

Energizing the “Birge Story” of Public School Music in the United States: Some Ideas on How to Amp It Up

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I want to thank the symposium organizers, especially Alan Spurgeon, Bill Lee, Patti Tolbert, Michele Gregorie, and Phil Hash, for all their work and for inviting me to speak.¹ It is an honor to address this group.

It is a pleasure to spend a few days in such a beautiful, historic place. In 1528 Spanish explorers in Florida observed native people singing, playing instruments, and using music to heal the sick.² A few decades later, not far north of here, “French settlers were greeted by a marching band of Indian musicians and warriors,” and music played a role in Sir Francis Drake’s capture of the fort and burning of the town of St. Augustine in 1586.³ A Spanish missionary taught singing at St. Augustine not long after that.⁴

These and other stories are not found in the first book on the history of music in American schools, *History of Public School Music in the United States*, by Edward Bailey Birge (1868–1952).⁵ Birge’s model defines music education largely as school music, emphasizes leading individuals and organizations, and

1. This article is a slightly augmented version of a keynote speech presented at the St. Augustine Symposium on the History of Music Education, sponsored by the National Association for Music Education History Special Research Interest Group and held at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, May 28–31, 2014.

2. Wiley L. Housewright, *A History of Music and Dance in Florida, 1565–1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 2–4.

3. *Ibid.*, 38, 48–49.

4. *Ibid.*, 18–19. The first known instance of European-style music teaching in the Western Hemisphere occurred in central Mexico in 1523–24, and the first in North America, also initiated by the Spanish, took place in what is now New Mexico in 1540. See Allen P. Britton, “Music in Early American Public Education: A Historical Critique,” in *Basic Concepts in Music Education*, Fifty-Seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, part 1, ed. Nelson B. Henry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 197.

5. Edward Bailey Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States* (Boston: Ginn Company, 1928). Subsequent editions were his new and augmented edition (Bryn Mawr, PA: Oliver Ditson Company, 1937 [copyrighted 1939]), with some chronological updates but no changes to the original; and a reprint of the 1937 edition (Washington, DC: Music Educators National Conference, 1966). Citations in this article are to the reprint edition. An earlier book, *Music Education in America—What Is Wrong with It? What Shall We Do about It?* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926) by Archibald T. Davison of Harvard University, is, as the title suggests, more of a critique than a history of music education. For example, the author discussed “the

provides factual but little analytical history. Since the book was first published in 1928, most music education historiography has followed this model.⁶

The Birge book has meant a great deal to the profession, and historians have augmented the story line considerably. However, no one has seriously challenged the approach, scope, findings, conclusions, or facts, and here is where we can improve. No matter their importance, works of history rarely remain definitive forever, because among the most important tasks of historians is the challenging of assumptions, paradigms, methods, conclusions, and facts of other scholars. Toward that end, I propose holding a centennial symposium in the year 2028 to celebrate Birge's seminal contribution, a century during which so far his story of American music education has stood virtually unchallenged. In the meantime, during these next fourteen years, we could energize, add vitality to, and generally "amp up" the "Birge story" of American music education.

Multiple Story Lines

Most groups of historians produce multiple story lines about their respective collective areas of interest, but so far that has not happened in our field.⁷ In fact, in a comparative study of the Birge and Mark and Gary books I found high correlations, beyond the $p < .0001$ level of significance, in the coverage of gender and geographical variables.⁸ And the similarities between these two and other survey books and editions extend beyond the quantifiable.

The strong similarities are not desirable because multiple, differing, even contradictory story lines are essential to the understanding of history.⁹ Communities of scholars should not be content with a single story, "the story," but should instead provide various perspectives and stories. By doing so they energize and provide vibrancy and richness to our understanding of history.

6. A leading music education historian wrote: "In our mental conceptions, . . . our subspecialty remains Birge-brained"; William R. Lee, "Reflections on Oral History and Quanto-History: The Larger Context," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 34, no. 2 (April 2013): 96.

7. For critiques of multifaceted research on American history by an important organization of historians, see Richard S. Kirkendall, ed., *The Organization of American Historians and the Writing and Teaching of American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Interestingly, this organization and the (current) National Association for Music Education were founded in the same year: 1907.

8. Jere T. Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation in Two Music Education History Books," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 131 (Winter 1997): 67–86. The correlations are reported and discussed on p. 82. The first edition of the Mark and Gary book was analyzed: Michael L. Mark and Charles L. Gary, *A History of American Music Education* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992).

9. Some story lines are constructed subconsciously, but others are not. Similarly, language and language devices used by "participants" or "actors" in real time and employed by scholars

As the sociologist James Loewen put it in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, his well-known critique of secondary school American history textbooks: "History is furious debate informed by evidence and reason."¹⁰

Ongoing research and debate among our community of scholars should result in corrections and alternate interpretations, or story lines, as well as additional details. The actual history of American music education is far too complex to permit its rendering as a single story. The Birge story may be as good as any, and we should continue to improve it, but parallel stories would enhance our understanding of our own history.

