

**The Other Otto Dresel:  
Public and Private Musical Identities in a  
German-American ‘Forty-Eighter’ and his Family, c1860–1880**

Molly Barnes

**ABSTRACT:** This essay explores the musical life of a German-American “Forty-Eighter” and his family, with particular attention to their domestic musical preferences as reflected in five surviving sheet-music albums. Otto Dresel, easily confused with the far more prominent German musician of the same name who settled in Boston, was a gifted amateur whose public musical activities, both choral and instrumental, typified those of many German arrivals of that generation. This was a largely male realm of affirmative, expansive ideals; here the stress was on civic virtues, happy fraternal bonds, and the celebration of German musical culture as an elevating force in America. The family albums suggests that the music he shared with his wife and children at home in Columbus, Ohio served quite different purposes. It was performed intimately, in an often melancholy and even mournful mode that reflected the need for personal consolation and was thus more in keeping with typical Victorian attitudes toward the domestic, womanly sphere. Evidence about the troubled course of Dresel’s life helps us understand his growing need to take refuge in his home and family as well as in music that helped him and his loved ones deal—for a time, at least—with deepening feelings of regret, failure and loss. This marked contrast between the public and private sides of the Dresels’ musical lives points to a need for greater attention to the distinctive character and functions of intimate family music making in nineteenth-century America, especially during the years of widespread disillusionment and cultural reorientation that followed the Civil War.

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In response to the political and economic crisis that gripped central Europe in 1848, two young German men unknown to each other but who shared the name ‘Otto Dresel’ fled their homelands. Both harboured strong liberal ideals and feared persecution by the autocratic governments of the German states. One of them, an accomplished pianist, dreamed mainly of seeking his professional musical fortunes in a freer land. The other, while an able musician in his own right, had a more immediate and pressing motivation: he was fleeing a two-year prison sentence for high treason because of his involvement in revolutionary political activities. The two men arrived in the United States within a year of each other. Dresel the pianist eventually settled in Boston and developed a reputation as a respected performer, composer, teacher and music critic. Thanks almost exclusively to the musicologist David Francis Urrows, he is a relatively familiar figure among scholars of art music in nineteenth-century America.<sup>1</sup> The other Otto Dresel, by contrast, is barely known today and has drawn almost no notice in recent scholarship. He made his way to Columbus, Ohio, where he would marry, raise a family, embark on a legal career, and lead a busy if deeply checkered political and civic life. Yet he was also zealously active as a musical amateur, and along with his musically gifted German-American

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<sup>1</sup> See David Francis Urrows, ‘Apollo in Athens: Otto Dresel and Boston, 1850–90’, *American Music* 12/4 (Winter 1994): 345–388; also *Otto Dresel: Collected Vocal Music* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2002); *Otto Dresel: Chamber Works* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2009); *Otto Dresel: Keyboard Music* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2015); *Otto Dresel: The Lost Child* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2018). In an appendix to the 2002 edition of *Chamber Works* Urrows also briefly discussed our ‘other’ Otto Dresel: ‘The Doppelgänger: (Friedrich) Otto Dresel (1824-81)’, 252-53.

family he deserves the attention of music historians. Indeed their story bears on aspects of American music history that would be far less accessible through attention to a Boston luminary, namely the intimate and emotionally complex realm of family music making. It can also serve as a case study in the musical experiences and activities of German-Americans in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

A handful of biographical sketches, newspaper items, organizational histories and specialized studies, along with his own publications and a thin assortment of surviving letters, can allow us to paint a moderately detailed picture of this ‘other’ Dresel’s career, as well as his civic and political engagements. Fortunately for present purposes they also reveal a good deal about his manifold public musical activities. Far fewer, on the other hand, are sources bearing on the more personal and private musical experiences he shared with his family at home. This paucity is unsurprising, since the most intimate performances are also typically the least well documented. One narrow but nonetheless evocative window into this otherwise largely hidden realm of performance is afforded by the serendipitous survival of five volumes of sheet music that had belonged to an Otto Dresel and two family members in the 1870s.<sup>2</sup> These ‘binders’ volumes’ were originally the products of personal selections and orderings, and were then professionally bound for their owners.<sup>3</sup> A first glance might easily lead one to associate them

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<sup>2</sup> I happened upon these volumes while perusing silent auction items at the annual meeting of the Society for American (SAM) at Lancaster, PA in March, 2014. I entered into a bidding war with my former college mentor, the American music scholar Neil Lerner, who later admitted that he had bid with the intention of giving me the collections as a gift, which he did, and for which I thank him warmly. I have been unable to identify the donor of the volumes to the SAM silent auction, or otherwise to trace their ownership over the years. See Appendix I for a listing of the contents of each volume.

<sup>3</sup> Over the past twenty years, scholars of American music have tacitly agreed to use the term ‘binders’ volumes’ to refer to these bound collections of sheet music. The term is convenient, though as Karen Stafford writes in her 2020 dissertation, it “gives the false impression that the

with the prominent Boston Dresel, whose large circle of contacts included the likes of Liszt, Mendelssohn and the Schumanns. But a closer look soon reveals that the volumes belonged to an altogether different man and his closest relations, who lived far from the ‘Athens of America.’

