

Frederick Stearns, Leopoldo Franciolini, and the Making of the Stearns Collection (2001)  
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This year marks the hundredth anniversary of Frederick Stearns's donation of some nine-hundred musical instruments to the University of Michigan. To commemorate this historic milestone in some small way, I would like to spend about an hour with you this afternoon tracing the early history of the collection and discussing the career of the man most responsible for shaping it. Who was Frederick Stearns, and what was his philosophy of collecting? How and what did he acquire? From where, and when? How much did he know about what he was collecting? How well did he know the man who died twice -- an unscrupulous Florentine instrument dealer named Leopoldo Franciolini -- and what did he have to do with the Stearns collection? What motivated Stearns to donate his instruments in the first place, and then keep collecting hundreds more afterward? Who were the men most responsible for bringing the instruments to the university? Why did one of these men encourage Stearns to maintain an active role, while another literally pleaded that he not?

Answering these questions will not only help mark the upcoming centenary, but also shed light on the collection today. The Stearns is unique for its almost unimaginable array of instruments from all over the world, many of them acquired by Stearns himself at the turn of the century. In this respect, it is a time capsule of inestimable value, particularly for ethnomusicologists who might seek to determine the material differences between the musical cultures they now observe and those that existed a century ago. To be sure, the collection also contains many items of interest to scholars of Western Europe and America, but next to such treasures are objects that one is tempted to call kitsch in some cases, frauds in others. It is this idiosyncratic quality of the Stearns Collection that I also hope to illuminate in my presentation. Before attempting to do so, however, let me offer words of appreciation to Professor Joseph

Lam, who invited me to speak; to his (and my) undergraduate assistant, Steven Ball, who helped with the photography; and to the staff of the Bentley Historical Collection, which houses the archival material to which I shall refer in this talk.

Our examination of the early history of the collection necessarily begins with Frederick Stearns, who was born in Lockport, New York, on April 8th, 1831. We know little about him until his fifteenth year, when he reportedly began work as an apprentice at a Buffalo New York drugstore. Possessing considerable talent as a pharmacist, and the determination to attend university in his spare time, he rose quickly from clerk to partner in one of the city's major drug companies. At age 24, Stearns left Buffalo for Detroit, where he set up shop as a druggist. He soon founded a drug manufacturing firm complete with its own medical journal to promote its products. By 1880 Frederick Stearns and Company was a prosperous and far-flung concern, with branch offices in Winsor Ontario, New York, and London. By the late 1880s Stearns thought himself wealthy enough to retire and leave the day-to-day operation of the business to his son, Frederick Kimball Stearns. Thus from the year 1887 on, the elder Stearns—in fact, only fifty-six years old—sought to supplement what he called his “moderate early education” and indulge his passions for travel and collecting.

His first acquisitions were artifacts from China, Japan, and Korea; these eventually found their way to the Detroit Art Museum, now known as the Detroit Institute of Art. His numerous trips to Cairo suggest a fascination with the mysteries of ancient Egypt—the mummies that Stearns acquired can still be seen at the DIA. He also collected rare coins and precious stones. Natural history was yet another interest: Stearns's collection of over 10,000 different specimens of shells came to the Detroit Museum after he had written a book entitled *Marine Mollusks of Japan* in collaboration with an expert on the subject.

Stearns's passion for collecting musical instruments was a comparatively late development and would seem, at first, to be out of place with his other interests. Stearns himself may have disagreed. Not only did collecting instruments allow him to continue exploring the ancient, the exotic, and the curious, but it afforded him an opportunity to develop his idea that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution could be applied to products of human manufacture. As Stearns himself wrote in September of 1898 to a woman who had read about his collection in *The Detroit Free Press*: ". . . I have a collection of nearly nine-hundred musical instruments which illustrate the *evolution* of musical instruments from primitive times to those more fully developed of to-day. I do not collect because they are of interest from a historical or an artistic point of view but merely to illustrate the *changes in form*." A newspaper article from a little while later declares that "the greatest value [of the collection] consists in the fact that it represents in almost unbroken series the *evolution* of three kinds of instruments, percussion, wind and string, from prehistoric times down to the present day. . . In this respect no other similar collection can compare with it." Even the New York Metropolitan Museum's display "does not show the *evolution* of various kinds of instruments."

Further documentary traces suggest how strongly Stearns committed himself to the application of evolutionary theory to instruments. Around the time of the newspaper article just quoted, Stearns was writing a book that he himself described as a study of instruments "of all times and nations and of their development or evolution from primitive forms . . ." The recipient of a fellowship that Stearns established at the U of M in 1902, Phillip Schenk, called it "The Stearns Fellowship in the Evolution of Musical Instruments." Thus Stearns transferred his interest in natural history and the theory of evolution to the study of instruments. In this sense he was unlike other contemporary collectors, such as Richard Shureleer of the Netherlands, whose

collection documented the musical history of the Low Countries, or Mary Elizabeth Adams Brown, who purchased many beautiful objects having to do with music, some of them instruments but many of them not. Her collection forms the core of that found in the Metropolitan Museum.