Undoubtedly there is a causal relationship at work here, in that we music educators probably learned much of what we "know" about our history from reading the Birge story repeatedly in various forms. Over a decade ago I asked eighteen music education historians, including some of you, to rate 254 individual music educators, whose names were taken from the two books mentioned earlier, for suitability for inclusion in a biographical dictionary. Correlations between the adjudicators' ratings and coverage in the books were as almost as high as the correlations between the books.¹¹

Some Examples of Needed Revision

Now let's look at some specific parts of the Birge story that could be challenged, starting with the canonization of Lowell Mason. Birge himself acknowledged that Mason and the Boston School Committee were not unique in their ideas about music in schools.¹² However, later in his book he repeatedly implied, and even stated outright, that Mason and Boston were the first, thus contradicting his earlier statements and the facts in the case.¹³

10. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: New Press, 1995), 5. Citations in the present article are to the first edition of this book. The author stated in the introduction to a second edition, brought out by the same publisher in 2007, that approximately one million copies of the first edition (in various formats) were sold (xii).

11. Jere T. Humphreys, unpublished data set. Data from the music education survey books were drawn from Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation," 67–86. In 1950, music psychologist Paul Farnsworth reported high correlations between preference for classical composers among musicologists, university students, and elementary school students. He acknowledged influence from the collective judgments of the culture, but he then unfortunately proceeded to interpret the results as evidence of "the lawfulness of aesthetic taste." Paul Randolph Farnsworth, *Musical Taste: Its Measurement and Cultural Nature*, Stanford University Publications: University Series, *Education-Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1950), 7–20 (quoted passage, p. 20).

12. Birge, *History of Public School Music*, 36–37. Later he mentions a specific case of music teaching in New York City schools before 1838 (68).

Perhaps because Birge said it, countless music educators, scholars and practitioners alike have stated or implied that the Boston experiment in school music instruction was the nation's first—thus cementing it as a cornerstone of the Birge story. However, scholars have cited dozens of previous instances of music in American schools, one possibly as early as 1709.¹⁴ Some, though not all, of these instances occurred in private schools, but why restrict our story to public schools when we focus so much attention on the private singing schools? Of course Lowell Mason was a powerful figure in the history of American music and music education, but he manifestly was not the first school music teacher, much less the only one early on.¹⁵

The Boston experiment may well have been the first time music entered the formal curriculum, although according to Sunderman, from 1830–40 “communities in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, began to experiment with music as a part of the regular school curriculum.”¹⁶ However, being “part of the regular school curriculum” and being a “regular subject” may not have been the same thing. Was music really a “regular subject”? Mason biographer Carol Pemberton concluded that the Boston School Committee's sanctioning of music in the curriculum may have been the first and was probably the most influential instance, but she made no claim to equality among the curricular subjects.¹⁷ It appears that in the 1838 experiment music was taught in two thirty-minute classes per week, taught separately for boys and girls.¹⁸ It is unlikely that one hour per week was close to the time allotted for reading, writing, or “cyphering.” This blurring of the story line's details has led to misleading statements like this one from a modern survey book: “Music was approved for the first time in the United States as a subject of the public school curriculum, *equal to other*

14. See Frederick Lloyd Sunderman, *Historical Foundations of Music Education in the United States* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1971), 88–98, where the author cited sources of evidence for music in the schools of Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut prior to 1838, and in New York State as early as 1835 and in New York City “possibly” as early as 1829. He also cited evidence of music teaching in the schools of Boston and other Massachusetts locales before 1838 (65–69). According to Sunderman: “One of the earliest parish charity schools, organized in New York City in 1709, for many years offered a crude form of choir training” (25). Even earlier, in Maine in 1693, young Native Americans were taught to form and sing in a church choir (9).

15. Britton, “Music in Early American Public Education,” 206–7.

16. Sunderman, *Historical Foundations of Music Education*, 96.

17. Carol A. Pemberton, “Revisionist Historians: Writers Reflected in their Writings,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 217–18.

18. Carol A. Pemberton, “Critical Days for Music in American Schools,” *Journal of Research*

subjects.”¹⁹ This and other similar statements should be rebutted, not cited repeatedly and uncritically.²⁰

Some writers have also insisted that Mason's three-volume series titled *The Song Garden*, the first two volumes of which appeared in 1864, was the first graded vocal series, despite the publication of Joseph Bird's two-volume set for primary and grammar grades three years earlier (1861). In one of his books Michael Mark claimed that Mason's was the first series. James Keene did likewise and went on to state that Bird's *Vocal Music Reader* “was not a ‘series’ in the strict sense,” though he provided no reasons for his conclusion.²¹ On the other hand, Mark and Gary noted, correctly, that Mason, in reference to his *Song Garden*, was the first to use the term “graded music series,” and they stopped short of crediting him with producing the first graded series.²² The scholar best known for research on nineteenth-century vocal series, Robert W. John, had this to say: “Who is to be credited with the publication of the very first graded series depends upon one's definition of the term series. If two volumes may properly be designated by this term, then credit must go to Joseph Bird.”²³

Sometimes we historians must acknowledge that we cannot come to a definitive conclusion, as John did. But is this why his judgment has been ignored by many subsequent writers? Surely it is not enough to simply state an opinion without giving reasons, as Keene did. Loewen points to a desire to simplify complex matters and give definitive conclusions as shortcomings in the writing of American history textbooks as well.²⁴

Are details like these very important? Perhaps not in their own right, but we should be willing to correct errors, either resolve or acknowledge ambiguities, and debunk myths even if it means challenging the Birge story and telling a less tidy one.