In this essay I explore both the public and domestic sides of this virtually unknown musical life, with particular attention to the latter aspect as reflected in the family albums. I argue that these two dimensions present a notable contrast of musical genres, moods and functions. Dresel’s public musical activities, both choral and instrumental, followed patterns shared by many musically active German men of the Forty-Eighter generation. Their performances tended to stress civic virtues, happy fraternal bonds, and the celebration of German musical culture as an elevating, patriotic force in American civilization. Though by no means devoid of sentimentality, this was a largely male realm of affirmative, expansive ideals and commitments. The music he shared with his family at home, on the other hand, served notably different purposes. It was performed intimately, in an often melancholy and even mournful mode that reflected the need for personal consolation and was thus more in keeping with typical Victorian attitudes about the domestic, womanly sphere. The more we discover about the troubled course of Dresel’s life, the better we can understand his growing need to take refuge in his home and family as well as in music that helped him and his loved ones deal – for a time, at least – with deepening feelings of regret, failure and loss. I propose that this marked contrast between the public and private sides of the Dresels’ musical lives points to a need for greater attention to the distinctive character and

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binder is the agent responsible for the selection and organisation of materials in the resulting tome, but it was most often an individual who selected and gathered the contents of the volume, delivering it to the binder who was then hired to physically join the music together in a binding’. See Stafford, ‘Binders’ Volumes and the Culture of Music Collectorship in the United States, 1830–1870’ (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2020): 1, fn. 2.

functions of intimate family music making in nineteenth-century America, especially during the years of widespread disillusionment and cultural reorientation that followed the Civil War.

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The spread of German music and musicians in nineteenth-century America is a well-known theme in scholarship on music in the United States. Often this theme has been connected to the study of the development of German-American identity, but it has also been explored with regard to its broader and deeper cultural effects. Heike Bungert, Karen Ahlquist, Barbara Lorezkowski, Mary Sue Morrow, Suzanne G. Snyder, and Christopher Ogburn, among others, have written about the *Männerchor* tradition and German-American singing festivals (*Sängerfeste*) throughout the country.<sup>4</sup> John Koegel, Jonas Westover, John Spitzer, and Nancy Newman, in turn, have illuminated various aspects of the growth of instrumental music in the U.S. at the hands of German immigrants, with attention to their swelling numbers in homegrown orchestras and to the tide of German ensembles that toured the country beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> These and many other studies have established the ‘German element’ as a

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<sup>4</sup> See Bungert, ‘The Singing Festivals of German Americans, 1849–1914’, *American Music* 34/2 (Summer 2016): 141–179; Ahlquist, ‘Musical Assimilation and “the German Element” at the Cincinnati Sängerfest, 1879’, *The Musical Quarterly* 94 (September 2011): 381–416; Lorezkowski, *Sounds of Ethnicity: Listening to German North America, 1850–1914* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010); Morrow, ‘German *Männerchöre* in New York and New Orleans’, in *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918*, ed. Michael Saffle (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998): 79–109; Snyder, ‘The Indianapolis *Männerchor*: Contributions to a New Musicality in Midwestern Life’, *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918* (111–40); and Snyder, ‘The *Männerchor* Tradition in the United States: A Historical Analysis of Its Contribution to American Musical Culture’ (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1991); Christopher Ogburn, ‘Brews, Brotherhood, and Beethoven: The 1865 New York City Sängerfest and the Fostering of German American Identity’, *American Music* 33/4 (Winter 2015): 405–440.

<sup>5</sup> Scholars have focused especially on professional American (but heavily German-populated) orchestras such as the Theodore Thomas Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony (founded and led by

central feature of an emerging American musical culture. Nearly all, however, have focused on public musical events such as symphony concerts, choral concerts and festivals, and the like. Largely because of a scarcity of sources, very little research has been conducted on German-American music making that was more hidden from view: that which was played in the home or in private settings, apart from larger public audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, German-Americans who arrived in the mid-century wave experienced many of the same social and cultural transformations that were affecting the American public generally; indeed they had no small part in bringing about those transformations. Beginning in the second