Stearns's strong belief in the evolution of cultural practices and manufacturing drove him to purchase many objects that these and other collectors would have overlooked. [Slide 1: Rebab, Tunisia #1243] For instance, his quest for ethnic survivals from before the Middle Ages led him to this humble rebab from Tunisia in northern Africa. He associated this type of bowed string with one that the Moors introduced to medieval Spain, not without justification. [Slide 2: qanun] This *qanun* from Turkey suggested to Stearns a connection with the ancient Assyrian *azor*, which was subsequently brought to Persia and early Arabia. Although this is a modern instrument and not at all inexpertly crafted, Stearns's interest in it had to do with evolution, not aesthetics.

Stearns collected not only so-called 'primitive' instruments, but many up-to-date ones as well. For example, he purchased a number of winds from the firm of Adolphe Sax in Brussels, including an early model bass clarinet, a saxophone, and a saxtromba. For Stearns, these represented technological, hence evolutionary advances over earlier types. Sax's instruments have become expensive on today's market, but Stearns was motivated not by the possibility that an object would appreciate in value, but by the belief in continuous human advancement fueled by technology. This view helps us make sense of Stearns's taste for what we might call musical contraptions, some of which combined two instruments in one. [Slide 3: *Mundharmonica*] I would include in this category this *Mundharmonica* of German manufacture. While other collectors of the time would have thought this instrument too trivial and perhaps ridiculous to

preserve, Stearns likely found the addition of a small bell on the top interesting. This is played by flicking the wire trigger with the right hand index finger.

Stearns was also fond of instruments that demonstrated how technology improved a less developed form. The harmonica, of course, is a free reed instrument activated by the breath and slid from side to side across the lips. [Slide 4: accordion] This late 19th-century French *accordeon* is likewise a free-reed type. It probably gained a place in the collection because it represented an improvement on the harmonica, thanks to the addition of a keyboard and a bellows. [Slide 5: zither] Stearns also avidly collected contemporary instruments that automated the playing process, like this zither made in German called the *Syrene*. The partially perforated strip of green cardboard in the foreground is dragged over a number of points on the steel cover-plate as the player pressed the telegraph-style key on the right. The perforations raised the spring-loaded points, thereby allowing only certain combinations of strings to be sounded when the player strummed them with a plectrum. We might think of this as a kind of automated autoharp, with the cardboard strip working like a player piano roll.

How Stearns developed his evolutionary take on instruments is difficult to determine, but it likely grew out of certain popular notions of his day. These are reflected in pamphlets on the history of instruments that survive today among Stearns's papers. One such publication, the "History of Musical Instruments: Showing the Derivation of Modern Types from the Ideas of Archaic Times," came to Stearns compliments of Detroit Music Company on Woodward Avenue. It features drawings of ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and early modern instrument, along with "Oriental Fiddles" and other curios. These accompany a somewhat melodramatic, and highly dubious, historical account. Another pamphlet entitled "The Rise of the Banjo," printed in Philadelphia, describes the evolution of the modern instrument from what it calls primitive or

vulgar types. Although such popular literature seems quaint now, it should be remembered that during the time that Stearns was collecting there were as yet no serious textbooks on musical instruments, nor were there any but a few major public collections.

Thinking of Stearns as an amateur natural historian who applied scientific principles to instruments, it's not surprising that he attempted to organize his collection according to what he considered a rigorous classification system. He divided the instruments into four basic categories: percussion, winds, strings, and pipe and reed combination instruments. Each of these, in turn, was further subdivided, much like the taxonomic subdivision of genus into species and subspecies. In attempting to bring systematic order to instrument classification, Stearns—though an amateur—was something of a pioneer who worked along lines just then being explored by instrument specialists in Europe. Victor-Charles Mahillon, curator of the Instrument Museum of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels, worked on the same problem of classification at about the same time. If Stearns's system was less successful than Mahillon's, or that of Curt Sach and Eric von Hornbostel which we still use, it was because Stearns was among the first, largely unaware of developments in Europe. (I have learned that Stearns could read neither French nor German, and relied on English-language correspondence or translations by unnamed assistants.)