19. Michael L. Mark, *A Concise History of American Music Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2008), 48 (emphasis added).

20. A nearly identical statement can be found in Michael L. Mark and Patrice Madura, *Contemporary Music Education*, 4th ed. (Boston: Schirmer Cengage Learning, 2014), xvi.

21. Mark, *Concise History*, 55–56; and James A. Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Centennial, CO: Glenbridge Publishing, 2009), 202. Colwell and Heller also credited the series as the first, and, like Keene, they gave no reasons, though they did present both sides of the story. Cynthia M. Colwell and George N. Heller, “Lowell Mason's ‘The Song Garden’ (1864–66): Its Background, Content, and Comparison to a Twentieth-Century Series,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 231–33.

22. Michael L. Mark and Charles L. Gary, *A History of American Music Education*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2007), 188.

23. Robert W. John, “Nineteenth Century Graded Vocal Series,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1954): 105.

More important than who was first is the context for the appearance of graded series, something scholars have not provided in favor of focusing on the rote versus note controversy that erupted during that period. Education historian Harold Rugg described the structuring of grammar schools and secondary academies into grades "in the decades prior to 1850": "Children were graded horizontally, roughly in accordance with chronological age. . . . Subject matter was graded, too, to fit the new groups of young people. First, Second, and Third Readers made their appearance."²⁵

Emphasis on Music in Schools

Another emphasis in our field is school music. This is understandable because, like Edward Birge, most of us have spent our careers involved with music programs in schools and universities. It is our bread and butter, so to speak. However, one consequence is the near total absence of scholarly work on music education in other realms, even entire regions. The most obvious example is the implication in the Birge story, at least through omission, that there was little music education in the southeastern United States during the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries.²⁶

On the contrary, we have strong evidence of music teaching and learning in the South early on. George Pullen Jackson's notable book titled *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, published only five years after the Birge book, provides ample evidence of widespread musical activity throughout the region. Indeed, much of the book is devoted to pedagogical concerns among groups of musically like-minded people, including fasola and shape note methods and songbooks used in churches and community gatherings.²⁷

Jackson not only studied southern musical and music education practices that lay outside European classical music traditions; he also took some contrary positions to those of writers on American music who deprecated shape note notation and practices, stating that they "were not conversant with all the

25. Harold Rugg and Guy Montrose Whipple, *Curriculum-Making: Past and Present* (Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Company, 1926; rpt., New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969), 17.

26. See Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation," 73–75, 77–83. At least Birge included "public school" in the title of his book. When that qualifier was dropped from the titles of successor survey books, broader coverage was implied, but those books remained true to the Birge story in that they continued to focus largely on music education in schools.

27. George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Songs, Singings, and "Buckwheat Notes"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

facts in the case."²⁸ Jackson's work is still referenced by scholars of American folk music, but he is rarely cited by music education historians.²⁹ Do we ignore his work because he studied nonclassical music education practices, because they were outside the schools, or both?³⁰

We have even stronger evidence of music education in the South than that provided by Jackson. The phenomena of white country and mountain music and then black African American music provide overwhelming prima facie evidence of music teaching and learning in the South during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. African American music from the American South, with major but sometimes underacknowledged contributions from white country and mountain music, led to jazz and eventually rock and roll.³¹ Popular music that originated in the American South became, and arguably remains, the most important music in the world.³² None of this could have happened had musical practices and skills, and the music itself, not been taught and learned at near unprecedented levels of success throughout much of the South over a period of decades.

Similar to New England early on, music teaching and learning took place outside the public schools in the South.³³ Again, we seem to be tethered to

28. *Ibid.*, 15. The writers Jackson named were: Nathaniel D. Gould (1781–1864), a singing school master and tunebook compiler; Frank J. Metcalf (1865–1945), an antiquarian and authority on hymns; and Waldo S. Pratt (1857–1939), editor of the *American Supplement to the Grove Dictionary of Music*.

29. Music education survey books do not cite Jackson at all. However, in a well-known essay Britton ("Music in Early American Public Education," 211n34) recommended Jackson's works, especially his *White Spirituals*.

30. See Jere T. Humphreys, "Expanding the Horizons of Music Education History and Sociology," *Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 7, nos. 2–4 (1996/97): 8–9.

31. Jere T. Humphreys, "Popular Music in the American Schools: What the Past Tells Us about the Present and the Future," in *Bridging the Gap: Popular Music and Music Education*, ed. Carlos Xavier Rodriguez (Reston, VA: MENC: The National Association for Music Education, 2004), 93–94; and Jere T. Humphreys, "Relationships between Popular Music and Democracy: Implications for Popular Music Pedagogy," *Music Education Research International* 6 (2013): 2. Britton ("Music in Early American Public Education," 204–5) also mentioned the contributions of southern white music to jazz.

32. Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (London: John Calder, 1987), 4.

33. Lee and Worthy noted the region's "different musical polity." William R. Lee with Michael D. Worthy, "North American School Ensembles," in *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, vol. 1., ed. Gary E. McPherson and Graham F. Welch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 813. This same point was made recently by Patti Tolbert and Carolyn Livingston, "The Letters of Anne Grace O'Callaghan and Charles Faulkner Bryan: Communication between Two SCME Leaders in the Post-World War II Era," *Journal of Historical Research in Music*

the Birge story: what he covered we cover, and what he did not cover we tend to ignore.