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Thomas 1891–1905), and the New York Philharmonic, as well as travelling German orchestras in the U.S., including the Germania Musical Society, the Steyermark Orchestra, the Saxonia Band, and the Joseph Gung'l Orchestra. See for example Koegel and Westover, 'Beethoven and Beer: Orchestral Music in German Beer Gardens in Nineteenth-Century New York City,' in *American Orchestras in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Spitzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 130–55; Nancy Newman, *Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010); and Philip V. Bohlman and Otto Holzappel, *Land Without Nightingales: Music in the Making of German-America* (Madison: Max Kade Institute at the University of Wisconsin, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Scholarship on what is broadly called 'private music making' includes the overlapping categories of music played in the salon, the parlor, and the home circle. 'Salon music' is a notoriously imprecise term, but tends to be associated most strongly with the piano and the French musical scene of the nineteenth century. Notably absent from recent studies is the intimate nuclear-family setting; see for example *Musical Salon Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Anja Bunzel, et al. (Woodbridge and Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2019). The German term *Hausmusik* generally indicates 'music for informal performance by amateurs in the home.' See *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (online); also Grove online. Other relevant sources include Walter Salmen, *Haus- und Kammermusik: Privates Musizieren im gesellschaftlichen Wandel zwischen 1600 und 1900* (Leipzig: Deutsche Verlag für Musik, 1982), and *Musica Privata: die Rolle der Musik im Privaten Leben: Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Walter Salmen*, ed. Monika Fink et al., (Innsbruck: Edition Helbling, 1991). Recent studies by Christina Bashford and Marie Sumner Lott have drawn attention to the importance of private settings, but they focus on Britain and Europe, and neither deals exclusively with performances in the home by and for the immediate family. See Bashford, 'Historiography and Invisible Musics: Domestic Chamber Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63/2 (Summer 2010): 291–360; Sumner Lott, *The Social Worlds of Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music: Composers, Consumers, Communities* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

quarter of the nineteenth century – toward the end of which a deluge of German immigrants arrived in the U.S. – the American sheet music industry exploded. Publishers regularly churned out songs, piano arrangements of opera arias and orchestral works, études, and other music for an eager and ever-growing number of middle- and upper-class consumers. Sheet music sales provided rapidly broadening access to a wide variety of music for many Americans. Studies of private music making in nineteenth-century America have focused above all on the cultural significance of sheet music, much of which is generally (if sometimes misleadingly) termed ‘parlor music’ because it was frequently performed in private, domestic spaces – chiefly the parlor.<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Tawa’s 1980 book *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790–1860* helped to launch the conversation on this crucial element of nineteenth-century musical life. Subsequent studies have pursued an enormous range of related topics, from the spread of pianos and piano-playing to middle-class homes, to lyrical meanings and sentiment in popular song, to minstrelsy and blackface iconography in sheet music publications, to the close association of parlor music with girls, young women, and the female-dominated domestic sphere more generally.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Petra Meyer Frazier points out the confusion that may result from using the term ‘parlor music’ as a catch-all for this varied repertory: ‘many of these so-called parlor songs were originally intended for the stage, or at least associated with theatrical performers and works, while others were used in concert repertoires of popular groups such as the Hutchinson Family or mixed with the more operatic fare of distinguished singers like Jenny Lind... While these aspects make the ‘proper’ parlor songs harder to pin own, they also mean the music bridges vernacular and cultivated music. Since the genre is difficult to categorize by means of strict stylistic criteria, performance setting must be taken into account’, ‘American Women’s Roles and Domestic Music Making as Revealed in Parlor Song Collections: 1820–1870’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1999), 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> Notable examples of scholarship on nineteenth-century American sheet music include James A. Davis, “‘Our War Songs’ (1864): Popular Song and Music Criticism during the American Civil War’, *Popular Music and Society* 41: 5 (August 2017), 489–505; Daniel H. Foster, ‘Sheet Music Iconography and Music in the History of Transatlantic Minstrelsy’, *Modern Language Quarterly*

Only in the past couple of decades have scholars begun to draw attention to the special importance of the ‘binder’s volume’ in nineteenth-century domestic musical experience, and particularly in the everyday lives of young women and girls. In a 1999 dissertation dealing with several large collections from across the country, Petra Meyer Frazier discussed these volumes within the context of prior scholarly findings about nineteenth-century American women’s lives. She showed that such albums represented far more than collections of ‘innocuous music’ meant to provide light entertainment for gatherings in the home. They reflect not only the ideals, values, tastes and desires of young, white, middle-class women, but also contemporary social expectations and idealizations of these young women.<sup>9</sup> The collection of Emily McKissick (1836–1919), the first binder’s volume to appear in a facsimile edition (2011), offers evidence complementing these claims. According to Katherine Preston, the varied selections in this album ‘almost perfectly [encapsulate] the styles of music that were broadly popular among the