Stearns's recourse to scientific methodology now makes sense, but we have yet to learn why he began collecting musical instruments in the first place. [slide 6: lyre guitar] In addressing this, we are fortunate to have, in an 1898 typescript, the "Preface" to a book he was reportedly writing, which includes the following autobiographical note:

In the shop of a dealer in antiquities, at Prague, I once saw a lyre-guitar, which seemed to me to illustrate clearly a point in the evolution of musical instruments from primitive to more complex forms. I resolved to search for other examples and to make a study of

them. Since then I have found in various countries many native musical instruments the curious forms and quaint sounds of which aroused my interest. At first I procured only such as were readily accessible; later I undertook to form a collection, illustrating not only the principal types, but also the different genera and species of musical instruments rare or indigenous, ancient and modern. The collection now comprises more than eight hundred examples, and affords material for a somewhat comprehensive study of the subject.

It seems to me likely that Stearns played the guitar before noticing this one in the dealer's shop.

[Slide 7. Martin guitar] He was, for example, enthusiastic enough about the modern steel-stringed instrument to purchase two early Martin guitars; this one was produced a number of years before the turn of the century. He bought many other guitars in various forms, including shapes that evoked connections with antiquity. [Slide 8. Half moon.] This inlaid "lira-chitarra" or lyre guitar, for instance, was made in 1898 by a maker named Gennaro who worked in Naples. [Slide 9. Mandolin] On frequent trips to that same city Stearns bought not only guitars but mandolins like this one.

In all likelihood Stearns bought this instrument from a dealer or perhaps the maker himself. This seems to have been the way he normally acquired instruments. But it is possible that the Martin guitar we've just seen came to him in a different manner. The fact that the Bentley Library preserves among Stearns's papers a turn-of-the-century sales catalogue from the Martin Company suggests that he could have ordered them directly through the mail. Besides this catalogue, Stearns's surviving scrapbooks include numerous magazine and newspaper clippings for all kinds of modern instruments. These alerted him to illustrated catalogues, many of which are likewise preserved, that touted the latest developments in instrument technology and manufacture. From these, Stearns could have ordered whichever instruments struck his fancy. A sufficient number of sale catalogues come down to us at the Bentley to make it worthwhile for someone, someday, to connect them with objects in the modern collection. I am

reasonably convinced, for example, that Stearns would have bought his “Schoenhut’s Door-Harp” this way. According to the collection’s catalogue, this instrument “through the falling of suspended balls on the strings . . . serves to welcome the approaching, and speed the departing guest. Of no musical value.”

Stearns seems to have bought mainly modern instruments through the mail, but he sometimes ordered antiques or curio this way. [Slide 9. *Cornu*] From a 1901 letter we learn that he purchased some theatrical instruments sight-unseen and was unsatisfied with their quality upon their arrival. This reproduction of a Roman *cornu* may be one of the instruments he was describing, though it is fairly well made. Stearns also received consignments of instruments on approval, some perhaps unsolicited. A letter from Victor Flechter, a dealer in Italian stringed instruments, dated 12 March 1896 indicates that he was sending a shipment to Detroit because a traveling virtuoso of Stearns’s acquaintance, Edward Remenyi, had informed him of his interest in “old curio instruments.”

Besides browsing dealers’ shops and ordering from catalogues, Stearns also bought instruments at industrial fairs and cultural expositions that were common events during his lifetime. We know, for example, that a tube zither from Madagascar came from the 1900 Paris Exposition. At the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901 he bought two bowed stringed instruments, one from the Apache people, the other from the Philippines, along with a plucked lute and harp. With Stearns’s approval, Albert Stanley, the Director of the School of Music, bought reproductions of medieval stringed instruments that Lyon and Healey had displayed at the company’s exhibit at the Chicago Exposition of 1893. Finally, Stearns bought a few instruments at auction. One notice of such a purchase comes in a 1899 letter from an Belgian



dealer, which mentions instruments he had recently acquired at the auction of the collection of Caesar Snoeck.

Having learned something about why and how Stearns acquired his instruments, let us turn to the matter of his gift to the University of Michigan. Why did he make the donation? First and perhaps foremost, Stearns was a philanthropist who made generous gifts to leading cultural institutions in the Detroit area. On many occasions he had invited the public to view his instrument collection, which was displayed in his Detroit home on Lafayette Avenue. By donating them to the university, a still wider audience would be entertained and educated. In fact, correspondence shows that Stearns was concerned that adequate space be set aside for his instruments in the University museum.

Philanthropy aside, however, the Bentley archives also allow us to conjecture about Stearns's personal motives. I would argue that his donation had a great deal to do with his hopes to write a book on the evolution of instruments. We have already noted that there were not yet scholarly texts on the subject, and Stearns was apparently determined to meet that need. Yet it also seems that by century's end he had come to realize that his knowledge of instruments was limited, apart from his belief in certain principles of development and perhaps an amateur's interest with plucked strings. To support this hypothesis we have a revealing note scribbled by Stearns himself on the back page of a Parisian antique dealer's catalogue from around 1896: "Many of these names [of instruments] are new to me." On the back cover of the same catalogue he scribbled the name and address of Canon Francis Galpin, a noted English collector. Although Galpin's publications on the history of instruments were issued after 1896, Stearns may possibly have intended to correspond with the British expert, perhaps at the suggestion of someone at the dealer's gallery.