Even portions of the public school music story line should be reexamined. The Birge story implies that shape note notation was not used, but at least two music books with shape note notation intended for use in public elementary schools were published in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in 1872 and 1882. The preface of the 1882 book contains this statement: "A character note music book for the school room has long been needed by the children of America."³⁴ Were these books actually used in public schools? We do know that the notation was taught in the South's first normal school from its founding in Virginia in 1874 and thereafter in dozens of normal schools in other southern states.³⁵ These schools trained singing school teachers, but given the widespread use of shape notes throughout the region, the notation may have been used in public schools as well, at least informally.³⁶

By that time, shape note practices had moved outside the Birge story's two regions of focus, the East and Midwest, much like singing schools are also dropped from the story after they moved south and west.³⁷ Of course shape note practices were also outside the realm of classical art music. Similarly, the Birge story ignores the presence of glee clubs, accordion and mandolin orchestras, harmonica bands, guitar ensembles, and athletic bands in colleges and universities during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Evidence of this widespread activity was published over two decades ago.³⁸

Let's look at one more example. On the subject of phonograph usage in schools, Kevin Kelleher observed that Birge covered one of his colleagues in the Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC), Frances Elliott Clark, and her work with the Victor Talking Machine Company, but he only alluded to the existence of other companies and not by name. The other two large ones were the group of companies that sprang from Thomas

34. Preface to A. J. Showalter and A. S. Kieffer, *Hours of Singing for the School Room* (Dayton, VA: Ruebush, Kieffer & Co., 1882), quoted in Charles Edwin Morrison, "Aldine S. Kieffer and Ephraim Ruebush: Ideals Reflected in Post-Civil War Ruebush-Kieffer Company Music Publications" (EdD diss., Arizona State University, 1992), 141.

35. Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 355–58. The first was the Virginia Normal School.

36. See Morrison, "Aldine S. Kieffer and Ephraim Ruebush," 139, 143.

37. Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic," 73–75, 77–83.

38. Jere T. Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in American Education: In Service of Many Masters," in *The Ithaca Conference on American Music Education: Centennial Profiles*, ed. Mark Fonder (Ithaca, NY: Ithaca College, 1992), reprinted in *Journal of Band Research* 30, no.

Edison's 1877 invention and Columbia Records, which evolved in 1888 from two earlier companies. Birge may have overlooked the music education products and activities of those companies because they probably lacked ties to the MSNC. Kelleher also noted that subsequent historians have also passed over these other phonograph companies and their work, presumably because Birge did so.³⁹

Contradictory Stories

What would happen if we were to produce accounts that actually contradict elements of the Birge story? For a rare instance we can turn to a quantitative analysis of membership of the MSNC from 1907 until World War II. The national convention was held in the Southern Division only once during that period, in Nashville in 1922. In that year the Southern Division contributed 17 percent of MSNC members, not far below its share of the national population of 21 percent. But during the two years before and two years after 1922, MSNC membership from the Southern Division averaged only about half that.⁴⁰

It is reasonable to conclude that most MSNC members from the South in 1922 were school music teachers and that more of them may have joined the national organization had more national conferences been held in their region.⁴¹ However, I can find very few references to this study of MSNC membership or to the study of gender and regional coverage in the two survey books mentioned earlier, since the respective articles appeared in the *CRME Bulletin* over fifteen years ago.⁴² Alas, the information revealed by these rare published challenges to the Birge story has not found its way into new survey books or new editions of older books on the history of American music education. Likewise, Loewen wrote: "Despite criticisms by scholars, . . . new editions of old [American history] texts come out year after year, largely unchanged," "unaffected by recent research."⁴³

39. Kevin Daniel Kelleher, "The Contributions of Thomas Alva Edison to Music Education" (DMA diss., Boston University, 2013), 7–9. For this Kelleher cited Birge, *History of Public School Music*, 212.

40. Jere T. Humphreys and Charles P. Schmidt, "Membership of the Music Educators National Conference from 1912–1938: A Demographic and Economic Analysis," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 137 (Summer 1998): 23. The MSNC was renamed the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) in 1934.

41. *Ibid.*, 24.

42. *Ibid.*; and Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation."

Methodological Concerns

I'd like to turn now to methodological concerns, a topic not often discussed in music education historiography.⁴⁴ First, a reliance on archival sources, coupled with the use of narrative reporting style, tends to result in top-down approaches through the telling of stories about selected individuals, institutions, and events collectively called "event history." Some historians believe that narrative event history is inherently conservative due to its emphasis on elites, who, after all, are the ones who tend to maintain records for posterity.⁴⁵ Clearly we could do more "history from below" to supplement the traditional approaches.⁴⁶ The MSNC study described earlier contrasts with other studies in that it did not cover the organization's leaders, policies, or activities but instead examined the rank-and-file membership.⁴⁷

Even more important, histories based on broad structural factors would provide different perspectives and understandings from those of our event histories.

