to commence my career with." White's life as a man only begins, it seems, once he has secured his father's consent to "being free," and it is at that point when writing in a journal begins to matter—a gesture of defiance against the law of majority.⁹

⁷ Ibid., 51.

⁸ Cavicchi, 81.

⁹ Augst, 20.

Root's own self-discovery of his own masculinity and independence came into being when he became the primary breadwinner of his family. He also had to make his way in a primarily intellectual profession when his identity had previously been founded on his ability to labor on the family farm. Such a struggle was quite common for young men moving to urban centers and pursuing more white-collar professions.

Young Americans also used personal diaries, memoirs, scrapbooks, and autobiography to chart and record their daily activities. Such a collection of programs, ticket stubs, newspaper clippings, photographs, and personal recollections enabled a young man to chart his own self-discovery as he adjusted to city life and its new values. A cataloged and reviewed record of educational and social experiences helped to portray a cultured and well-rounded individual. A diary of musical experiences ran parallel to a young person's growing up as he or she transitioned from farmer to cultured urban worker. Cavicchi, for example, traces Lucy Lowell, a young single woman living in Boston, who describes a period in 1884 when she attended a Wagner Festival in Boston sponsored by famed conductor Theodore Thomas and heard five performances in as many days. Cavicchi points to Lowell as of the same social status as the majority of young men keeping diaries during the nineteenth century, thus rendering her scrapbooks useful to such a discussion. A person's mere attendance at musical events was not sufficient to prove substantial self-reflection, but a diary provided a place for its writer to demonstrate his or her enabled discerning taste, and thus self-development:

While self-making continued to be a central theme in middle-class ideology, how the self was made—and with which activities and skills—became more and more debated, making any individual's audiencing a series of weighted

choices. By Lucy Lowell's time in the early 1880s, a middle-class young person could not simply consume music as a listener, but had to somehow demonstrate that he or she was a *discerning* listener.¹⁰

This recognition is one reflected in Root's autobiography, projected by his older self onto his younger experiences. Rather than simply recounting musical experiences, Root includes his impressions and criticisms of those experiences with the knowledge of an older musician.

Moral Development

Recording daily events and ritualistic practices ensured that a more complete individual could look back on his lifetime and appreciate the moral progress of his character over time. This practice pleased the humanist and the Protestant in many American men: "From this perspective, both the classical humanist and the Christian devotional traditions motivated clerks to use their diary as a device for moral timing, to coordinate and evaluate the development of character against linear measures of progress."¹¹

Humanism, in the nineteenth-century sense, required a sense of living for others, while American Protestantism entailed a record of good deeds. Autobiographies, diaries, and personal memoirs could be used as repositories for anecdotes demonstrating one's altruism throughout a lifetime. With the rise of social reform after the Civil War, an exhaustive record of social contribution was seemingly required from all middle-class Americans. The desire to educate and elevate the culture of the masses consumed middle-class reformers, especially those working in

¹⁰ Cavicchi, 110–11.

¹¹ Augst, 48.

intellectual occupations.¹² It seems that personal diaries, scrapbooks, memoirs, and autobiographies are where many Americans recorded these efforts. Accordingly, personal diaries provide much of the information that educates scholarship about nineteenth-century American moral reform movements. Augst provides an entry from Jonathan Hill's diary of his work as a white-collar clerk in which the young man reflects on the past year and his own moral development. The passage demonstrates that it was integral to a young man's moral development to self-reflect: "Another year gone! Have we fully improved the moments of the old year? And if we have not have we distinctly enough noted them to make the correction in the new? For one I wish my answers could be more satisfactory to the monitor within."¹³

During the post-Civil War period, American society underwent tremendous transformation industrially, economically, and socially. Culture, especially music, became a way for the majority of Americans to feel they had some sort of control over the tumultuous change through which they lived. This translated to many middle-class people pursuing cultural enterprises as a way to improve the standard of living and to organize their own experience in society. Steven Baur calls this the "intensification in cultural self-consciousness": "Educated cultural activists promoted culture as a means by which to foster social cohesion and administer moral

¹² Steven Baur, "Music, Morals, and Social Management: Mendelssohn in Post-Civil War America," *American Music* 19 (Spring, 2001), 65.

¹³ Jonathan Hill, quoted in Augst, 43. Augst points out that the word "monitor" meant conscience in nineteenth-century vernacular, specifically in relation to guidance "received from ministers, teachers, and parents as an objective internalized standard of spiritual and moral responsibility."

instruction during this period of intense social change.”¹⁴ Such examples of cultural activism were systematically collected and displayed by men like Root who desired to demonstrate their own moral contributions to American society during this period of intense change.

Augst looks specifically at the establishment of and improvements made to libraries across the United States by middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century as an outward display of this cultural activism. He points out that most middle-class professionals recognized that knowledge gained through reading was moral capital in society. Augst argues that the establishment of libraries in major cities was an effort on the part of middle- and upper-class Americans to disseminate that moral knowledge to the working and lower-middle classes. He provides several examples from personal diaries about the importance of library support:

That which afforded the best and at the same time the most rational, was the privilege obtained by becoming a member of the young men’s Mercantile Library Association. . . . It now contains 24,000 volumes and 3,000 members having commenced, like many of its proprietors, with very limited means. . . . Its growing advancement holds out inducements to its numerous members whose unemployed hours from business, may be profitably spent in accumulating the means of mental improvement and substantial knowledge, from the works of eminent authors.¹⁵

The establishment of libraries after the Civil War went along with other moral pursuits by middle- and upper-class Americans including the establishment of museums, concert halls, and schools for young children. Many of these moral developers kept records of their activities in personal diaries and journals to reflect

¹⁴ Baur, 65.

¹⁵ Augst, 176.

their reform efforts, and to attain public awareness of their morality: if it was not written down, it could not be proven.

Self-projection

The act of writing autobiography was a trend that developed with the nineteenth-century notion of the Romantic self, a philosophy embraced in Europe and America that allowed an individual to analyze and organize his emotions about the state of his life. This trend was seen prominently in literature, visual art, and music, best embodied by nineteenth-century Romantic composers like Hector Berlioz and Robert Schumann. This was a movement that encouraged, above all, introspective evaluation of the self.¹⁶

Cavicchi explores this idea of self-projection by providing examples of Americans presenting “perfect” and admirable qualities in their journals and diaries. One young middle class clerk, Nathan Beekley, writes that he was aware of the sort of image attending minstrel shows and burlesques gave him and that he must avoid them more often: “It won’t do—must stop going to places of amusement—it don’t pay—particularly since losing so much money. . . . To keep out of the broils, I went to the opera again this evening.”¹⁷

Cavicchi also provides the example of a young George Templeton Strong to show how someone could create or embellish his identity through diary keeping. Strong used what he calls his “musical mania” to illustrate that he was a discerning

¹⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁷ Beekley, quoted in Cavicchi, 75.

listener who understood the moral benefits of being a music lover in the nineteenth century. As Cavicchi explains:

He maintained a strong fascination with the city's musical environment, from military bands and amateur-musician neighbors (which mostly annoyed him) to popular singers like Henry Russell, from the rehearsals and concerts of private music societies like the New York Philharmonic and opera at the exclusive Astor Place to hugely popular events by traveling virtuosos. . . . Strong seem inclined to judge the musical life of the city itself, accumulating varied musical experiences and measuring their worth.¹⁸

Cavicchi argues that young men like Beekley and Strong used their diaries to project a self-created identity that pleased their individual moral sensibilities. He also points out that this was a common practice in the nineteenth century and was also practiced widely in autobiography.

Rather than relying on the outward appearance of good deeds, autobiography actually allowed a young man the opportunity to offer that introspective interpretation of the course of events in his life, in print, to the public. Autobiography thus became an art in itself: "In the 1840s, the performance of self became its own end, giving birth to a huge industry that offered young men and women, across social categories, a chance to explore what a modern 'self' might be and how they might share in it. Biographies and memoirs became best-sellers."¹⁹

Root may have also sensed the shift toward the approaching twentieth century that Joseph Horowitz explores in his book, *Moral Fire*. Horowitz believes that Americans anticipated the approaching centenary shift and sought to preserve their

¹⁸ Ibid., 76–77.