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70/1 (March 2009), 147–161; Stephanie Dunson, ‘The Minstrel in the Parlor: Nineteenth-Century Sheet Music and the Domestication of Blackface Minstrelsy’, *The American Transcendental Quarterly* 16/4 (Dec. 2002), 241–255; Paul Charosh, ‘Studying Nineteenth-Century Popular Song’, *American Music* 15/4 (Winter 1997): 459–492; Susan Key, “‘Forever in our Ears’’: Nature, Voice, and Sentiment in Stephen Foster’s Parlor Style’, *American Music* 30/3 (Fall 2012), 290–307; Susan Key, ‘Sound and Sentimentality: Nostalgia in the Songs of Stephen Foster’, *American Music* 13/2 (Summer 1995), 145–166; Jon Finson, *The Voices That Are Gone: Themes in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Song* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Nicholas Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790–1860* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> See Meyer Frazier, ‘American Women’s Roles and Domestic Music Making as Revealed in Parlor Song Collections: 1820–1870’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1999), 263. A generation ago, Caroline Moseley argued that parlor songs ‘were part of the musical culture of a wide spectrum of Americans. We should not associate parlor songs only with upper-middle-class families; these songs pervaded American society enough to be found in oral tradition’. See Moseley, “‘The Maids of Dear Columbia’’: Images of Young Women in Victorian American Parlor Song’, *The Journal of American Culture* 6/1 (March 1983): 18–31; here 18. Nonetheless, as Moseley’s own work attests, parlor songs have proven especially illuminating for scholars seeking a richer understanding of middle- to upper-class women’s self-fashioning in America. Binder’s volumes constitute the prime resource for such study.



American middle class at the midpoint of the century.’<sup>10</sup> Mark Slobin maintains that Emily’s annotations, which include ‘fingerings, extra verses, harmony lines, and revealing marginalia’, evince key aspects of the young woman’s social environment.<sup>11</sup>

Yet more recently, Candace Bailey has pursued close studies of binders’ volumes belonging to women in the antebellum South in order to illuminate the role of these assemblages in their owners’ private lives and larger social worlds. Bailey argues that such albums served as musical ‘commonplace books’, not only reflecting their owners’ tastes and predilections but teaching, guiding, and reminding young women about proper social deportment. Often displayed prominently in the parlor, the binder’s volume also indicated to visitors that a young woman had mastered a socially-mandated set of skills and behaviors.<sup>12</sup> Bailey’s 2019 book extends this inquiry into bound and unbound music collections belonging to three young women from elite Charleston families in the antebellum era, showing among other things that these particular collections reflect their owners’ European travels and cosmopolitan orientation.<sup>13</sup> In a broadly complementary vein, Karen Stafford has studied the process of assembling such collections,

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<sup>10</sup> Katherine K. Preston, ‘Music in the McKissick Parlor’, in Mark Slobin, James W. Kimball, Katherine K. Preston, Deane L. Root, eds., *Emily’s Songbook: Music in 1850s Albany*, Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music 9 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2011), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Slobin, ‘An Ethnomusicological View of Emily McKissick’, in *Emily’s Songbook*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> See Bailey, ‘Binder’s Volumes as Musical Commonplace Books: The Transmission of Cultural Codes in the Antebellum South’, *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10/4 (2016): 446–469. Petra Meyer Frazier makes similar arguments in *Bound Music, Unbound Women: The Search for an Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Michael J. Budds (Missoula, MT: College Music Society, 2015). Other studies of nineteenth-century American women’s engagement with parlor music include Elizabeth Morgan, ‘Combat at the Keys: Women and Battle Pieces for the Piano during the American Civil War’, *19th-Century Music* 40/1 (July 2016): 7–19 and Petra Meyer Frazier, ‘Music, Novels, and Women: Nineteenth-Century Prescriptions for an Ideal Life’, *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 10 (2006): 45–59.

<sup>13</sup> See Bailey, *Charleston Belles Abroad: The Music Collections of Harriet Lowndes, Henrietta Aiken, and Louisa Rebecca McCord* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2019).

gathering data from some 263 binder's volumes held at the Library of Congress. She calls attention to a 'culture of collectorship', investigation of which can illuminate important aspects of the owners' family lives, memories, and 'visions of the world'.<sup>14</sup>

In an especially seminal essay of 2004, Ruth Solie discusses the central importance of home music-making, especially by adolescent daughters, to the emotional well-being of the nineteenth-century family as a 'nuclear' unit. She writes that 'music was necessary to society, not as mere entertainment but . . . as a sort of combination spiritual therapy and mental hygiene.' The family group centred on parents and children 'was the natural and proper locus for this *Herzensbildung* along with other kinds of education and [socialization].' While the husband's central responsibility was to earn money in the public sphere, the wife and daughters were expected to cultivate the family's emotional and spiritual well-being within the private sphere, very often through music. This convention frequently placed a special burden on an adolescent daughter as the main purveyor of musical enjoyment, and thus as central to the affective life of the home. Solie shows convincingly that domestic music making often became a form of family catharsis.<sup>15</sup>

All of these scholars have contributed to an expanded and refined understanding of domestic musical life in the nineteenth century. Yet many hundreds of bound sheet music collections still await close exploration by historians of American music. Given the widely-recognized influence of German music and musicians in the U.S. starting in the mid-nineteenth century, our lack of knowledge about music-making in German-American households represents an especially notable lacuna. The Dresels' volumes offer one starting-point in this realm, a case

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<sup>14</sup> Stafford, 'Binders' Volumes', 7, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Solie, 'Girling at the Parlor Piano', in *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 85–117; here 95.

that is evocative at least partly because it included highly active male involvement in a space that has typically been characterized as female, and also because it offers insights into a family group.<sup>16</sup> Viewed in the context of other relevant evidence, the contents of these collections can prompt new questions about the specific functions of music as an intimate domestic activity, as well as about the role of German-Americans in cultivating such practices during an era marked by heightened feelings of melancholy and loss.