44. Some exceptions include Gordon Cox, "Transforming Music Education History," in *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*, ed. Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 695–706; William R. Lee, "Toward the Morphological Dimensions of Research in the History of Music Education," in *Music in American Schools 1838–1988*, ed. Marie McCarthy and Bruce D. Wilson (College Park, MD: University of Maryland Music Library, 1991), 114–17; and Lee, "Reflections on Oral History and Quanto-History," 95–100. See also articles and chapters by Humphreys cited in this article and his published book reviews on historical research methodology: review of *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, in *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 24, no. 2 (April 2003): 204–10; review of *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke, in *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 20, no. 3 (May 1999): 203–9; review of *The People's Historian: John Richard Green and the Writing of History in Victorian England*, by Anthony Brundage, in *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 20, no. 1 (September 1998): 71–76; review of *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell, in *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 19, no. 3 (May 1998): 207–14; review of *Quantitative Methods for Historians: A Guide to Research, Data, and Statistics*, by Konrad H. Jarausch and Kenneth A. Hardy, in *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 18, no. 1 (January 1997): 140–48; and review of *Hierarchy, History, and Human Nature: The Social Origins of Historical Consciousness*, by Donald E. Brown, in *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 11, no. 1 (January 1990): 48–54.

45. Peter Burke, "History of Events and the Revival of Narrative," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 234.

46. See Jim Sharpe, "History from Below," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 24–41; Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation," 81; Jere T. Humphreys, "The Content of Music Education History? It's a Philosophical Question, Really," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 93–94; Humphreys, "Expanding the Horizons," 8–9; and Humphreys, review of *The People's Historian: John Richard Green*.

47. Humphreys and Schmidt, "Membership of the Music Educators National Conference."

Hopefully Lowell Mason will forgive us for turning to him yet again, but it is inconceivable that he and his Boston compatriots could have gotten music into the schools had it not been for the common school movement. That movement was a response to the growing middle class and part of the nation's progression from relative oligarchy at the time of its founding to relative democracy during the Andrew Jackson administration (1829–1837). The provision of schooling for most elementary-age children and other major social changes were part of that progression.⁴⁸ The number of schools increased, but more importantly for our purposes, many new subjects were introduced.⁴⁹ In other words, music entered the schools during a period of large-scale curriculum expansion.

Mason's contributions notwithstanding, large social forces and resulting changes in education were the main factors that led to music's entry into the public schools. The fact that it happened in multiple cities during the same period means that it could not have been due to the efforts of a lone individual or group. In fact, in its third annual report, dated 1835, the Boston Academy of Music claimed to have received letters from fourteen states "asking for information" about how to introduce music "as a branch of education."⁵⁰ There were only twenty-four states in 1835, so clearly the desire for music in schools was widespread at least three years before the celebrated date of 1838.

Our failure to identify and attribute cause to structural factors has led us to personify and thus misinterpret the roots of curricular music in the first half of the nineteenth century. It has also contributed to our failure to recognize the only other huge shift in our history: the addition of ensembles and the change from sight-singing to comprehensive general music, both of which occurred during the progressive education movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Progressivism was a reaction to industrialization and the resulting urbanization, first in Europe and then the United States. Much like Mason and the Boston Academy could not have done what they did without the common school movement and the massive underlying social and political shifts, Will Earhart, Frances Clark, the MSNC, Albert Mitchell, and other heroes in the

48. Jere T. Humphreys, "United States of America: Reflections on the Development and Effectiveness of Compulsory Music Education," in *The Origins and Foundations of Music Education: Cross-Cultural Historical Studies in Compulsory Schooling*, ed. Gordon Cox and Robin Stevens (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 124–26; and Jere T. Humphreys, "Change in Music Education: The Paradigmatic and the Praxial," *The Journal of the Desert Skies Symposium On Research in Music Education 2013 Proceedings* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2013), 52–53. Keene, *History of Music Education*, 102–7, also gave some attention to these matters.

49. Rugg and Whipple, *Curriculum-Making*, 20.

50. Report quoted in Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1904), 79–80.

Birge story could not have facilitated the gigantic shifts in music education that began between 1890 and 1915, a twenty-five-year period when, not coincidentally, the number of American high schools doubled.⁵¹ There have been a few serious attempts to analyze the earlier experiment in Boston and a few studies on early ensembles and shifts in general music, but nearly all of these constitute event history and are local in scope.⁵² Generally, scholars have failed to account for the large-scale structural changes that so profoundly affected music education during the common school and progressive eras.

Structural history analysis requires a broad range of knowledge. It is not enough to simply ascribe causation to events that occurred at approximately the same time. In apparent attempts to incorporate structural history, some modern authors have confused correlation with causation in their attribution of the 1838 Boston experiment to the Industrial Revolution.⁵³ Except for the cotton gin and steam-powered riverboats, inventions and processes that led to the supplanting of hand labor with machines did not begin in the United States until the 1830s.⁵⁴ A similar error is the attribution of the founding of the MSNC to multicultural forces, two phenomena that arguably were not even correlated, much less causal.⁵⁵

Structural approaches to history began in Europe in the eighteenth century when scholars began to delve into economic, social, and cultural history, including the history of diet, trade, luxury, and women's issues, as well as the arts and sciences. American general historians started with regional history and turned to national political history in the 1950s and 1960s. They turned sharply to social and cultural (largely structural) history in the 1960s and

51. Rugg and Whipple, *Curriculum-Making*, 18–19. For more on music education during that period, see Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in American Education," 44–45; and Humphreys, "Change in Music Education," 53. In an address in 1914 to the National Conference of Music Supervisors in Minneapolis, the editor of the *Journal of Education* said: "A quarter of a century ago there was a wild dash at the unregenerate public and way made for liberty to teach music. We got music into the system." A. E. Winship, "Appreciation of Appreciation," *Music Supervisors' Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (November 1914): 18. A quarter century prior would have been 1889.