Stearns declared his intention to donate his collection to U of M in a letter dated 15 September 1897 to Francis W. Kelsey. It is certain that Kelsey accepted Stearns's offer, although we lack the copy of his response to Stearns. Nonetheless it was widely recognized at the time that Kelsey, who served as chair and professor of Latin, was unmatched in his zeal for bringing important collections to the university, including the famous ancient papyri now in the Special Collections department of the Graduate Library. Kelsey was also president of the Musical Society and, not coincidentally, editor of numerous books, among them the *Handbook of Archeology and Antiquities*, published by Macmillan Company. This is the same press that Stearns would later approach with his book proposal. Indeed, in his letter offering the collection to the university, Stearns lets it slip that he was working on what he called "a luxurious illustrated catalogue," as yet unfinished.

About two months later, on Monday 22 November 1897, Stearns sent Professors Kelsey and Stanley his draft manuscript entitled *Rare and Curious Musical Instruments: The Finds of a Curio Hunter*. Stearns requested a "critical reading" of the section referring to the pitches, keys, and tonalities of the instruments described, particularly the winds, which I have suggested were not within Stearns's competence. He was also concerned with musical nomenclature since he wished to avoid using staff notation, reportedly in the interests of accessibility to the public. Despite these concerns, Stearns requested the return of his manuscript in less than a week, by Friday the 26th, because he intended to leave for New York the following day. Stearns may have hurried the academics along because he hoped to pitch his book to a publisher. If so, he may have had misgivings about the reactions of the two Michigan scholars to the quality of his work.

By late December 1897 Stearns's manuscript was at Macmillan, the same company with which Prof. Kelsey had an ongoing business relationship. According to the proposal, the

typescript and photographic plates were to be produced by the printing establishment in Stearns's drug company—the one that produced his medical journal. Writing on December 31, George Brett, President of Macmillan, objects to this idea, calling it “a cheese-paring policy of false economy.” The end of 1898 found Stearns still resisting Brett's counter-proposal that the plates should be printed using the photogravure process, which Stearns argued was too expensive and lavish. Difference between the men on this matter delayed the book project for years. Stearns's working title of the book, incidentally, by then had a more academic ring to it: *Musical Instruments: A Collection of Representative Types with Notes, Descriptive and Explanatory*.

Upon its receipt, Brett sent Stearns's manuscript to outside readers, a common practice then as now. Although we don't have their reports, subsequent correspondence between Kelsey and Brett indicates that the text was unacceptable as submitted. If Stearns had not already thought of it, this rejection led him to seek a collaborator, as he had done with his earlier book on seashells. Stearns's next plans for the book, which had been rechristened as *The Musical Instruments of All Times and Nations*, included an introduction by Albert Stanley. Not coincidentally, I think, the letter that first mentions this collaboration is dated a mere two days after the public announcement of Stearns's donation. The collection was officially tendered to the Board of Regents late in 1898 and formally accepted at their meeting of 17 January 1899. The signed contract for the catalogue from Macmillan is dated 17 February. Thus the timing of Stearns's donation on one hand, and arrangements for the catalogue on the other, ran in tandem.

From time Stearns committed himself to his gift, Stanley, Kelsey, and he worked collaboratively on both the writing of the book and the collection. Stanley was responsible for drafting the historical introduction and correcting Stearns's descriptions. Kelsey oversaw preparations to mount the instruments in the old university museum; he was also responsible for

determining which gaps in the collection's holdings were to be filled first. For his part, Stearns had the task of filling the gaps.

Of the three men, only Kelsey was successful at meeting the objectives. Stanley, who worked only part-time in the collection, and slowly at that, delivered a much longer introduction than anyone had anticipated in February 1904, long after the original deadline. It seems that Stanley's main attention during the intervening years was devoted to administering the School of Music and directing the University Musical Society's May Festival. Moreover, judging from the correspondence, he was also a man of frail health. In any case, Stanley himself was no expert in instruments and, in fact, took an extended leave from the university in the spring of 1899 to travel to Europe both to recuperate and visit the major European collections. As Stanley dragged his feet, negotiations with Macmillan reached a dead-end, in large part because Stearns categorically refused to double the \$1000 subvention that had been demanded to cover printing costs. A different catalogue, probably based loosely on Stearns's original, was later published under Stanley's name in 1918; a second corrected edition was issued in 1921.