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Our Dresel – Otto Friedrich Dresel – was born in 1824 in Detmold, then in the principality of Lippe, today in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia.<sup>17</sup> He studied law at Jena, and in the mid 1840s became caught up along with many other liberal, middle-class Germans in the revolutionary fervour sweeping central Europe. As editor of a radical-democratic publication and a leading political agitator he soon ran afoul of the authorities and was sentenced to prison. Dropping out of sight, he gained secret passage on a ship bound for Baltimore, arriving there late in 1849. After some two years of further legal study, English language immersion, and

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<sup>16</sup> My approach includes comparisons of the family's choices with data gleaned from two large collections of binders' volumes: the above-mentioned Library of Congress set studied by Stafford, and the John Carbonell Collection held at the American Music Research Center. The Library of Congress collection includes 263 volumes containing 10,622 individual pieces. The Carbonell Collection includes 597 volumes containing over 22,000 individual pieces. See John Carbonell Sheet Music Binders Volumes Collection, American Music Research Center, University of Colorado at Boulder, <https://archives.colorado.edu/repositories/3/resources/1805> (accessed 1 Aug 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Like many German writers of his generation, Otto switched his given first and middle names. Dresel's name is given as 'Friedrich Georg Wilhelm Karl Otto Dresel' in *Der Deutsche Pionier: Erinnerungen aus dem Pionier-Leben der Deutschen in Amerika* 13 (Cincinnati: Deutsche Pionier Verein, 1881–82), 411–419, 482–490; here 411. The OCLC catalogue lists the name as 'Friedrich Otto Dresel.' Other sources record 'Otto Friedrich Dresel.' Dresel very rarely if ever included 'Friedrich' and almost always signed his name simply as 'Otto Dresel.'

teaching music in Massillon, Ohio, he was admitted to the Ohio Bar and granted citizenship in 1852. The following year he settled in Columbus, where he practiced as an attorney until his death nearly twenty-eight years later.<sup>18</sup> A handsome man of great energy as well as passionate commitments, he soon emerged as a prominent and highly engaged citizen, gaining respect not only within the capital city's rapidly growing German immigrant community but among the general population as well.<sup>19</sup>

[Figure 1 here: Otto Dresel in an 1845 portrait by Julius Geissler.]

Adhering to the prevalent practice of endogamy in the German émigré community, in 1855 Dresel wed nineteen-year-old Marie Louise Rotthaas, the Columbus-born stepdaughter and heiress of a successful German-American beer-brewer.<sup>20</sup> Their union of some twenty-six years was by all indications a thoroughly devoted one. In contrast to Otto's busy public involvements we find little to no evidence that Louise was active outside the family sphere. Following a typical middle-class pattern for her time, she devoted herself to supporting her husband and caring for a large household. The couple's first child, Otto, died just short of his fourth birthday in 1860;

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<sup>18</sup> His older brother Werner was the Consul to the U.S. for several German states. Dresel was admitted to the Ohio Bar on 26 April 1852: *Ohio State Journal (OSJ)*, 27 Apr 1852.

<sup>19</sup> The earliest prose portrait appeared in *The Daily Ohio Statesman (DOS)*, 27 Feb 1864: 'Pen and Ink Sketches of Members of the Ohio Legislature.' The most detailed profile appeared in *Der Deutsche Pionier*, 13 (1881–82) (above, note 17); this work, written by his friend H. Rattermann after Dresel's death, offers a highly admiring and not uniformly dependable overview of Dresel's life, emphasizing his importance for German-American culture. A much briefer sketch is found in Adolf Eduard Zucker, *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 289–290.

<sup>20</sup> Biographical details on Louise are scarce. Her stepfather was Jacob Silbernagel, on whom see Donald Schlegel, *Lager and Liberty: German Brewers of Nineteenth-Century Columbus* (Columbus: D.M. Schlegel, 1982; 2nd ed. Columbus, 2014). Silbernagel was a member of the Columbus *Männerchor*; it is thus quite likely that Dresel came to know him – and his daughter – through this connection (*DOS*, 4 Jan 1866, 2). Some eight years into the marriage Louise was described by a reporter as 'rather good looking' in *The Portage County Democrat* (1 Apr 1863).

despite what we know about the high child mortality rates of the age, we will find reason to conclude that this loss affected the parents both permanently and profoundly. Another son (Herman, 1858–98) and four daughters (Alma, born 1863; Flora, 1865–1925; Clara, 1867–1900; and Marie Louise, 1872–1918) would live to adulthood. The children were raised in a traditional German domestic cultural environment that placed a high value on academic achievement along with musical activities.<sup>21</sup> By all indications Otto took on the role of *paterfamilias* in a well-established old-world mode, maintaining a clear separation between his domestic life and his engagements outside the home.