¹⁹ Ibid., 100.

own thoughts during what he calls a “fulcrum moment,” beginning in the 1880s, as they reflected on the entirety of the nineteenth century:

Far less often applied to the United States, [*fin de siècle*] typically refers to a dynamic moment in Old World culture, a fulcrum moment, circa 1880 to 1914, dialectically charged, tugged backward and forward, a moment of closure and of anticipatory excitement. Evoking a vibrant coda, it is freighted with decadence: escapism, aestheticism, ennui; evoking a new beginning, it connotes revolt.²⁰

Conclusions

Root’s autobiography—and the function of autobiography more generally—should be considered carefully when studying his career and his role in the development of the American musical identity during the nineteenth century. As can be seen from Augst and Cavicchi’s studies of nineteenth-century diary, journal, autobiography, and memoir, there is indispensable utility in using these media to sharpen the identities that young middle-class men created for themselves. These young men were, of course, peers of Root and his autobiography deserves the same treatment. Following Augst and Cavicchi’s example, chapter four will explore how Root uses autobiography to construct his own identity through self-discovery, moral development, and self-projection.

²⁰ Joseph Horowitz, *Moral Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 11.

Chapter 4: Root's Autobiography: Morals, Manhood, and Modesty

As described in the introduction to this thesis, George Frederick Root's posthumous reputation has been limited to that of a "layman's musician."¹ Such a narrow description, while accurate as far as it goes, does not adequately represent how this composer actually viewed his own career. By examining his autobiography, which was first published in 1891 as *The Story of a Musical Life* by the John Church Company, we can come to understand the foundations of Root's identity, cobbled together by the composer himself. Such a study reveals three major themes: nineteenth-century American morals, manhood, and modesty.

Root and Functions of Nineteenth-Century Autobiography

Root's autobiography can be used much in the same manner that Cavicchi and Augst have used the personal diaries of his nineteenth-century white male peers: to examine the processes of self-discovery, moral development, and self-projection. This can be done by analyzing and evaluating the events that Root chose to include in his autobiography, especially since the book was written near the end of his life. A closer look at how Root charts each of these autobiographical functions in his own writing will help to parse out the overarching themes of morals, manhood, and modesty.

Root details his own path to self-discovery mainly in terms of choirs he directed, particular pupils he taught, teachers from whom he took lessons, churches at which he played, performances he attended, and individual pieces that he wrote. Consequently, his autobiography does not present the reader with a complete picture

¹ s.v. "Root, George Frederick," *Oxford Music Online*.

of a young man adjusting to urban life after spending his boyhood on a farm. Instead, the reader discovers a young man who grappled with pedagogical dilemmas in his early development as an educator, and one who was forced to recognize his own limitations as a composer. Rather than merely describing his triumphs, Root demonstrates that the decision to move to New York in 1844 was a difficult one and that he struggled at first with his piano and singing lessons. In the process, the reader becomes privy to Root's personal self-discovery within the pages of this autobiography. For Root, the need for early self-discovery must have seemed even more daunting, given his temporary responsibility for the financial support of his family back in North Reading, Massachusetts.

Root's record of his own personal moral development is manifested in his autobiography more subtly than in those of many of his nineteenth-century peers. Rather than describe each good deed, Root provides anecdotes in which he chose the most moral action possible. For example, early on he describes an encounter with a critic of his piano playing at church. Instead of disparaging the critic, he recounts his modest and generous response and points out that it is important to never say anything negative about another person. This results in an indirect display of his moral development, rather than a simple dictation of his virtues and good deeds. In short, Root expects the reader to draw his own conclusions about his morality.

As will be explained in this chapter, Root marries the functions of moral development and self-projection by providing broad principles that govern his life choices: religious piety, societal standards of masculinity, American patriotism, and general humility. The reader is simultaneously convinced of Root's struggle to attain

these virtues, while fully believing that he is a man who embodies them in his later life. That Root's moral development was accepted by his peers is made clear by W. S. B. Mathews's account of Root's career (discussed in chapter two). Furthermore, this sense of high moral standard was perpetuated by his children, as in his own daughter's vivid obituary for her father (discussed in chapter one).

Root's autobiography also fits temporally into Joseph Horowitz's "fulcrum moment" frame, the period at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth in which Americans quantified and evaluated their experiences in the closing century.² Root's choice to end his autobiography with a brief discussion of his upcoming involvement in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 also fits neatly into this moment, which Horowitz describes as a period "of closure and of anticipatory excitement."³ Root takes stock of his life's events up to this point, but eagerly looks to the future and the possibilities that it holds. He writes that he is overwhelmed with excitement for the World's Fair, for which he is a planning member: "Considerable importance has been attached to the assembling of a Musical Congress on this occasion, which shall include prominent musicians and musical educators of this and other countries. I am one of the five members of the commission chosen for the furtherance of this object."⁴

² Joseph Horowitz, *Moral Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 11.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 219.

Root's *Story of a Musical Life*

Root's autobiography reads like a daily diary and consists of nineteen chapters, although it cannot have been composed that way, as Root's actual diaries burned in the Chicago Fire of 1871. Each of the chapters covers a specific period in Root's life and is situated in a particular geographical location. There is also an appendix, which lists Root's published books and some of his sheet music, followed by piano-vocal reductions of significant songs from his career. His purpose, he writes, is to provide a chronological account of his personal development rather than a catalog of his achievements:

Special prominence could have been given in this work to the orderly arrangement of such musical statistics and items of musical history as come within its scope, but such a plan would have interfered with my story, as such, so those matters have been allowed to come in as wanted, without references to their chronological order.⁵

Many of Root's writings have not survived and primary source scholarship is thus limited mainly to his autobiography.⁶ Because Root wrote this work at the end of

⁵ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, preface.

⁶ In addition to his autobiography, other writings and publications by Root include music education textbooks, articles in *The Song Messenger of the Northwest* and other auxiliary writings, and some limited personal correspondence. Some notable textbooks still available for viewing are: *The Musical Curriculum* (Root & Cady, 1865); *The Sabbathbell* (Mason Brothers, 1856); *The Diapason* (Mason Brothers, 1860); *The Silver Chime* (Henry Tolman, 1862); *The Silver Lute* (Root & Cady, 1862); *The Triumph* (Root & Cady, 1868); *The Prize* (John Church, 1870); *The New Song Era* (John Church, 1877); *National School Singer* (A. S. Barnes, 1878); *Palace of Song* (John Church and Root & Sons, 1879); *Our Song World* (John Church, 1884); *The Repertoire* (John Church, 1887); *The Glorious Cause* (John Church, 1888); *The Treble Clef Choir* (John Church, 1894). Root gives a comprehensive list of the books he published in an appendix of his autobiography. Auxiliary writings include: Root's contributions to *The Memoirs of Philip P. Bliss* (A. S. Barnes, 1877); various columns and articles from *The Song Messenger of the*

his life, the reader could assume that the depiction the composer presents is the self-projection that he wanted perpetuated after his death. The autobiography leans heavily on American ideals like Protestant piety, the importance of family, connection with nature, Transcendentalism, patriotism, nineteenth-century American manhood, and the value of establishing oneself in society through hard work.

Morals

Throughout his story of self-discovery, Root often illustrates, by anecdote, the ethical and moral standards to which he held himself. As presented in chapter three of this thesis, middle-class white men in the nineteenth century used autobiography to illustrate their adherence to and development of acceptable moral standards. Root's personal morality focuses primarily on his Protestant devotion and the importance of his family, and is illustrated through the choice of vignettes recounted in his autobiography.

It is not known for certain which Protestant denomination(s) Root embraced during his lifetime. If we assume that Root subscribed to the beliefs of the churches where he performed every Sunday, it is likely that he was probably a Presbyterian, Congregationalist, or Unitarian. All that is known for sure is that he was Protestant, since he recounts no experiences with Catholicism. Nineteenth-century Americans saw the rise of Protestant theology as specific to New England. This religious trend

Northwest can be accessed through the American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals. There is also some personal correspondence currently in the possession of the Root Family. The Lowell Mason Collection at the Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library Special Collections at the University of Maryland holds a letter from Mason to Root regarding revisions and publication of *The Musical Curriculum*, as well an original autograph in Root's handwriting.

had its roots in Jonathan Edwards's Calvinist revivalist writings, but soon gave way to a more inclusive and multifaceted form of Protestantism. By the time Root was a young man, Unitarianism was one of the most prominent Protestant denominations in New England. This denomination emphasized free will and the value of good works.⁷ Unitarianism is significant to a discussion of Root's personal moral code because it incorporates his desires to be recognized by God for his good works and to be successful.