During the time when the book project was still in the works, however, Stearns acted as agent / donor on behalf of the University. As late as August 1903, Kelsey was still asking him to fill gaps. The list of instruments needed "to complete the presentation of certain important types" in the museum and in the catalogue included: an early bassoon; oboes of various sizes; pommers in all sizes; krumhorns in all sizes; tenor and sopranino recorders; regale; cryth; baritone, tenor, and treble viols, and a violone. Stearns thus sought out particular kinds of instruments, about which he knew little. It was this, I believe, that made him easy prey for unscrupulous dealers before and after donating the bulk of his collection to the University.

The most notorious of instrument dealer of the time was the Florentine, Leopoldo Franciolini, who lived from 1844 to 1920. Franciolini was arguably the most important European trader in antique instruments in the years around 1900—the time when many important public and private collections were being assembled. Franciolini is remembered largely as a forger who created what he called musical “rarities” that, in fact, never existed. He typically made these out of pieces of broken authentic instruments and by adapting bits of almost anything old, including leather book covers. [Slide: outside, alto clarinet]. He often gave his frauds fanciful names of dubious pedigree. This is what Franciolini called a *genus*, but what might more accurately be called an alto horn were it authentic. It is noteworthy for its tortuous windway, fraudulent manufactured petina, and pseudo-antique Roman medallion. Stearns probably bought this instrument late in 1885 or early 1896 since its image appears in a Franciolini sales catalogue from around that time. You see it here in the middle of the bottom row. [Slide] This *spinettina a ottavino*, likewise depicted in 1895, is almost a complete fabrication. The presence of these and other early Franciolini instruments in the collection proves that Stearns had dealing with the Florentine villain years both before and after his donation to the University.

Franciolini became increasingly prosperous in the early 1900s, precisely at the time when Stearns was filling gaps at Kelsey’s request. Franciolini’s catalogues from this time list over 250 instruments each, an alarming number of which found their way to Ann Arbor. Unfortunately for Franciolini, his success was short-lived. In March of 1910 he was tried in Florence and convicted for his part in an elaborate plot to swindle a German collector. He was sentenced to four-months imprisonment and payment of court cost. When his subsequent appeal met with only partial success, he floated a rumor that he had passed away. By faking his own death, Franciolini presumably thought, he could rescue his stock of counterfeits, placing them in the hands of his

as-yet-unindicted sons and heirs. Unfortunately for the elder Franciolini, serious European collectors and the then-emerging group of museum professionals were already aware of his dishonest practices. The German-language *Zeitschrift fuer Instrumentenbau* even reported on his trail. Franciolini continued play a role in the antiques business, if hidden well behind the scenes, until his second and final death in 1920.

Not all the instruments that Franciolini sold were fakes. It is likely that the turn-of-the-century “lira-chitarra” that we saw earlier came from his shop; by my observation it was not altered in any way, but then again, it was not an antique. But even some of Franciolini’s antiques were genuine, perhaps dispersed among the frauds to allay the suspicions of his more sophisticated clientele. In fact, it was not generally Franciolini’s practice to create completely fraudulent instruments, but instead to use parts of several authentic ones to build two, three, or more. [Slide] This so-called *colascione* from the Stearns Collection is very similar to one shown in Franciolini’s 1895 catalogue. The absurdly long neck is an obviously fabrication, as is the table, the glued-on filigree, and perhaps the rose covering the sound-hole. [Slide.] The bridge, however, is very likely original to a seventeenth-century lute, though it was modified in Franciolini’s shop. Notice how the original channels for the doubled strings have been filled in and replaced by brass string holders. [Slide.] The bowl of the instrument comes from a bass lute by Michael Hartung, a German lute maker active in the early seventeenth-century Padua. As such, this piece of an authentic instrument has been of interest to modern American lute builders since there are no Hartung instruments in this country. Note the maker’s initials on the capping strip and the characteristically large number of narrow ribs that comprise the instrument’s bowl. Without Franciolini, a useful piece of historical evidence would have been lost for it seems unlikely that he would have altered an integral lute; the original Hartung probably reached him in

pieces. But this confected *collascione* has more in common with an archeological dig than a historic instrument.

Harpsichords offered Franciolini a wealth of opportunities. For these he again began with authentic instruments [Slide] and then added new ornate stands; case paintings; new, misspelled, and often clumsily lettered inscriptions; and new labels and signatures. Franciolini also had a weakness for the parchment roses that covered the sound-holes of old Italian harpsichords and other stringed instruments. He would typically pluck out the originals for his personal collection, and then replace them with cruder, modern reproductions—the Stearns collection has a photograph of a portion of this rose collection. Franciolini's task of faking harpsichords was considerably simplified by early Italian construction techniques, in which a light inner instrument was stored in a more stoutly constructed and separate outer case. He also seems not to have been concerned about making his instruments playable, since they were intended as curios for the drawing rooms of the well-heeled or for museum collections.