The world outside remained a turbulent and challenging realm for him. The democratic political convictions that had led him to confront autocratic rule in Germany also prompted Dresel to oppose what he saw as the threat of growing federal power in the U.S. He emerged as a strongly partisan Democrat, a supporter of Stephen Douglas and the doctrine of ‘popular sovereignty.’ Elected as a representative of Franklin County to the Ohio Legislature in 1861, he soon created a furor by loudly supporting states’ rights, accusing the Lincoln administration of establishing a ‘military despotism’, and denouncing those who ‘in their hatred of slavery, propose to bury it under the ruins of the Constitution.’<sup>22</sup> Vicious public smears followed against

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<sup>21</sup> The available biographical information on all the children except Herman remains sketchy, but the family’s emphasis on academic achievement is clear. Herman entered the U.S. Naval Academy in 1876; at his graduation in 1880 he shared highest honors with one other cadet (*Der Westbote*, 17 Jun 1880). Alma was honoured as the best student in her class at her high-school graduation in 1881 (*Der Westbote*, 30 Jun 1881). In 1884 a writer for *Der Westbote* described Clara, the third daughter, as ‘the most capable student’ in her high school class (*Der Westbote*, 12 Jun 1884). According to contemporary accounts the family spoke German at home, but mastery of English was clearly expected as well, since the children attended English-language schools.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Douglas, the prominent Democratic politician who famously debated Lincoln in the Illinois race for U.S. Senate in 1858, adopted the slogan ‘popular sovereignty’ for his proposed policy of allowing the voters of each new state admitted to the Union to determine whether or

his ‘Copperhead’ views and even his personal character. In 1863 his Republican opponents in the legislature publicly censured him as a treasonous promoter of ‘sedition and disunion’. Despite his re-election soon thereafter, he grew seriously disheartened by these political batterings, and he resigned from the legislature in late 1864.<sup>23</sup>

Although the nasty conflicts and defeats of the war years damaged Dresel’s reputation he continued to enjoy considerable public regard, especially among the German-Americans of Columbus and among Ohio Democrats. The scope of his undertakings was impressive. He offered a wide range of legal services, and was probably a founding member of the Columbus Bar Association. His related activities included service as a notary public, a transfer agent for funds sent between the U.S. and Europe, and a Master Commissioner of the Franklin County Court.<sup>24</sup> His expanding civic engagements included at least two terms on the Columbus Board of

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not slavery would be legal there. Lincoln and the Republicans opposed any extension of slavery to the western territories and the new states formed from them. On Dresel’s support of Douglas, see *OSJ*, 2 Dec 1859. On the accusation of ‘military despotism’, *OSJ*, 18 Feb 1862. While Dresel shared racial views common in his day, he was not an active defender of slavery; his overarching political concern, both before and after the Civil War, was to oppose the centralisation of power.<sup>23</sup> While he remained a staunch and vocal Democrat, he never again held public office above the local level, and he increasingly turned his energies into different channels. A brief discussion of Dresel’s political views and activities can be found in David Gold, *Democracy in Session: A History of the Ohio General Assembly* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), 200–201. On Dresel’s censure, see *DOS*, 27 Mar 1863; 28 Mar 1863. Despite this censure, he continued to make public speeches against the war; see for example *DOS*, 11 August 1863. On his resignation, see *DOS*, 17 Dec 1864. In 1864–65 he briefly opened a piano and music store with John M. Seltzer, but quit the business within months; according to the *Deutsche Pionier* profile by Rattermann (above, notes 17, 19) his temporary withdrawal from both law and politics ‘was for Dresel a fateful step, which he later seriously regretted. For others in the meantime had taken his place, which he could never entirely regain’. In 1865 he advertised his return ‘exclusively to the law’, serving also as a notary and transfer agent: *Der Westbote*, 31 May 1866; announcement dated 12 July 1865.

<sup>24</sup> He regularly advertised his legal practice in both English- and German-language newspapers, including *DOS*, *OSJ*, and *Der Westbote*. For the claim that he was a founder of the Columbus Bar Association, see *A Return to Yesteryear: The German Singing Society in America* (Columbus: The Columbus Maennerchor, 1973), at Columbus Metropolitan Library, ‘Columbus

Education and helping to found the Columbus Public Library, of which he became a Trustee. He joined one of the two Masonic lodges in Columbus. In 1866, he became president of the Columbus People's Hall Association, which sponsored musical events, lectures, conventions and other public functions.<sup>25</sup> He was active as a writer of both fiction and non-fiction; numerous poems, essays, songs, and at least one novella came from his pen, appearing mostly in German-language newspapers and periodicals.<sup>26</sup> A gifted orator, he was frequently invited to address Democratic party functions around Ohio, and he also spoke at numerous cultural gatherings, including an 1877 meeting of the German Pioneer Society of Cincinnati. Later he would be profiled in this group's publication, *Der Deutsche Pionier*, which celebrated the lives and exploits of leading German Americans.<sup>27</sup>

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Memory': <https://digital-collections.columbuslibrary.org/digital/collection/memory/id/48118/rec/1>. Letterheads from the 1870s indicate that he was also an officer and sometime president of the 'Columbus Trust Association'; this position included activity as a transfer agent. He was appointed Master Commissioner of Franklin County in September, 1878 (*OSJ* 23 Sep 1878); this office was responsible for assisting the Justices of the court in researching legal issues and preparing written analyses.