52. Two examples include Bruce Dunbar Wilson, "Documentary History of Music in the Public Schools of the City of Boston, 1830–1850," vols. 1, 2 (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1973); and Estelle R. Jorgensen, "Engineering Change in Music Education: A Model of the Political Process Underlying the Boston School Music Movement (1829–1838)," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 67–75.

53. Mark and Madura, *Contemporary Music Education*, xvi.

54. A few examples from the 1830s through the remainder of the century include railroads, the mechanical grain reaper, steel plow, telegraph, sewing machine, telephone, phonograph, electric motor, and diesel engine.

55. Mark, *Concise History*, 91.

1970s, led by studies of women (which we have made a start on) and race (which we really have not).⁵⁶ In music education to date we continue to do event history nearly exclusively. Structural historiography would entail identifying broad causal factors, not just events and trends that happened to coincide.⁵⁷

None of this will be easy. Nearly all music education historians hold degrees in music, which, though a fine art, tends to fall within the purview of humanities research: that is, the study of exemplary individuals, events, and institutions—event history, in other words. Despite this, when I became editor of what we renamed the *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education (JHRME)* I considered naming it the *Journal of Historical and Sociological Research in Music Education*. A poll of the editorial committee yielded a 50/50 split, but Mark Fonder, who four years later succeeded me as editor, asked: "What if we don't get sociological submissions?" That settled the issue in my mind and the current title was adopted.

And indeed we did not receive sociological submissions, despite my editorial invitation in the first issue of the renamed journal in October of 1999.⁵⁸ But even if authors had responded to the call, adding new research paradigms and thus altering the Birge story would have required reviewers to support the efforts. Instead, too often reviewers reject submissions for reasons that are simply not credible. Once a journal reviewer wrote only two words about one of my efforts: "Invalid approach." Many other comments, though more subtle, are fig leaves intended to cover reviewer recalcitrance.

Editors play a crucial role also. Just before we launched the *JHRME*, Allen Britton told me that the first issue of the *Journal of Research in Music Education (JRME)* would never have come out had he not overridden the reviewers. Indeed, the field is fortunate to have had several strong music education research journal editors willing to cajole, and sometimes override, reviewers who refused to accept worthwhile submissions.

Structural historiography, quantitative or not, seems to trigger recalcitrance. Our Birge event-history story is important, but when we neglect structural factors we sometimes create mythical people, organizations, and events in the interest of feel-good history, much like Loewen's descriptions of what is offered up in

56. James T. Patterson, "The Persistence of Political History," in *The Organization of American Historians and the Writing and Teaching of American History*, ed. Richard S. Kirkendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.

57. Humphreys, "Content of Music Education History?" 91. For more information on these ideas, see Peter Burke, "Ranke the Revolutionary," in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James Powell (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 37–42.

58. Jere T. Humphreys, "Editorial," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 21, no. 1 (October 1999): 1–2.

secondary school American history textbooks. Unfortunately, our excessive emphasis on event history leaves the impression that music educators can change the entire system, whereas this is not the case and never has been. It also causes us to overestimate the influence of the federal government, which arguably has had comparatively little direct effect on music education on the ground despite all the attention it has received, and on the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), whose influence has been overstated considerably in the Birge story.⁵⁹ That overemphasis began with Birge himself, and he never changed his mind. Four months before he died in 1952, the year after he donated the rights to his book to MENC, he stated in a letter to the organization: "It was my hope that thus the historical narrative might continue unbroken in future printings of the history. I trust that your board will look with favor upon this proposition, especially if you realize, as I do, that the history of public school music is so largely that of the Conference itself."⁶⁰

Britton and also Wiley Hitchcock described the failed attempts of colonial-era leaders to reform the public's musical tastes.⁶¹ Clearly the situation continues today, though in different forms, with self-appointed gurus, mostly professors and MENC leaders, exhorting music teachers to change the world. Music educators are among the most idealistic of the human species due to our deep roots in an idealistic classical art music, and in the teaching profession, which was propagandized as an ideal to young people during the common school era in lieu of tangible rewards. Idealism can be a good thing at the local, or event, level, but the major changes in music education since ancient Greece have resulted more from large-scale shifts in society than from the work of music educators, working individually or collectively.⁶²

But this is my story, not Birge's, so pre-service and in-service music educators continue to be told by ahistorical authority figures that they can and should revolutionize the practice of music education.⁶³ We historians cannot blame ourselves alone for the nonworking reformist attitudes and practices in American

59. Humphreys, "Change in Music Education," 60.

60. Edward B. Birge, letter (handwritten) to "Board of Directors of the M.E.N.C.," dated March 12, 1952, Birge Collection, MENC Archives, University of Maryland at College Park. The author is grateful to Charles Frederick Schwartz Jr. for calling attention to this letter, in his "Edward Bailey Birge: His Life and Contributions to Music Education" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1966), 191.