We might pause for a moment and ask how Franciolini could get away with this for so long? One reason is obviously the lack of knowledge among collectors, particularly rich Americans who found the objects he was selling well within their price ranges. Stearns assigned task of acquiring instruments from all times and nations after 1889 made him especially vulnerable. Cardboard tags once attached to instruments that survive at Bentley show that he bought over twenty items from Franciolini on one day alone, November 10, 1900. That Stearns purchased these instruments personally is proven by a letter dated New Years Day, 1901, in which he complained to Kelsey about the high costs of crating and shipping them from Florence.

Aside from gullibility, another reason for Franciolini's success was what we might call the neo-Classical spirit of the turn of the century. Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman-style

instruments were commonly shown in advertisements for modern ones. Many new musical inventions were typically given fanciful pseudo-antique names like cornopion and Gramophone. Though it may seem to us naive, it is at least understandable how collectors like Stearns might have overlooked the vast gulf between their age and antiquity: they were literally able to reach out and touch objects from the distant past, or at least that claimed its inheritance. Thus we can simultaneously forgive Stearns and his contemporaries their enthusiasm for antiques, but nonetheless observe that it made them easier marks.

It is during the last stage of Stearns's collecting that Franciolini perpetrated his most legendary series of frauds: the virtual invention of the three manual harpsichord. [Slide, slide, slide] Albert Stanley, who as we have seen was responsible for correcting Stearns's catalogue, appears to have tried to put the best spin on the Franciolini affair. On p. 165 of his 1918 catalogue, he referred to the notorious Florentine as "a rather imaginative instrument-maker." In a letter to Stanley dated June 8th, 1920, Georg Kinsky, curator of the Heyer Musikhistorisches Museum in Cologne, criticized this characterization, writing that:

... to my opinion [this is] a somewhat euphemistic judgment. This 'honourable man' was rather a forestaller of ancient instruments, making them up in his workshop, where he used to indulge in unfair dealings and sometimes even in outright counterfeiting. Any object derived from this troubled source must indeed be considered with deep distrust, if it does not turn out a regular falsification, it is nearly always a very suspect renovation of something. Signatures were added frequently, likewise paintings and other embellishments in a lavish but rather coarse style, even where there was no decoration before. According to my notes the following numbers of the Stearns Collection: 1042, 1073, 1074, 1333, 1336 and 1382 are of Franciolini's workmanship. It is my firm belief, that, against the judgment of Hipkins, No. 1336 is not authentic but has been transformed by Franciolini from an originally double-keyboarded harpsichord into what it is now, and furnished with the signature of that famous maker Cristofori. There was another cembalo with three keyboards (likewise signed Christofori), one belonging to a noted German museum, which has been proved a falsification of Franciolini's. I regret to say that also some of the rare and "unique" pieces of the Crosby Brown Collection in New York are Franciolini's make.



Stanley had been gullible, but the same cannot be said of his assistant, Phillip Schenk, a newly minted bachelor of arts from the University of Michigan. Schenk held the assistantship that Stearns had provided for two years, 1902 to 1904. As his monthly reports to Stearns show, Schenk dutifully educated himself in a range of subjects, but devoted most of his time early on to reading books on anthropology and ethnology. In early March 1903, he visited the major collections on the East coast, and there became disenchanted with his work back home and perhaps with the Stearns Collection itself. In Washington D.C. he learned from the curator of instruments at the National Museum of the systematic catalogue that Victor Mahillon had made for the Brussels Royal Conservatory Collection. Upon arriving back in Ann Arbor, Schenk requested a copy of the Brussels catalogue, which Stearns personally bought for him. Schenk then screwed up sufficient courage to write Stearns about his what he had learned. Beginning by complimenting the old man for his “scientific arrangement” of the collection and comparing Stearns’s spirit to that of a “scientific student of ethnology rather than that of a collector of curios,” he nonetheless declared Mahillon’s system far superior to Stearns’s. Responding, Stearns first complained to Kelsey about having to revise his book along the lines that Schenk had suggested, but then offered to spend as much as a year in the effort. This did not happen, however, due to Stearns’s ill health and the ill-fate of the original catalogue project.