<sup>25</sup> Dresel served at least two terms on the Board of Education between 1861 and 1875; notably, he used this position to argue strongly for the value of musical instruction in the public schools. The *DOS* sketch of 1864 (above, note 17) reported his first election to the Board in 1861. On his advocacy of musical instruction in the schools: *DOS*, 27 Feb 1864; *OSJ*, 18 Jul 1873. Member of Masonic Lodge No. 20 ('Magnolia') of Columbus; elected an officer of the lodge in 1858: *OSJ* 3 Nov 1858. On his presidency of the Columbus People's Hall Association, see *Der Westbote*, 27 Sep 1866, and *DOS*, 12 Oct 1866.

<sup>26</sup> Dresel's poetry appeared in several newspapers (see for example his poem 'Aus der Revolution' in the *Ohio Staatsbote* of 24 Apr 1850); a number of his poems were reprinted by Rattermann in the *Deutsche Pionier* profile (above, note 17). Several of Dresel's essays were serialized in *Der Westbote*.

<sup>27</sup> Democratic meeting speeches: *Dayton Daily Empire*, 29 Aug. 1859; *DOS* 23 Jul. 1863; *DOS* 13 Oct. 1866; *DOS* 4 Mar 1867; *DOS* 26 Nov 1867; *DOS* 4 Apr 1868, among many others. Speech to the Pioneer Society, 29 May 1877: *Der Deutsche Pionier*, 9 (Jul 1877), 132–141; extracts published as 'The Mission of German Americans as Pioneers of the Future', *OSJ*, 27 Jul 1877. In the later 1870s Dresel gave numerous fall campaign-season speeches around the state in support of Democratic candidates (*Der Westbote*, 5 Oct 1876; 4 Sep 1879; 9 Oct 1879; 30 Sep

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Beyond his career, political and civic involvements, Dresel became passionately occupied with a variety of public musical activities. Only months after settling in Columbus, he became the conductor of the city's *Männerchor* or men's choir, characterized by one source as 'the most prominent cultural force among the Columbus Germans', and he remained intimately involved with this group at least until the early 1870s. He would be chosen as president of the North American *Saengerbund*, in which capacity he coordinated and oversaw the operations of some twenty-two mainly midwestern German singing societies from the 1860s to the early 1870s. In this office he served as the leading organizer and host of a national *Sängerfest* held in Columbus in 1865, among the first such events since before the Civil War and a major affair even for this busy state capital. His selection to lead the festival was hotly criticized because of the political positions he had taken during the war. Nonetheless he announced this event as promising 'a great chorus of Union, Harmony, and Reconciliation', and his welcoming speech to the assembled groups was a passionate call to German-American singers to fulfill their 'holy mission' in the service of freedom and national fraternity.<sup>28</sup>

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1880; 7 Oct 1880). In 1879, in an apparent effort to revive his political career, friends nominated Dresel to serve again in the state legislature, but he received few votes at the convention and was not elected (*OSJ* 16 Sep 1879).

<sup>28</sup> Dresel's involvement with the Columbus *Männerchor* is outlined in *Der Deutsche Pionier* (above, note 17). The 'most prominent cultural force': La Vern Rippley, *The Columbus Germans* (Baltimore: Fürst Publishing, 1968; reprint Indianapolis: Max Kade German American Center at Indiana University, Purdue University at Indianapolis, and Indiana German Heritage Society, 1998), 14. A *Westbote* writer defended him against those who decried his selection as host of the 1865 singing festival: 8 June 1865. 'A great chorus of Union': circular in *DOS*, 26 May 1865. Dresel's presidency: *DOS*, 1 Sep 1865. His address of welcome at the national festival: *Der Westbote*, 10 Sep 1865. After a *Männerchor* concert in April 1868, Dresel was presented with 'a handsome gold watch' by the group; see *The Morning Journal*, 17 Apr 1868. According to A



[Figure 2 here: Directors of the Columbus *Männerchor*.]

These singing festivals marked the continuation of an already well-established German tradition. They have been characterized as ‘an inherently male space’, offering both singers and the men in their audiences respectable public venues for happy sociability, beer-drinking, *Gemütlichkeit* and pride in German culture. Christopher Ogburn argues that the societies that organized these assemblies had an inherently defensive aspect at a time when the massive influx of Germans into the U.S. evoked powerful waves of nativism. These singing clubs ‘demonstrated the fraught place of German Americans in the ever-evolving concept of American identity’, yet at the same time they promoted ‘the emergent connection between “Germans” and music.’<sup>29</sup> The *Männerchor* thus served as a support group that afforded a needed sense of community while also projecting a positive public image of German-Americans. For Dresel and other German-born Democrats who had been denounced as virtual traitors, the 1865 *Sängerfest* in Columbus supplied a nearly perfect opportunity to declare their loyalty to the Union in a highly visible way, even as they furthered a much broader task, that of uplifting Americans by means of musical culture.