There is evidence in his autobiography to suggest that Root possibly subscribed to a New England Unitarian theology popular during the mid-nineteenth century. This interest in Universalism is reflected in the portions of his autobiography that are transcendentalist in nature, pointing to the popularity of the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (a Unitarian minister himself). Root's comfort with his remarkable financial success also echoes the Unitarian sentiment that high achievement in one's vocation was not sinful. Of course, these observations do not unequivocally prove Root's status as a New England Unitarian, but they do provide clues to his particular Protestant denominational leanings. Dena Epstein writes in the liner notes for a recording of *The Haymakers* that Root became more liberal in his religious beliefs as he grew older.⁸ Consequently, interactions with Unitarianism seem possible.

Just as it cannot be said that Root considered himself a Unitarian, so too must one be cautious in assuming he was a transcendentalist. Root makes no mention in his

⁷ Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*, revised (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 157–58.

⁸ Dena J. Epstein in the liner notes to *The Haymakers*.

autobiography of these sorts of beliefs, but he was fairly well educated and he was a member of New England middle-class society for most of his life. Therefore, it does seem plausible to suggest that Root was at least aware of Emerson, Thoreau, and the maxims of transcendentalism. Furthermore, with the foundations of transcendentalism so dependent upon those of Unitarianism, it is likely that Root was, at the very least, exposed to an amalgamation of the two doctrines.

The mid-nineteenth century saw a new, widespread economic affluence, a situation that was often difficult to reconcile with the desire for simplicity in American Puritanism. The rise of Methodism across the country (and Unitarianism in New England), however, helped to justify the religious value of American capitalism.⁹ As the nineteenth century wore on, it became more and more ethically acceptable for the middle class to amass money. Many middle-class women sought opportunities to promote culture, specifically the arts, in American cities. This bent toward educational philanthropy became the trend in the latter half of the century and translated into the abiding principle of doing good works integral to New England Unitarianism.

Nineteenth-century Americans were aware of Emerson's ideas about what it meant to be a contributing member of American society. Emerson often invoked business to illustrate "how vocation is a secular form of devotion."¹⁰ This idea relates back to Steven Baur's notion of the "calling" and reconciles how successful

⁹ Roger Robins, "Vernacular American Landscape: Methodists, Camp Meetings, and Social Responsibility," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4 (Summer 1994), 180.

¹⁰ Augst, 125.

Americans could subscribe to an “Emersonian” code of ethics and yet still be comfortable with their commercial success and resulting affluence.¹¹ To be skilled and successful was symbolic of an individual’s “religiousness” in his occupation:

Its moral basis is founded not on faith but on that enigmatic combination of reason and instinct, of speculation and practicality, that any person evinces in being shrewd. In a culture without a modern vocabulary for diagnosing the complex processes of psychology, Emerson finds a practical and accessible illustration of somatic intelligence in business.¹²

Emerson asserts that to be shrewd is a natural intelligence that should not be stifled. This brand of transcendentalism would likely have appealed to Root, a man who sought to do good works and yet attain considerable success in his profession. This also helps to explain Root’s defense of Lowell Mason’s own great financial success.¹³ Root’s parents might have taught him these values as a young boy.

Root uses religion to address his own financial success in his autobiography. He does not directly assert this justification for his success, but he also never apologizes for his financial affluence. Rather, Root emphasizes the good works he does in which the passing of money is implicit. For example, Root describes the composition of “Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching” as an attempt to compose a song that would be “very near the hearts of the loyal people of the North.” He writes that he was surprised by its publishing success: “[It] was not only an illustration of the advantage of my blackboard training, but was a further confirmation of what I have said before, that in my case successes were usually

¹¹ Baur, 73.

¹² Augst, 125.

¹³ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 102.

surprises.”¹⁴ There is no mention of money or financial success here, but it is implicit in the fact that the song itself was widely distributed. Root does not apologize for this financial gain. Instead, he demonstrates his Protestant devotion by asserting that he was always “surprised” by career success.¹⁵

Root might also have subscribed to what J. Peter Burkholder describes in his book on Charles Ives’s musical transcendentalism as a core set of beliefs in nineteenth-century transcendentalism, based on a more specific form of spirituality. He emphasizes the divinity of nature and human reliance on intuition to access God: “[Transcendentalism] signifies a set of beliefs, centering on the ideas of the divine presence in nature and humankind and immediate access to the divine through intuition.”¹⁶ Root does not aim to represent transcendentalism musically, but seeks to incorporate its themes into his texts.

This particular manifestation of transcendentalism aligns with Root’s constant references to the restorative power of nature and his desire to only speak well of the people he meets. In the very first chapter of his autobiography, he recounts his long and wondrous journey from Boston back to North Reading after securing a position with Artemas Johnson:

On my way home from Boston, in the old stage-coach, after the interview and agreement with Mr. Johnson, I was in another world. The ride in the wonderful cars was nothing to this. That was on iron rails, this was in the golden air. The dusty old towns through which we passed were beautiful as

¹⁴ Ibid., 141.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J. Peter Burkholder, *Charles Ives: The Ideas Behind the Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 26.

never before; even the mulleins by the wayside were transformed into more gorgeous flowers than ever bloomed in garden or conservatory.¹⁷

In the same paragraph, he extols the power of nature to restore him and his musical work in some of the most colorful language used in the autobiography.

Root's appreciation for nature was, at times, religious. He found spirituality to be omnipresent in landscapes and there was restorative power in the country near his

home at North Reading:

How many times I have walked, after the day's work was over, through dreary forest roads, to neighboring towns to exercise my musical powers with some embryo performer like myself, or, late 'in the stilly night,' as a lone serenade, unknown, unexpected and unchallenged, to breathe my sighs for freedom through the old four-keyed flute.¹⁸

There are many more examples of this effusive appreciation for nature scattered throughout Root's autobiography.

Root incorporates his connection with nature more subtly throughout the rest of his narrative. Rather than explicitly pointing out his appreciation of nature, he simply describes its restorative power in the landscape that he finds, especially when writing music. Each time Root describes a place where he spent some time, he extols the scenery and nature and the strength they give him. For example, when he spends time writing *The Haymakers* in North Reading at the family farm, he says: "I did most of the work in my new library at Willow Farm, where, by stepping to the door, I could see the very fields in which I had swung the scythe and raked the hay, and in which I had many a time hurried to get the last load into the barn before the thunder-

¹⁷ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 6–7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

storm should burst upon us.”¹⁹ There are a few more passages with this pattern, one when he describes how long a walk it was home from Boston to North Reading in his early career, but that he was happy to do it. It is possible that Root may have deliberately included these recollections to celebrate and illustrate his religious love of nature.

It is also important to note that transcendental ideology was not a philosophical cornerstone of Root’s musical aesthetic, as it was with Charles Ives.²⁰ Root merely appreciated nature in a typical nineteenth-century manner, never mentioning this appreciation’s relationship to his composition other than to say that nature often sustained him and fortified him in his work. Consequently, Root’s transcendentalism was tied together with his piety. He sensed that God was omnipresent in the world, especially in nature. This was not a topic that he attempted to relay or share in his music.

In addition to his appreciation for nature, Root fills his book with stories that reflect his good works in order to prove his Protestant devotion. One example of Root’s dedication to religion is his constant mentioning of “good” churches that he sought out each time he visited a new city, presumably those that aligned with his religious values. Root also writes that he has no qualms about discussing his religion with others. He recounts a story early in chapter three of hearing some gossip about his own organ-playing abilities that left the perpetrator looking worse for criticizing Root in the first place. Careful to adhere to his Christian sensibilities, Root is entirely

¹⁹ Ibid., 113.

