

COLLECTION OF AMERICAN SHEET MUSIC (1844-1949)

The Charles C. Myers Library at the University of Dubuque has a collection of 573 pieces of American sheet music (of which 17 are incomplete) housed in Special Collections and stored in acid free folders and boxes. The collection is organized in three categories: African American Music, Military Songs, and Popular Songs. There is also a bound volume of sheet music and a set of The Etude Music Magazine (32 items from 1932-1945).

The African American music, consisting of 28 pieces, includes a number of selections from black minstrel shows such as "Richards and Pringle's Famous Georgia Minstrels Songster and Musical Album" and "Lovin' Sam (The Sheik of Alabami)". There are also pieces of Dixieland and plantation music including "The Cotton Field Dance" and "Massa's in the Cold Ground". There are a few pieces of Jazz music and one Negro lullaby.

The group of Military Songs contains 148 pieces of music, particularly songs from World War I and World War II. Different branches of the military are represented with such pieces as "The Army Air Corps", "Bell Bottom Trousers", and "G. I. Jive". A few of the delightful titles in the Military Songs group include, "Belgium Dry Your Tears", "Don't Forget the Salvation Army (My Doughnut Girl)", "General Pershing Will Cross the Rhine (Just Like Washington Crossed the Delaware)", and "Hello Central! Give Me No Man's Land". There are also well known titles including "I'll Be Home For Christmas (If Only In my Dreams)". "We Stand for Peace while Others War" was inspired by President Wilson's "Appeal to Americans" calling for the United States to stay neutral in 1914. However, there are earlier pieces, the earliest being "Hurrah for the Clay-The Ashland Quickstep" from 1844 which was written for the dedication of the Clay Club building in Lexington, Kentucky.

The largest group in this collection (356 pieces) is the Popular Songs. Two of Walt Disney's songs are in this collection, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" and "When You Wish Upon A Star". Two pieces of note, designed to be mailed from hotels, are "Bier Stube Songs" from the Bismark Hotel in Chicago and "Songs Your Grandpa Danced to that Broke Grandma's Heart" from the 90's Tap at the La Salle Hotel, Chicago. Other titles in the Popular Songs are, "There'll Be Blue Birds Over The White Cliffs Of Dover", "My Sweet Hawaiian Doll I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles", "The Merry Widow Waltz", "The Milwaukee Fire, or The Burning of the Newhall House", and "In My Merry Oldsmobile".

There is also a bound volume containing 52 pieces of sheet music (4 of which are incomplete). Most of these are for the Spanish guitar and are some of the oldest pieces in the library collection. The William J. Petersen Collection on the history of Iowa and the Upper Mississippi Valley contains Iowa music, music about rivers, and pieces from expositions. There are also a few pieces of baseball music that would have been played on the stadium organ during games. Shelved with the Collection of American Sheet Music is a facsimile set of music by Stephen Collins Foster in three boxes (224 items). These are reproductions of all his songs, compositions, and arrangements. Josiah Kirby Lilly of Indianapolis, Indiana donated this set to the library in April of 1934.

This collection is a significant source, not only for the music itself, but as a means for understanding popular culture in America.