More troubling were concerns that Schenk began raising six months after he returned from the East coast concerning the quality of Stearns’s most recent collecting efforts on the University’s behalf. Writing to Kelsey in September 1903, Schenk wrote alarmingly that:

... Frankly, unless Mr. Stearns were to trust implicitly to the advice of men like Mr. Galpin or M. Mahillon, I don’t think he ought to be urged to make any more purchases. His early purchases are almost uniformly far better than those coming later. In fact, there has been a steady deterioration in the grade of his acquisitions and I am afraid that additions made by him, unadvised, would only complicate an already very difficult problem. Supplying him with a list of desirable instruments will not help us much if he

falls into the clutches of men like Franciolini again. They'd make up anything for him or make him believe that what they had was what we wanted. Mr. Stearns simply doesn't know enough about musical instruments to be trusted to go much further alone.

Schenk's own observations also had led him to mistrust practically anything Stearns had written about instruments. In the same letter, he declared that Stearns " ... did not have the technical skill to detect differences, and jumped to conclusions." Finally, at the close of this extraordinarily frank letter, Schenk adds the following note about the Franciolini harpsichords, including the one with three manuals:

I am keeping the Franciolini harpsichords on the third floor, so that, when you come back, we can hold the autopsy behind closed doors. . . . The harpsichord upon which Franciolini placed the inscription 'Ioannes Baptista Giusti Lucensis faciebat A[nn]o 1613' is a true curiosity, -- fearfully and wonderfully made. In the keyboard alone there are keys originally belonging to six different instruments. . . ."

It is clear that Schenk and presumably also Kelsey were onto Franciolini, Albert Stanley's gullibility aside. Yet despite this Kelsey never dampened Stearns's enthusiasm for 'enriching' the collection. This may have been because chronic illness had impacted Stearns's itineraries. Indeed, writing to an acquaintance in August 1902, Kelsey thought it unlikely that Stearns would donate any more than a few instruments beyond what the two hundred or so he had already bought since his initial donation.

Kelsey seemed as calm as Schenk was hysterical, perhaps because the older scholar had determined to fill out the collection himself in a manner consistent with the expertise and professional values he had represented throughout his career. Although detailed records of acquisitions were not kept at this time, correspondence in the Stearns Collection's archive shows how the University's policy differed from Stearns's. First it accepted instruments given by individuals other than Stearns; these donations are noted in Stanley's catalogue. But even more important, the University attempted to professionalize the collecting process. It authorized

University employees to collect instruments in the field. For example, Kelsey acquired instruments from the Seneca Indians on the Cattaraugus Reservation, Erie County, New York. He also incorporated Peruvian instruments brought back from an expedition by Prof. Joseph B. Sterre.

Kelsey and Schenk also solicited the cooperation of third parties besides Frederick Stearns to expand the collection, though most of these individuals had little knowledge of instruments. For example, Dean Worcester of the U.S. Philippine Commission was asked to purchase instruments in Manila in August, 1902. There are also similar notices of Schenk's arranging with Christian missionaries to Mexico and Africa in 1903 and 1904. Thus it is safe to say that the first steps toward a professional acquisition policy were taken at a time when Stearns's involvement was tapering off.

Our examination has revealed a number of facts and produced conjectures about the early history of the Stearns Collection. The greatest impact was that of a wealthy and well-traveled man, who strongly believed that the theory of evolution could be applied to musical instruments. His objective was not to find beautiful, rare, or even historically important objects, but to prove himself right. Yet his knowledge of instruments was limited and, because he hoped to publish a book expounding his theory, he sought collaborators at the University of Michigan. The donation of the collection was part of that collaborative process and likely intended as a *quid pro quo*.

Yet as the numerous gaps in the collection came to be recognized, Stearns became increasingly vulnerable to dealers like Franciolini, from whom he bought a large number of "missing links." Certainly those in positions of responsibility back in Ann Arbor were aware of the problem, but Francis Kelsey astutely chose to let the matter run its course. It likely seemed increasingly unlikely that Stearns's book would ever be published or that he would be collecting

much longer. Meanwhile, Kelsey and Schenk acquired instruments in a manner more in keeping with the University's anthropological and archeological collections: they found them in the field, either on their own or via third parties. This kind of professionalism distinguished their acquisitions policy from Stearns's and set the collection on the path that it has maintained ever since.