²⁰ Burkholder, *Charles Ives*.

forgiving about the matter. Of course, he does not miss the opportunity to make a moral statement about the matter: “But this incident taught me a lesson in regard to saying unpleasant things about a person unless I know to whom I am talking.”²¹

Root was also concerned with obeying the edicts of his church. In chapter six, he tells a story from his travels in Europe in which Giulio Alary, Root’s music teacher while abroad, invites him to see one of his opera rehearsals. Root declines the opportunity on account of the rules of his church:

I was in trouble, for I knew I could not make him conceive how there could be any conscientious scruples against accepting his invitation, but at that time, in the church to which I belonged, it was thought wrong to go to opera or theatrical representations, and I determined when I left home that I would do nothing in Paris that I would not do in New York.²²

Presumably to emphasize his proclivity for doing good deeds, Root tells a story of helping a young French girl make her way in America. He met the girl in Paris and told her he thought she would do well as a painter in America. To his surprise, she later came to the United States and sought Root and his wife’s sponsorship. She had success as a painter and married a wealthy gentleman from Cuba: “A year afterward I received a letter from her, filled with praises of her beautiful boy, and calling down blessings upon my head as the cause, to some extent, of her happiness.”²³ Root also recounts a story of a mock trial onboard a ship

²¹ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 32.

²² *Ibid.*, 63.

²³ *Ibid.*, 74.

involving a Mormon elder seeking proselytes and how he was “brought to justice” by the false jury sentencing him to prison.²⁴

The final standard Root emphasizes in his autobiography to support his Protestant morality is the importance of family. In the very first chapter, he expresses gratitude toward his mother for her support in his pursuit of a musical career. He is sure to mention that he places great value on their mother-son relationship and that he has been able to take care of his family through his success, conveniently fulfilling his own calling:

She said, “Go, my son, if you find the opportunity; I’ll get along in some way.” I knew well what that meant—my father and the brother next younger than myself being both in South America, and six younger children to care for—hard times certain—possibly privation; but I had the hardihood of the inexperienced youngster that I was, and said, “Mother, just let me get a start and you shall never want for anything.” I thank the Lord that I was able to make that promise good.²⁵

Root continually mentions how grateful he is to his family for supporting his career unconditionally.

Root also writes about his very talented progeny, particularly his eldest son F. W. and his eldest daughter Clara Louise Burnham, the former working as a composer and the latter a novelist. He deems all of his children musically gifted, as well as many of his grandchildren, and expresses his deep pride:

Of the clan in general, including brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, and the families with which they are connected, living near, it is only necessary to sound the call and more than thirty respond. All are musical—the children of my brother E. T. conspicuously so. They occupy some of the best choir

²⁴ Ibid., 170.

²⁵ Ibid., 4.

positions in the city, and one of the young ladies is one of Chicago's best amateur pianists.²⁶

It clearly pleased Root greatly to believe that his musical legacy would continue with his children and grandchildren, and certainly added to his reputation as a successful musician that his progeny continued his own work. That his children strove to develop his musical work further conveniently lends credibility to his reputation.

Root's Protestant devotion and emphasis on family provide one facet, morality, of a well-developed individual. Scholars can assume that this image was purposefully crafted since Root wrote his autobiography at the end of his life. Root therefore chose which vignettes best represented his character, consequently presenting a morally developed man.

Manhood

As is representative of white men of his generation, Root embodies American masculinity in specific ways. Cavicchi states that the notion of the self-made man influenced middle-class white men as they pursued occupations in urban centers and responded to the perceived societal pressures of masculinity. The thirst for economic individualism was inextricably tied to concepts of American manhood and what it meant to discover one's "self":

[Economic individualism] presented a powerful appeal to gender generally: as the role of women became increasingly associated with care and protection of the home in the postcolonial era, the idea of leaving home for the world of commerce became sharply significant—young men were leaving not simply to find work, but they were embarking on a discovery of their manhood, away from female influence.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 207.

²⁷ Cavicchi, 81.

This desire for financial independence was often characterized by years early in a career filled with hard work and little financial reward. In his article about white-collar clerks in antebellum America, Brian Luskey observes that the only examples for success that were available to young, middle-class, white men were those that emphasized hard work: “Cultural narratives extolling hard work, self-control, perseverance, and patience promised success.”²⁸

These virtues were the same ones that Root associated with the self-made American man, and they provide an important context for his portrayal of his early years when he worked tirelessly for Lowell Mason and never turned down a professional opportunity. Root’s striving for a self-made career eventually led to his physical exhaustion and stomach ulcers:

About this time I began to feel the effects of my reckless treatment of a naturally strong and healthy constitution. For years I took a hasty breakfast before other people were up, in order to be with my blind class, nearly two miles off, at half past seven in the morning. Then every working hour through the day was filled with other classes and private lessons, and some nights in the week with evening work, and if a new pupil wanted my dinner hour I gave it and snatched a lunch as I could get it in place of the regular meal. This, with the Sunday work, gradually sapped my vitality and brought on the usual trouble of overworked people—dyspepsia.²⁹

Yet, Root may have been up against greater odds than just the expectation to work hard. There were still questions about the manliness of certain occupations in nineteenth-century America. If an occupation did not involve manual labor, it was difficult for the worker to defend his masculinity. This is a notion against which all

²⁸ Brian P. Luskey, “Jumping Counters in White Collars: Manliness, Respectability, and Work in the Antebellum City,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 26 (Summer 2006): 196.

²⁹ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 58.

men working in more intellectual occupations must have fought. As Brian Luskey explains:

But could mental exertion, writing, or selling actually be considered work? . . . In order to make this claim convincing, brain workers had to subvert the labor theory of value by contending that the character of a hard-working man was as reliable an emblem of republican citizenship as hard work with the hands. Character traits such as self-discipline and application to business were, for these men, as important as labor itself.³⁰

Gail Bederman notes that there was a shift towards more intellectual occupations in the mid-nineteenth century, emphasizing qualities that may have been considered feminine before. Because of this, as the century progressed, American society fell into a sort of crisis over what actually constituted manhood. Bederman notes that from the 1850s on, young men were encouraged to build their masculinity in order to provide for a family. The best way to do this was to exercise self-control over masculine impulses:

Middle-class parents taught their sons to build a strong, manly ‘character’ as they would build a muscle, through repetitive exercises of control over impulse. The middle class saw this ability to control powerful masculine passions through strong character and a powerful will as a primary source of men’s strength and authority over both women and the lower classes.³¹

Root embodies this expectation to stifle natural impulses in favor of doing his duty. He recounts many moments where he chose the moral course of action, ignoring his natural impulses. Refusing to attend the opera rehearsal in London is one prime example of choosing religious duty over personal interest. When he recounts Jacob Abbott’s request that he move to New York and undertake music education, Root

³⁰ Luskey, 215.

³¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11–12.

confides that he had no desire to move to New York after settling in Boston, but he stifles his personal emotions to do the “right thing” and moves to New York:

Mr. Jacob spoke to me on the subject of going there. I hesitated; I was doing well, had a large circle of good friends, was near my old home, etc., but Mr. Abbott said: “There is a great field in New York—nothing like Mr. Mason’s work and yours has been done there. Here Mr. Mason and Mr. Webb are at the head, and you must for a long time occupy a subordinate place. There you will have a clear field, and I think you can sustain yourself in it. We want such work as you can do in our school, and we think other institutions will want the same when they know what it is.”³²

Root chose the good of others over his own personal feelings and moved to New York where he was, of course, highly successful. The struggle between wanting to remain in Boston where he was well connected and moving to New York where he had a chance of wider success demonstrates an unshakeable sense of striving masculinity on Root’s part.

Root also chooses portrays himself as a hard-working man who values the notion of the American Dream. Cavicchi points out that Americans desired to reestablish themselves upon moving to a new city, and that this often prompted much self-evaluation:

If, previously, a person’s life-course was determined in predictable ways by shared traditions and institutions, new arrivals in cities were eager to embrace an ideology that emphasized a different process of “economic individualism,” that involved attaining an “occupation,” enduring trials in the marketplace, and achieving individual success. For many, life in this new, larger urban environment encouraged an intense, self-examination and questions. How do I live here? Can I be the same person that I was before?³³

This desire to re-establish oneself, yet retain the important aspects of a former life is evident in Root’s visits to churches in accordance with his own religious beliefs, his

³² Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 35–36.

³³ Cavicchi, 78.

seeking out of music teachers with whom to develop relationships, and embracing every professional opportunity that came his way upon his arrivals in Boston, New York, Chicago, and even Paris, Glasgow, and London. The attainment of the American Dream required Root to tirelessly pursue these opportunities and truly establish him in a new city.