61. Britton, "Music in Early American Public Education," 201-5; Wiley Hitchcock, "William Billings and the Yankee Tunesmiths," *HiFi/Stereo Review* 16, no. 2 (February 1966): 55-65. See also Jere T. Humphreys, "Some Notions, Stories, and Tales about Music and Education in Society: The Coin's Other Side," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 23, no. 2 (April 2002): 138-40.

62. Humphreys, "Change in Music Education," 54, *passim*.

63. *Ibid.*, 64, *passim*.

music education because they began long before Birge launched our historiography. But our failure to depersonify the Birge story and identify structural causes of change undoubtedly exacerbates the long-standing reformist proclivities of American music educators. Today, reformism appears to contribute to discouragement and burnout among pre- and in-service teachers.

Another phenomenon that encourages scholars to stick with a single story line and steer clear of competing lines, according to Loewen, is a desire to present a simple, clear, powerful message. Hence, "[American history] textbooks employ a rhetoric of certainty."⁶⁴ After all, as a profession we have always been concerned about our status, sometimes to the point of paranoia.⁶⁵ So it is tempting to not discuss our differences, not "air our dirty laundry," but instead to tell an unambiguous story so we can send strong positive messages to our constituents. Nevertheless, we could vitalize our story if we would focus more, for example, on the history of music education in racially segregated and then integrated schools—black, white, brown, red, and so forth. And we should examine racist practices such as minstrel show performances that persisted in some schools until the mid-twentieth century. Studies about race in American music education could fill several research careers.

Still another phenomenon that makes us overly conservative is our desire to avoid confrontation with each other. So long as everyone sticks closely to the Birge story we can largely avoid conflicting stories and differences among us. We need to produce competing stories, though, if we are to "amp up" our field. On the rare occasions when authors have told conflicting stories, they tend to ignore, not cite, any opposing stories, while the purveyors of the Birge story simply ignore the conflicting stories in return. We are missing opportunities to let others decide for themselves and maybe even join in the debate.

Challenging the Birge Story

Our overreliance on survey books, especially the ones by Birge, Keene, and Mark and Gary, contributes to these problems. We are fortunate to have them, and I continue to read and use them in my classes. However, in the build-up to our Birge centennial in 2028 I propose that we sharply curtail our excessive, uncritical citing of these books, that we stop treating them as the ultimate authority and thereby relieving ourselves of having to do as much digging or even thinking, all while avoiding conflict. Instead, we should treat them as the prevailing model to be challenged. I look forward to one day seeing articles in our journals that challenge, and not just cite, these survey books. Collectively

64. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 281.

65. Jere T. Humphreys, "Applications of Science: The Age of Standardization and Efficiency in Music Education," *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 9, no. 1 (January 1988): 19.

these books are truly indispensable but as a model to be tested, not as the ultimate source of knowledge and wisdom. The solution falls not to the book authors, because no book can do everything, but to the rest of us, the users.

Some Current Topics

Some of the things I have mentioned today relate to current concerns, so I want to finish with some thoughts on how the insights and courage needed to move us beyond the Birge story could serve the field well on some current issues. Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin contributes historical perspectives on current issues, and education historian Diane Ravitch has courageously reversed herself on the failed attempts at industrial-model education, including testing, which she played a role in implementing.⁶⁶ Similarly, we could analyze how industrialized education is affecting music education, among other important current issues.

We could also tackle some of our sacred cows, such as how the professional organizations are functioning. Is Julia Koza correct in her allegations of corporate influences on MENC?⁶⁷ Has government pressure or money been behind some MENC initiatives?⁶⁸ What about the canceling of the large conferences, while the conventions of other organizations continue to flourish? What about the near exclusive emphasis on advocacy? To what extent are the policies grounded in reality? A bit further back, what were and are the long-term effects of the move of MENC headquarters from Chicago to the Washington, D.C., area?

In the field at large, what about the nonworking attempts to banish the teaching and learning of content and skills in favor of process? Historical evidence points in the opposite direction, as do empirical studies on the importance to learning of content stored in long-term memory. What about the widespread failures of these and other ideology-driven approaches?⁶⁹

66. For recent perspectives on Ravitch, see Sara Mosle, "The Counterrevolutionary: How Diane Ravitch has Upended the School-Reform Movement," *The Atlantic* 312, no. 2 (September 2013): 38–42.

67. Julia Eklund Koza, "A Realm without Angels: MENC's Partnerships with Disney and Other Major Corporations," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 72–79; and Julia Eklund Koza, *Stepping Across: Four Interdisciplinary Studies of Education and Cultural Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 1–77 (chapter 1: "No Hero of Mine: Disney, Popular Culture, and Education").

68. Jere T. Humphreys, "2006 Senior Researcher Award Acceptance Address: Observations about Music Education Research in MENC's First and Second Centuries," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 187, also n. 16.

69. See Daisy Christodoulou, "Minding the Knowledge Gap: The Importance of Content in Student Learning," *American Educator: A Quarterly Journal of Educational Research and Ideas* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 27–33. This article was adapted from her book *Seven Myths about Education* (London: Routledge, 2014).