## NOTES

- (1) Kahnt & Uhlmann, Accordeon-Fabric (Altenburg, Germany), catalogues of 1885 and 1896.
- (2) In 1895, Stearns had written for information about instruments and music from the Autoharp Department of Alfred Dodge & Sons, Pianoforte Materials. (Their response to Stearns is dated 6 December 1895.)
- (3) Same for Virgil Practice Clavier Company. (Their response, dated 9 December 1895, acknowledges his cash order with express charges prepaid.) Stearns eventually purchased this “instrument.”
- (4) Received information about Lehman’s Improved American harp from The American Chromatic Harp Company, Chicago Illinois.
- (5) Note (1896?) from the Musik-Haus (Nürnberg) with total amount (in dollars) paid for zithers, harps, a lute, two alto violas, and other stringed instruments, less ten percent discount

In addition to modern instruments, Stearns also bought a few **curios** from European dealers through the mail:

- (1) Stearns noted that he had purchased some theatrical instruments sight unseen (Pompei) from Gorga (dealer?). Letter, Stearns to Kelsey, 1 August 1901.
- (2) Scattered notice of instruments (referred to as “antique reproductions used in operas”) in undated note filed with correspondence from 1900.

b. From showrooms:

- (1) Stearns probably visited the showroom of O. Weishaupt & Cie, a Parisian dealer of musical antiquities, in 1896. Stearns himself scribbled the prices of instruments in which he was interested on the back page of Weishaupt’s catalogue, “Instruments de Musique Anciens.” He had also received a postcard from the same dealer (Novembr 1896), which alludes to Stearns’s interest in a cornemus and Orphica (18th-century keyboard). [ADDRESS?]
- (2) Newspaper clipping dated 27 November 1899 indicates that Stearns had collected during his “tours of the world.”

2. Following contact from dealer, Stearns would request information and then take a consignment of instruments on approval:

Letter, 12 March 1896, Victor S. Flechter, a dealer in Italian string instruments, to Stearns. Edward Remenyi, violin virtuoso, told Flechter of Stearns’s interests in “old curio instruments.” Flechter sent a consignment of instruments for Stearns’s approval.

3. From exhibitions.

- a. According to the tags, Stearns himself purchased instruments at two exhibitions. At the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, 1901, he purchased a bowed chordophone (“violin”) of the Apache people, another of Philippine provenance; he also bought plucked lute-type (mandoline) and harp from the Philippines. At the Paris Exposition, Stearns purchased 1900, bought a *Valhia* (a kind of harp).
- b. Albert Stanley bought instruments (reproductions) from Lyon and Healey for \$17.00. These had been displayed at the company’s exhibit at the Chicago Exposition of 1893, which had been kept in storage. (Letter, Schenk to Kelsey, 31 August 1903, acknowledges receipt of the instruments. Letter, Kelsey to Stearns, 5 October 1903 indicates that the

Stearns's reimbursement had not been received. Stearns acted soon thereafter, acknowledging his mistake.)

4. Bought instruments at auctions.

Stearns acquired instruments from the collection of Caesar Snoeck. 17 January 1899, R.B. Turner & Co. (Brussels, Belgium) to Stearns.

5. Systematic collecting in the field by professional anthropologists or museum personnel.

- a. Kelsey collected instruments of the Seneca Indians on Cattaraugus Reservation, Erie County, New York. Receipt to Schenk at UM (receipt) 24 Dec. 1903. University treasurer reimbursed by Stearns on 25 January 1904. (See NPUMS 1, 2nd ed., p. 17)
- b. By second edition--NPUMS 18, 2d ed. p. 19, collection of materials from Peru in an expedition by Prof. Joseph B. Steere (UM? 1870-1875). Musical instruments from this expedition were added to the Stearns Collection.

6. Solicitation of cooperation re. collecting from third parties, most without particular knowledge of musical instruments.

- (1) Kelsey asked the Hon. Dean C. Worcester, U.S. Philippine Commission, to collect indigenous instruments to fill lacunae in the Stearns collection. (Letter, Kelsey to Worcester, 8 August 1902). Planning to return to the United States in 1903, Worcester responded that the prospects were good that he could acquire instruments from the Manila area, where he lives. (Letter, Worcester to Kelsey, 17 Sept. 1902)
- (2) Schenk had arranged with the Rev. Hubert Brown, the leader of a group of Presbyterian missionaries to Mexico, to prevail upon his "co-workers" to collect indigenous instruments. (Letter, Schenk to Kelsey, 9 Nov. 1903).
- (3) In a letter (to Phillip L. Schenk) dated 13 November 1903, Mrs. Anna M. Lehman (N. Paulina Street, Chicago) requested the transfer of some African musical instruments to the University Museum. Schenk had also asked Mrs. Lehman to collect more instruments on her up-coming trip to Africa in the spring of 1904. Schenk was concerned about the encroachment of civilization: according to Lehman: "It is, however, very true, as you have observed, that many interesting specimens are now becoming very rare, since the advent of the trader." Mr. and Mrs. Lehman were Christian missionaries.

6. Possible purchases from from private parties who had read about Stearns's collection.

Letter, 24 September 1898, Louise M. Bishop to Stearns. Had read about Stearns's collection in the Detroit Free Press and offered him an instrument in sale. He does not seem to have bought her instrument.

7. Donations (indicated in catalogue, 2nd ed., by parentheses.)