Another important aspect of the period in which Root established himself as a masculine American musician was the social reform movement after the Civil War. During the antebellum years, a much greater emphasis was placed on the importance of education and engaging in cultural enterprises. Steven Baur writes in his article about the role of Felix Mendelssohn's music in nineteenth-century American life that there was a broad movement to "heighten cultural awareness and to promote development in art, literature, music, and other fields of culture after the Civil War."³⁴ He goes on to say that the combination of newly established cultural institutions and innovations in "processes of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration" changed the social atmosphere of nineteenth-century America: "Educated cultural activists promoted culture as a means by which to foster social cohesion and administer moral instruction during this period of intense social change."³⁵

Root composed music in this dynamic era and ultimately took cues from these social factors into account as he toiled for his own career success. Adaptability was essential to an American man's success, and that is certainly what Root tried to be. Baur also points out that society began to see culture as a "moralizing social force,"

³⁴ Baur, 65.

³⁵ Ibid.

something that Root would certainly have been attuned to as a devout Protestant and upstanding, moral, American man.

Root also uses his autobiography to display his unwavering American patriotism, a key attribute of the ideal American man. In chapter seven, he describes how he celebrated national independence while abroad in Paris: “When the fourth of July came, six of us Americans decided to make a day of it in honor of the fatherland.”³⁶ Also on this particular trip, Root relays a conversation with a Frenchman in which he insists how great it is to be American:

I grew eloquent in very ungrammatical French on the advantages of our ways, and volunteered a good deal of information as to probable results if they were in American instead of in France. . . I should have been considerably astonished if I could have known then how I was making America, and especially New York, appear to them the veritable land of promise. This feeling grew stronger as we became better acquainted.³⁷

Finally, Root discusses the real estate rush in preparation for the Chicago World’s Fair. He points out that it has always been the American dream to buy a parcel of land as your own, especially on the frontier, and that the World’s Fair brought back this sentiment to Chicagoans. Adding to the contentedness Root feels at being American, he writes on the final page of his autobiography: “To conclude, I can not imagine a pleasanter life for myself than the one I now live.”³⁸

Root’s awareness of the societal expectations for American men is clear throughout his autobiography. His exercise of self-control, desire to re-establish himself in a city, awareness of social reform expectations, and general American

³⁶ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 69.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

patriotism all contribute to well-rounded image of American masculinity. Like his Protestant devotion, this image of masculinity was carefully documented at the end of his life.

Modesty

In Root's journey to self-discovery, spirituality and masculinity played important roles, but so too did good fortune and chance. Root helps justify receiving good fortune by always expressing humility and modesty; it would not, after all, be very Christian of him to say that he was entitled to his financial success. A man with a high code of ethics and morality would wish to present an image of modesty in order to reconcile all of his personal values with his public financial success and popularity. To demonstrate this merger, Root writes in the preface: "I do not like the appearance of self-praise that I have to assume while recording in this book certain sayings and events which refer to myself and my career. I hope the reader will see that my story would not be complete without them, and on that ground excuse the apparent egotism."³⁹

This passage seems to mostly align with the personal accounts given of Root's character and attitude over the years. The entire final chapter of the book is devoted to countless praiseful excerpts from letters and newspapers. Such a display is not expected from a humble, gracious, and grateful man, especially after having read his appeal in the preface of the book, but it is important for the reader to recognize that it would be impossible for Root to give an accurate account of his career unless he discussed his great success in some measure. Most of what Root includes in this final

³⁹ Ibid., preface.

chapter seems sincere and is presented in the least self-aggrandizing manner possible. He leaves praise to the words of others and allows the reader to draw conclusions, thereby demonstrating his humility.

Another interesting story is recounted in chapter seventeen involving the passengers and crew of the steamship *City of Rome* honoring Root with song and applause during his journey back to the United States from Glasgow and London. Root contends that he “tried to keep out of the way and let the younger people do the performing, but they found me out, and I had to take part.”⁴⁰ He mentions, finally that “after the great kindness of my English friends, it was pleasant to find, after all, that ‘a prophet’ may have some ‘honor in his own country.’”⁴¹ By simply appropriating the words of his fellow travelers, Root does not directly call himself a “prophet.” He has maintained his painstaking humility, even through this passage.

Conclusions

As a white, middle-class male who successfully made the transition from rural to urban life in nineteenth-century America, it was almost required that Root write an autobiography that outlined his self-discovery, his own moral development, and self-projection for posterity. Root’s autobiography is also an archive of the social conditions, pressures, and trends in play during his lifetime. There is nothing unique about the moral, masculine, and modest self-depiction he provides, but Root’s concern with writing an autobiography that presents his image in this manner proves that he desired to be remembered for more than his war songs or his status as a

⁴⁰ Ibid., 199.

⁴¹ Ibid., 199.

“layman’s musician.” His description of experiences beyond “singing in the classroom, church, and home” provide a more complete insight into a life that the majority of American music histories have discussed in an increasingly limited manner since Root’s death in 1895.⁴² It is also possible, however, to see Root’s desire for a positive posthumous reputation reflected in his musical works. Chapter five will discuss the appearance of these values in his most popular secular cantata, *The Haymakers*.

⁴² s.v. “Root, George Frederick,” *Oxford Music Online*.

Chapter 5: Secular Cantata: A Different Kind of Singing

George Frederick Root's secular cantata *The Haymakers* (1857) was incredibly popular in its era, enjoying immediate publication and many performances. Its subject matter reflected the Protestant sensibilities of nineteenth-century Americans and the blending of American and European elements appealed to a wide swath of the American public. It was also a cost-effective way to do large-scale amateur entertainment across the United States. This chapter will describe the genre as nineteenth-century Americans experienced it. It will then present Root's most famous cantata, *The Haymakers*. Finally, it will analyze how Root placed many of the same themes that were prevalent in his autobiography in the libretto, which he wrote himself. This chapter will not only demonstrate the relative lack of existing scholarship about Root's cantatas, but will also substantiate the need for inclusion of these works in future studies of nineteenth-century composers like George Frederick Root.

The American Secular Cantata: Defining the Genre

Jacklin Stopp describes the secular cantata not by appealing to its music, but as “a medium for publicizing a composer and providing a source of income.”¹ This explanation applies well to Root's works, as he gained both popularity and financial reward from them. After the mid-eighteenth century, the word “cantata” simply indicated a piece that was scored for large chorus accompanied by piano or small orchestra. *The Haymakers* was Root's attempt at composing what he called an

¹ Stopp, “The Secular Cantata,” 394.

“operatic cantata.”² To Root, this simply meant a work that blended American and European art song styles. Considering the themes of simple farming life, the inclusion of various American musical idioms, and the practical value cantatas served for amateur musicians, it would not be inappropriate to ultimately describe *The Haymakers* as an extension of Root’s “people songs,” the term he used to describe the wide appeal he hoped his music would have for various groups of Americans.

Stopp divides the history of the American secular cantata into three distinct periods between 1850 and 1919. Her first two periods are “transitional” (1850–1869): during the first of these the secular cantata became an outgrowth of the church cantata. She points to Root’s earlier *The Pilgrim Fathers* (1854) as a paragon of this stylistic period. Stopp also calls the second stylistic period (1870–1879) “transitional,” but says that two particular shifts of emphasis distinguish it from the first: that religious material was used for dramatic effect or to emphasize the Divine Providence of American uniqueness, and that most American composers relied on the examples of European masters, particularly Mendelssohn, Gounod, Liszt, Wagner, and Dvořák. This period, she writes, was dominated by German-trained composers such as Otto Singer and Dudley Buck.³ Paradigmatic works from this period include Buck’s *The Legend of Don Munio* (1874) and *The Centennial Meditation of Columbia* (1876) written for the centennial celebration of the United States in Philadelphia.⁴

² George F. Root, “Explanations and Directions,” *The Haymakers* (Chicago: Root & Cady, 1860).

³ *Ibid.*, 390.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Stopp's final period (1880–1919) was comprised of cantatas that mostly featured foreign locales as their settings. She says that the influence of European music was strongest during this last phase. Notable cantatas from the final period include George Whiting's *Tale of the Viking* (1881) and *Dream Pictures* (1891), and Arthur Foote's *The Farewell of Hiawatha* (1886), a setting of the final canto in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*.⁵

According to Stopp, *The Haymakers* falls into the initial “transitional” category of American secular cantatas. She explains that works during this transitional period were still firmly guided by Protestant themes, or what she calls the “Faith-in-God-Leads-to-Success-and-Happiness” formula.⁶ It follows, then, that Root felt comfortable incorporating spiritual themes into his seemingly secular works, considering his Protestant religious verve discussed earlier.