We could also examine how an eighteenth-century German philosophy of instrumental music aesthetics came to be transformed into a philosophy of music education in United States in the mid-twentieth century. Music education as aesthetic education became part of our received wisdom, our story, but historians have not recounted in detail how, much less why, it happened. Music education as aesthetic education is not only unique to the school subject of music; it also appeals to our idealism.⁷⁰ This and the other hypotheses just given are tentative. What we need is actual analysis and well-reasoned stories, things historians can do so well.

And we should investigate the attempts to destroy one of the things the field has done especially well, namely, the school music ensembles. The lack of historical awareness of how the ensembles entered schools originally is part of the problem. Too few graduate programs have qualified researchers of any type on their faculties, and even fewer professors can teach music education history much beyond facilitating class discussions about various iterations of the Birge story.⁷¹ Unfortunately, that story fails to distinguish adequately between required music courses, typically general music, and elective music courses, typically performing ensembles.⁷² Britton wrote:

Music educators . . . tend to believe, on the basis of misleading or no evidence at all, that things musical are done better in Europe than here. But such is not really the case. . . . There is little comparable in all of Europe to our high school bands, choirs, and orchestras, or our musicals. . . . Of course, competent musical instruction is provided everywhere in Europe for a small percentage of students, but, and this is what must be emphasized, nowhere does the percentage reach what we call the "select" 20 percent that we should be happy with but constantly blame ourselves for. European children simply do not have readily available the wealth of musical instruction taken for granted here.⁷³

He continued: "I wonder if those who suggest that we abandon bands and

70. See Jere T. Humphreys, review of *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education*, by David J. Elliott, in *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 17, no. 1 (January 1996): 153–59; and Humphreys, "Change in Music Education," 56–57.

71. Humphreys, "2006 Senior Researcher Award," 192–95.

72. Humphreys, "Reflections on the Development and Effectiveness of Compulsory Music Education," 64. For part of that story see Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in American Education," 44.

73. Allen P. Britton, "American Music Education: Is It Better Than We Think? A Discussion of the Roles of Performance and Repertory, Together with Brief Mention of Certain Other Problems," in *Basic Concepts in Music Education, II*, ed. Richard J. Colwell (Niwor: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 179.

other performing groups in order to serve the 80 percent or so of nonperforming students have ever tried to imagine how the change could be effected."⁷⁴ Britton spoke those words as part of his MENC Senior Researcher Award acceptance speech in 1990, almost two and a half decades ago.

Bill Lee, Peter Miksza, and a few others have publicly expressed misgivings about the attempts by some within the field to destroy the ensembles, and many more have done so privately.⁷⁵ Historians have a role to play in this because both the idealists and the doomsayers (who typically are one and the same) fail to understand that they have little or no power to change the system. They are, however, confusing, frightening, and angering our practicing teachers. Some are also depriving undergraduates of much of the training they will need to function in the real world of the schools, as opposed to the schools the would-be reformers envision.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Music education historians have done a good job of resisting the siren song of the most extreme features of postmodernist ideology. We should continue to insist on making distinctions between "qualitative," as in nonquantitative, and historiography, which has a long, distinguished history with its own methods and philosophical underpinnings.⁷⁷ I am hearing allegations of dissertation advisors telling students that history is not a viable topic—an ill wind that emanated from the quantitative quarter a generation ago and now comes from the qualitative. Despite the success of historical research in music education, we may be forced to defend it yet again.

Plenty of viable topics and relevant sources remain to be tackled in music education history. We can continue to utilize literal sources, we can search for unconscious ones, or both. We can continue to do event history and we can do structural history. For these and other things I think we can be thankful—because, as Britton said, we do this work for the joy it brings, not for the practical

74. *Ibid.*, 182.

75. See William R. Lee, "Why Bands Stuck: A Historic Look at Bands and Progressive Reform," paper presented at History Special Research Interest Group session, National Association for Music Education Convention, St. Louis, MO, April 2014; Peter Miksza, "The Future of Music Education: Continuing the Dialogue about Curricular Reform," *Music Educators Journal* 99, no. 4 (June 2013): 45–50; Britton, "American Music Education: Is It Better Than We Think?" 181–87; Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in American Education," 59–60; Humphreys, "Some Notions," 151–56; Humphreys, "Relationships between Popular Music and Democracy," 2–3; and Humphreys, "Change in Music Education," 63–64.

76. Humphreys, "Change in Music Education," 61–64.

77. Humphreys, "2006 Senior Researcher Award," 189.

results.⁷⁸ In what were likely his last public remarks, he said: "So let us all rejoice in our knowledge of how we came to be where we are, and our consequent improved understanding of where we might be heading."⁷⁹ That has been my experience, and I know the same is true for many of you.

78. Allen P. Britton, "Research in Music Education, with Particular Reference to the Historic and Scientific," in *Music in American Schools, 1838–1988*, ed. Marie McCarthy and Bruce D. Wilson (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1991), 130.

79. Allen P. Britton, "A Note of Greeting and Gratitude from Allen P. Britton," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 22, no. 2 (April 2001): 221. Note read by George N. Heller at the Allen P. Britton Symposium, University of Maryland, College Park, March 6, 2000.