The performance of Root's cantata followed the system established for traveling opera in the nineteenth century. Small groups of soloists toured the United States (mostly according to the railroads) and put on small productions with local opera companies that featured a *mélange* of many styles and entertainments. Many of the smaller towns did not have enough singers for a full chorus, or enough musicians for a full orchestra, so *The Haymakers* would have been a perfect production. The need for only a few soloists could be more easily met, and if one proficient pianist was available, the rest of the music could be left up to the local church chorus. Or, if

⁵ *Ibid.*, 391–92.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 389.

there were a handful of talented soloists in the church choir, this type of work could serve as slightly more challenging fare.

Most Americans attending a secular cantata performance during this period would probably expect a work with religious themes, a large chorus, at least piano accompaniment, some minimal staging and costumes, and perhaps a few props. They would expect to hear songs in many styles, including English glee, aria, oratorio chorus, recitative, madrigal, and American song.

The Birth of *The Haymakers*

His 1850 tour of Europe was a defining moment in Root's musical career. As a highlight, Root saw Hector Berlioz conduct a concert of new compositions:

The other concert that I think of with special interest was an orchestral performance of new compositions by Hector Berlioz, conducted by himself. That pale, wild face, surmounted by shaggy locks, black as night, haunted me for months. He was a disappointed man. His works, now taking so high a rank, did not find much recognition in his life-time.⁷

Perhaps now considering his own musical posterity, Root returned to the United States to continue teaching, but he was also now interested in composing music in European classical styles. Still quite conscious of the needs of the performers and audiences he served, Root composed, published, and premiered his first secular cantata *The Flower Queen* in 1852.

Root may have composed this work with his singing students in mind, but the long-term potential for the cantata's publishing success could have also factored into his compositional choices. He was clearly aware of the popularity of his secular

⁷ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 68.

cantatas by the mid-1850s. His connection with James C. Johnson, Artemas Johnson's brother, likely also demonstrated the potential for secular cantata.

In his autobiography, Root relays a story in which a director tells him of his own production of *The Flower Queen* that featured a choir of over two hundred singers and made him roughly a thousand dollars in profit. Root writes: "It evidently did not occur to him that, while he had made a thousand dollars, the author of the work had realized the munificent sum of sixty cents, or thereabout, as his share of the profits."⁸ Root calculates this sum from the ten or so scores that the director purchased to teach his choir, mostly by rote. Root then mentions that the copyright law was made stricter soon thereafter and he tried to enforce it with later performances of *The Haymakers*, but admits "it was more trouble than it was worth to enforce it, and I soon gave up the effort."⁹

Other cantatas soon followed, including *The Pilgrim Fathers* (1854), but Root's most popular cantata was *The Haymakers* (1857), composed at Willow Farm at the suggestion of Lowell Mason's son, Lowell Mason Jr. Root wrote that the cantata was inspired by his real-life experiences on Willow Farm in the hayfields during the haymaking season.

Rather than borrowing sacred texts, *The Haymakers* uses a secular libretto with Protestant undertones penned by Root himself. The plot follows a group of workers hurrying to finish the harvest before an ominous storm sets upon the farm. The cantata is in two parts (or acts). Part I features workers mowing the hayfield and

⁸ Ibid., 117.

⁹ Ibid.

going about their daily business. The act ends with the crew preparing for sleep. Part II opens with a chorus the following day and focuses on the drama of hurrying to finish the day's work before the rain comes. A storm ensues once the haymakers finish their work and the cantata closes with the return of the sunshine and another chorus.

Root wrote in the libretto that the staging for this work could be as simple or complicated as the director desired:

The "Haymakers," as the title indicates, is founded upon scenes and incidents connected with the hay-field, the farm-house, and the hay-making season, and may be given with or without characteristic costume, action, scenery, etc., at the convenience or pleasure of the performers . . . real scythes, rakes, and forks may be found too large and heavy; imitations are easily made, and will be better.¹⁰

Root also gave several suggestions for the staging:

A large platform or stage will be required, that the performers may have room enough for the necessary action. A part of the stage should be concealed from the audience, that the singers may be sometimes out of sight. This may be done by trees and shrubbery, leaving the open space in the center and in front. If convenient, the gable end of a farm house or other appropriate scenery may be represented behind the trees.¹¹

Farming props and animals were, presumably, quite easy to acquire, and any stage was probably suitable, making these productions inexpensive, visually pleasing, and inclusive of the entire community. Finally, Root provided directions about what sort of costumes may be used:

The ladies should wear straw hats and picturesque dresses of some simple material. A sort of Swiss costume is pretty, easily made, and convenient. The gentlemen should also wear straw hats and summer clothing. Jackets or

¹⁰ George F. Root, "Explanations and Directions."

¹¹ Ibid.

blouses may be dispensed with while at work. The farmer and other principal characters may have some appropriate distinguishing dress.¹²

These stage directions, were, of course, were merely suggestions. However much or little could be acquired or accomplished was sufficient for staging the work. Root even wrote that it was acceptable to stage the work without any props or costumes: “If sung, book in hand, without costume and action, no special direction is needed here.”¹³ He went on to give even more specific blocking instructions and notes for various numbers throughout the work, giving special attention to how the singers should move in relation to one another.

Root’s Choice of Thematic Material

Root was clever to use strong Protestant themes, also exemplified in his autobiography, to create his libretto. Some examples of the themes he incorporates into *The Haymakers* include the idea of “the calling,” images of masculinity, the restorative power of nature, and the importance of family. Each of these themes appears several times throughout the libretto, but a short discussion of each will provide sufficient context for Root’s work.

The Haymakers touches on something Root expresses in his autobiography: the value of labor and “the calling.” The *Chicago Tribune* wrote of the 1860 premiere:

The freshness of its music, which, combined with the naturalness of the plot, depicts with great truthfulness, while it slightly idealizes the labors of the American hayfield . . . The Italian opera walks on stilts, deals in exaggeration,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

and treats largely of kings, queens, dukes, and nobles. This is purely democratic, exalts labor, ridicules the useless city dandy, and holds up for your admiration the sturdy Farmer and his household, who learn from nature, the pure, the true and the beautiful.¹⁴

A specific textual example of this is found in “How Pleasant Are Those Cheerful Words.” This is a recitative, sung by the main character, a farmer, expresses that divinity and pleasure may only be found in doing one’s work well. He sings:

How pleasant are those cheerful words,
Happiness comes not from wealth,
comes not from station,
But from contentment calm and true.
He who walks cheerfully on the path of duty,
Doing with his might what his hands find to do,
Loving God and his fellow man,
He alone has the right to be happy.

It is difficult to mistake the meaning of this passage: that joy and religious gratification may be found in work. Musically, this recitative is not particularly difficult. The farmer is heavily supported by the piano harmonically.

Another theme that appears in both Root’s autobiography and his libretto is American masculinity. In “How Like Some Tented Camp,” a men’s chorus sings:

How like some tented camp the distant field appears!
All glorious in the morning light, tho’ wet with dewy tears,
How flies the heavy mist like smoke of battle’s strife,
As brightening all the sky the sun is bursting into life,
Like the sword’s bright flash,
And the saber’s class
And the rolling, rolling drum,
Are the glancing light,
Of the scythes so bright,
And the wood-bird’s whirring hum.

¹⁴ Review, *Chicago Tribune*, January 9, 1860.

Strife, battle, sword, flash, saber, rolling, scythe, and drum are all words that imply strength and militaristic duty, rather than the work of an office. Root also cleverly uses text painting to create images evocative of rolling drums and marching.

As if to illustrate the contrast between male and female expectations, Root follows the men's chorus with a recitative by the farmer's daughter, Anna, called "Joy!" She provides a short commentary about why the men are mistaken in their joy. Rather than providing insight to what feminine expectations were in the nineteenth-century, this passage actually brings masculine expectations into sharper focus by associating women with the gentle aspects of nature, and men with images of strength:

Joy! It is not the tended field, it is not the rolling drum, it is not the
saber's flash, nor the cannon's roar. The only tends are of fragrant hay.
The only sentinels, the hopping, hopping robins, who at our approach
have flown away.

This recitative, like the farmer's discussed earlier, is not musically difficult by any means. Anna is supported even more heavily by the piano, not just harmonically, but also melodically and rhythmically.

Root also revisits his belief that nature holds a restorative power. As discussed in chapter four, this restorative power is directly aligned with Root's view that divinity exists in nature. The quintette "How good is He, the Giver" best exemplifies this religious appreciation of nature:

How good is He, the Giver,
Whose mercies fail us never,
Whose bounty large is ever,
Loving and free;
From Him the bright sun shineth,
And soft at eve declineth,
Bringing the night.
Yet learn we a lesson from the falling grass:
In the morning it flourisheth and growth up,
In the evening it is cut down, and withereth—
So in a day our life may be ended.
When that time shall come, may we be gathered into
the garner of the Most High.
Praise the Lord.

This quintette, one of the more difficult pieces of the cantata, was often performed separately from the cantata, sometimes even during church services.

The final theme from Root's autobiography that appears in his libretto is the importance of family. Anna, the farmer's daughter, expresses her emotional ties to her family on the farm in "Scenes of Happiness." Anna emphasizes the importance of her family and how she will be sad to leave them in the future, an emotion that Root certainly grappled with when he left North Reading for the first time. This is also reflected in the portions of his autobiography where he described the strong ties he still felt to the family farm. Perhaps he considered these emotions when he wrote the libretto at Willow Farm:

Home, dear home, so lovely,
With a full heart turning to thee,
I cling in my love like a vine
To the objects so dear to me.
Yes! Scenes of happiness, I love you,
Deep in my heart shall your memory dwell,
When I wander far from friends and thee,
When I must say to all farewell.

Beyond the thematic material of the libretto, the setting of the cantata on the farm, while seemingly superficial, is concurrent with American life and progress. The mechanization and urbanization of life moved forward at great speed and the response of some Americans was to look nostalgically to simple farm life. Root may have even made a subtle comment about progress by writing a storm into the plot, suggesting that a storm of progress was overtaking American agricultural life. As Denise Von Glahn suggests about a handful of Charles Ives's songs, the strength and inevitability of the storm may also represent the futility of human progress against nature.¹⁵

Reflecting his desire to truly capture the spirit of the hayfield, Root composed the cantata on his family farm in North Reading, Massachusetts:

I did most of the work in my new library at Willow Farm, where, by stepping to the door, I could see the very fields in which I had swung the scythe and raked the hay, and in which I had many a time hurried to get the last load into the barn before the thunder-storm should burst upon us. In fact, nearly every scene described in the cantata had its counterpart in my experience on the old farm not many years before.¹⁶

Of course, these words were probably written with an eye toward the market and reflected a nostalgic view of the farm life, but Root reproduces a popular view of mid-nineteenth-century Americans: the idea that hard work will bring prosperity and that the simplest life is the rural one.

Musically, the work features vocal solos and large choral settings, but it does not follow a traditional form like the Lutheran cantata. Aside from its obligato in the form of piano accompaniment, there is nothing to musically suggest a strong parallel

¹⁵ Denise Von Glahn, "Charles Ives, Cowboys, and Indians: Aspects of the 'Other Side of Pioneering,'" *American Music* 19 (Autumn, 2001): 291–314.

¹⁶ Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, 113.

between *The Haymakers* and European cantata, even though Root may have planned to eventually orchestrate the work. The lack of an orchestra, however, should be viewed as a strength, as the sparse accompaniment and need for only mildly talented soloists makes it possible to perform the work without much expenditure. As Stopp explains: “The nucleus of most American secular choral activity was the English-speaking Protestant church choir which, functioning either as a unit or through its individual members, formed the basis for the special organizations which presented both sacred and secular works.”¹⁷ Most small towns that put on *The Haymakers*, then, looked to their local churches to provide the singers and other musicians necessary. This practice was palatable to pious parishioners because the religious aspects of the work outweighed concern over performing anything resembling opera.

Each act of *The Haymakers* is a series of songs set for solos, small groups, and full chorus. Root uses elements of American hymnody, English glee, oratorio, and opera throughout. While Root incorporates compositional elements of text painting, dual dramatic actions within one piece, and hocket, the greatest strength of the cantata is its variety of genres. The work opens with a recitative, “Arouse ye, arouse ye,” sung by the Farmer. Root uses the recitative, much how an opera composer would, to set the scene for the cantata. Root’s recitative, however, is markedly easier to sing than an operatic recitative would be as the melody adheres to a stricter rhythm and tempo:

¹⁷ Stopp, “The Secular Cantata,” 389.

Diversity of genre was essential to the cantata's success. For example, in contrast to the choruses, arias, and recitatives that came before, "How Hushed" could easily be mistaken for a ballad based on an Irish folk tune with its long, graceful melody:

The image shows a musical score for the piece "How Hushed" from the cantata *The Haymakers*. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 10 and includes the lyrics: "si- lence na- ture wears, With dread she seems op-". The second system starts at measure 15 and includes the lyrics: "- pressed, and wait- ing stands, As if in ___ hope some". The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The melody is characterized by long, graceful intervals, typical of a ballad or folk tune.

Example 6. Root, *The Haymakers*, "How hushed," mm. 9–15.

"Shrouded Is the Sun," on the other hand, is reminiscent of an opera chorus, using the range of the entire choir in addition to a solo quartet:

QUARIET 117 118

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

CHORUS 119 120 121

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, Yet fear not we, He

Example 7. Root, *The Haymakers*, “Shrouded is the sun,” mm. 114–18.

Finally, “Harvest Home” calls to mind the “Hallelujah” chorus of Handel’s *Messiah* texturally and stylistically. Root adheres to a four-voice choral setting throughout and shifts between dense polyphonic and strict homophonic textures. All of the voices come together in the last measures for three repetitions of the cantata’s final words, rhythmically slowing down to the end:

The image shows a page of a musical score for the song "Harvest home" from the cantata *The Haymakers*. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "Har- vest home, har- vest home, har- vest home." The score includes a measure number "120" and the text "END OF SECOND PART" at the bottom.

Example 8. Root, *The Haymakers*, “Harvest home,” mm. 117–124.

Root innately understood how to marry an appropriate level of difficulty with stylistic diversity to produce a work that would widely interest Americans. Dennis Martin applauds Root’s ability to compose music that was appropriate for an amateur audience:

The music of *The Haymakers*, is no mere succession of simple songs and hymns, as one acquainted only with Root’s Civil War and gospel music might expect. Instead, the cantata shows Root to have been a gifted and thoughtful composer, with good musical and dramatic sense. His experience with an understanding of both the voice and his public is evident. He seems to have known well the forces that would likely be available for performances and consciously to have written within their capabilities, while keeping his music interesting and of high quality—a not insignificant task.¹⁸

Overall, Root writes simple passages that he pushes further in places, but he never writes them out of the reach of average performers.

¹⁸ Dennis R. Martin, “Preface,” *The Haymakers*. Recent Researches in American Music IX and X (Madison: A-R Editions, 1984), x.

Impact and Reception

The Haymakers enjoyed great popularity across the United States after its publication. Many performances were mounted, mostly by amateur choirs, which were often announced in local newspapers, generating a great amount of excitement in small towns and communities. A rough survey of the performance history of *The Haymakers* reveals that Root conducted twenty performances of the work in its first season alone in Boston and that each of the three initial 1860 performances in Chicago were sold out, overflowing a 2,300-seat theater. The cantata was so popular that it even reached Brisbane, Australia by 1888 and enjoyed several performances in Great Britain before the turn of the century.

What can be gathered from these newspapers from across the United States is that Root's name was a household one in terms of amateur music. *The Haymakers* was widely popular in a number of states, and it enjoyed several performances after its publication in 1857 to beyond Root's death.

The *Weekly Graphic* of Kirksville, Missouri advertised one such performance by the Kirksville Choral Society in 1893, just before Root's death. The late date of this performance suggests that despite Root's cantatas were still especially popular.

This is clearly a call for amateur singers:

On Saturday after January 1st, there will be organized the Kirksville Choral Society under the auspices of the Richard Wagner Conservatory of Music. The Society will practice in the M. E. Church, at the beginning but once a week, after awhile twice. Its purpose is to study choral singing to prepare to render in May a grand cantata, George Root's "The Haymakers," and to furnish music for public occasions. Citizens and students are heartily invited to join as members. Membership fee for the season is \$1,50.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Personals," *Weekly Graphic*, Kirksville, MO (December 29, 1893).

Another performance of this type was advertised in the *Salt Lake Herald-Republican* as late as 1910. This paper reports a planned performance of *The Haymakers*, suggesting that the piece was already well known:

The choir at Westminster Presbyterian church will sing Sunday, Simper's anthem, "What Shall I Render?" at the morning service. In the evening the anthem, "God Hath Appointed a Day," by Berthold Tours. Mr. Phillips, the choir leader, is arranging for the presentation of "The Haymakers," by George F. Root, at the new chapel, June 1. Joseph Olson will assist Mr. Phillips in the tenor roles.²⁰

Yet another performance is mentioned in the *Omaha Daily Bee* in 1910, this one mounted by college students. Obviously, *The Haymakers* was not just popular as an educational tool in the northeast. It was clearly performed often across the United States, as evidenced by its appearance in newspapers from the south and midwest. It was also clearly still performed long after Root's death in 1895. Two of the three aforementioned performances occurred in 1910, a full fifteen years after Root had died. The *Omaha Daily Bee* wrote: "The department of music has greatly increased. The instructors are as busy as bees. The senior students are already engaged in the preparation of the cantata, 'The Haymakers,' by Root."²¹ Interestingly, this newspaper does not give Root's first name, suggesting that his music, particularly *The Haymakers*, may still have been widely known by Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century.

²⁰ "Music and Musicians," *The Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, Salt Lake City, UT (May 8, 1910).

²¹ "School and College Work: Featured Activities of the Opening Weeks of School Year," *The Omaha Daily Bee*, Omaha, NE (October 3, 1910).

The work was also not only performed in its entirety. Often, choirs would perform a few selections from the piece on a program of choral music. For example, a children's choir performed the "Away to the Meadows" chorus in 1870 in Philadelphia alongside a choral work by William Bradbury.²²

The *Burlington Free Press* of Vermont took the opportunity in 1859 to encourage its readers to attend a performance of *The Haymakers*, touting its musical uniqueness and describing its general success and popularity:

Our readers will notice that Root's Cantata, the Haymakers, will be performed at the Town Hall, in this place, next Tuesday evening, by a choir of select singers, under the direction of Mr. Partridge. We trust that this opportunity of hearing good music will be embraced by as many of our readers as possible. The cantata itself is beautiful—has recently been given, night after night, to crowded houses, and will be worth coming some distance to hear.²³

Another paper in Vermont reviewed an 1873 performance of the cantata favorably, describing the hall, the stage, the singers, and the music:

The presentation of Root's cantata of *The Haymakers*, on Wednesday evening, at the town hall, was highly successful. Though the weather was extremely sultry, the audience was large, filling both hall and gallery. . . . All sustained their parts well, and the multitudinous paraphernalia of the stage were managed in a very admirable manner. The music was excellent. The choruses, especially that by the "spreaders," the duets and solos, including the dairymaid's song by Miss Adams, were particularly admired. The fireman's song was also rendered with fine effect. No doubt the hall will be again filled this evening to hear the performance repeated.²⁴

²² "Grand Musical Celebration," *The Evening Telegraph*, Philadelphia, PA (May 31, 1870).

²³ "The Haymakers," *Burlington Free Press*, Burlington, VT (June 3, 1859).

²⁴ "Local Intelligence: Brattleboro," *Vermont Phoenix*, Brattleboro, VT (July 4, 1873).

The *Cleveland Morning Leader* also provided a favorable review of a production mounted in March of 1860. Naturally, they complimented Root's music:

The Haymakers.—Prof Chase has in preparation the great Operatic Cantata of the Haymakers, by Root, and will present it at the Academy of Music on Tuesday evening next, with all the effect that scenery and care can produce. This piece has much excellent music in it, and it will be performed in an admirable manner, as we can assure the public from the rehearsal last evening.²⁵

Eventual Decline in Popularity

The popularity of *The Haymakers* did eventually begin to decline with the beginning of industrialization. A possible explanation for this decline is that Root, then occupied with his popular song output, simply stopped trying to promote the work for performance and production. The score was published and it has already been shown that it was difficult for composers to police performances of large-scale works. And in light of his success with popular song during the Civil War, it is probable that Root simply let go of the work because he did not necessarily need it to be financially successful.

The Haymakers was published before American culture had become fully sacralized and likely benefitted from this fortuitous chronology. After the Civil War, the cantata declined in popularity, perhaps because of its inability to exist solely in either social stratum.²⁶ It was neither entirely art music nor entirely popular music. In the years leading up to the Civil War, Americans heard popular song on a daily

²⁵ "City & News Items," *Cleveland Morning Leader*, Cleveland, OH (March 29, 1860).

²⁶ Joseph Horowitz, "'Sermons in Tones': Sacralization as a Theme in American Classical Music," *American Music* (1998): 311–34.

basis. They heard songs at home, at work, and at social gatherings. But they also heard Italian opera and other classical genres when a touring group or soloist came to town. *The Haymakers* exists somewhere between those two aesthetics and is firmly situated in the area of shared culture. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Americans, in light of the increasingly dominant hierarchy of culture, were less interested in works that navigated the gray area between the highbrow and lowbrow. The end of a shared culture may have condemned this work to obscurity.

The subject matter of this cantata also became increasingly irrelevant as the United States headed into the twentieth century and industrialization. No longer was the idyllic farm scene one that Americans longed for nostalgically. Progress and urbanization were lifted up and the United States moved relentlessly forward, away from a farming economy. Furthermore, there was an increase in secularization among Americans, rendering their interest in the Protestant themes and values of *The Haymakers* uninteresting and irrelevant.

Finally, the late nineteenth century saw a more sophisticated and stylized output from American composers. The compositional simplicity of *The Haymakers* may have doomed it to insignificance, as it contributed no new musical trends or ideas to the future of American music. Root wrote a work that was, at the most, a good imitation of current popular styles, but did not reflect any sort of stylized composition derived from innately “American” music. This hardly seems like a work that would have a lasting impact on Root’s posterity as a composer. Composers like George Chadwick, Amy Beach, and eventually Charles Ives increasingly worked to develop a particularly “American” sounding music. Stopp writes that “by the first

decade of the twentieth century, interest in this form was superseded by a growing attention to opera and symphonic works.”²⁷ *The Haymakers* was merely an imitation of European music, not an opera or symphony.

Conclusions

Root’s secular cantata popularity came on the heels of his educational success, but before his inauguration as the prime Civil War songwriter in the 1860s. That *The Haymakers* was so widely known by the time he became famous for parlor song suggests that his entire reputation was not simply built on popular song or music education success. This is an important distinction to make when considering Root’s biography and place in nineteenth-century American music history. Clearly, Root’s status as a secular cantata composer is essential to a complete understanding of his influence.

Deeper study of Root’s biography reveals that he made more significant contributions to American music beyond songs like the “Battle Cry of Freedom.” A thorough examination of American music history has demonstrated that there are significant disadvantages to distilling Root’s career down to music education and Civil War song composition including marginalization, errors in biography, and reduction of the composer’s contributions to American music.

More importantly, by considering Root’s motivations for penning an autobiography—and connecting those motivations to the larger concerns of nineteenth-century Americans—Root’s musical goals, and his relationship to his

²⁷ Stopp, “The Secular Cantata,” 388.

audience comes into sharper focus. Finally, a close look at *The Haymakers* reveals that the morals, manhood, and modesty Root put forth in his autobiography were also present in his music. *The Haymakers* is not canonical in American music, but it does represent the trends of its time and the values of white, middle-class, American men. Root was a composer within and of his time, so it follows that his music stemmed from his musical experiences and aspirations. Thus, inclusion of his Root's autobiography and his projected self-image is necessary for comprehensive scholarship about his career, particularly secular cantatas.

Studies like this, that examine both a composer's autobiography, and his lesser known works, can help fill the gaps in our knowledge of nineteenth-century American music history. This particular study also reveals that Root was, above all, a typical nineteenth-century, middle-class, American male: successful in his transition from rural to urban life, mindful of his Christian duties, desirous of fulfilling societal expectations toward his masculinity, and deeply concerned with issues of American patriotism, family, and self-discovery.

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