Indeed as one contemporary noted, among the main public goals Dresel set for himself was ‘the spiritual elevation of the people through song and music.’<sup>30</sup> In the mid-1850s, just as his participation in the *Männerchor* grew busier, he began both playing violin and singing in a group

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*Return to Yesteryear* (above, note 24) he published a music workbook for men’s choruses at Berlin in 1865, but I have found no other record of such a publication.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Inherently male space’: Lorenzkowski, *Sounds of Ethnicity*, 111; Ogburn, ‘Brews, Brotherhood, and Beethoven’, 406. Ogburn focuses on the New York *Sängerfest* held in July, 1865, only a month and a half earlier than the Columbus gathering. According to Ogburn the singing societies were ‘primarily, although not exclusively, all-male groups’; by the 1860s, female and mixed groups began to appear (407, 409).

<sup>30</sup> Rattermann in *Der Deutsche Pionier*, 488.

called the ‘German Quartette Club.’ In 1859 he founded and also began performing with a small orchestra called the ‘De Beriot Club’, named in honour of the Belgian violinist, composer and teacher Charles Auguste De Beriot, which aimed to ‘encourage and cultivate the taste for music and social enjoyment.’ Dresel was evidently the leading member, serving as the ensemble’s permanent president. This group of men seems to have performed most frequently the chamber music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, often at the homes of its members, but notably also at unpaid local events including graduations and fundraisers to benefit various charities.<sup>31</sup> His public concert activities were clearly tied to a sense of social and civic responsibility to his adopted country.

In this regard Dresel exemplified the mid-century influx of Germans who greatly accelerated the spread of their native music in the U.S., not only through performance but through strong advocacy as well.<sup>32</sup> He felt that he shared with other European immigrants – especially those from the German lands – a positive obligation to promote his cultural heritage. In his 1877 speech to the *Pionier Club*, he could hardly have stated more clearly his ambitious sense of mission for German music in the New World:

As far as the German tongue is heard, so too sounds German song. It accompanies us across the sea, it follows us into the Western wilderness. It is the herald of our joy in life, our comforter in suffering and trials; it rejoices with us at our happy feasts and cries with us at the graves of our loved ones. It is the trumpet that knocks down the walls of the Nativist Jericho; it is the bridge over which our German life and character penetrates the American

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<sup>31</sup> Quartette Club concert: *OSJ* 12 Mar 1856. On the De Beriot Club: Rippley, *Columbus Germans*, 15. Rippley also states that for a time in the late 1860s Dresel led a brass band in Columbus, though I have yet to find further evidence to confirm this claim. Graduation concert: *OSJ* 21 Jun 1872.

<sup>32</sup> Zucker, *The Forty-Eighters*, passim.

family. Just look at the past! You'll remember the times when the Americans had no other songs but 'Old Hundred' and 'Yankee Doodle', and no instrument but the banjo. How totally different it is now! The tones of the piano sound in every house; Beethoven and Mozart have become familiar everywhere; Thomas with his chorus moves through the land like a triumphant conqueror! And thus it is that German music has fully penetrated into civic life, that the fingers, the hearing, the taste of the Americans have been so far edified. This is a German accomplishment, of which we may all be rightly proud. And the glorious work that we have begun we must carry on; indeed we must complete it.<sup>33</sup>

Notable here is that in Dresel's eyes the musical traditions and culture of his native land had a crucial role to play both in the realm of family life and in the general progress of American civilization; indeed he depicted these two dimensions as intimately related.

Such declarations represented a phase in the process by which German-Americans came to define their place in American society. According to Kathleen Neils Conzen, through the mid-century decades German immigrants hoped to maintain a separate ethnic identity based on a sense of cultural superiority even as they embraced the melting-pot ideal and disavowed notions of political or social separation.<sup>34</sup> Ogburn succinctly characterizes this outlook common to many educated German-Americans: 'it was the duty of German immigrants to instill 'culture' into their new home while never forgetting their roots'.<sup>35</sup> Conzen sees this ideal already on the wane in the

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<sup>33</sup> Speech to the Pioneer Society, *Der Deutsche Pionier* (above, note 27). The overarching theme of this speech was that 'Germanness' was bound to be integrated positively into 'American national universality'. Here as elsewhere, translations from the German are my own.

<sup>34</sup> Kathleen Neils Conzen, "German-Americans and the Invention of Ethnicity," in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, ed. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 131–47; here 136–7.

<sup>35</sup> Ogburn, 'Brews, Brotherhood, and Beethoven', 432.

years following the Civil War, replaced by a more resigned acceptance of cultural pluralism and a separate ethnic identity. Despite the positive ebullience of his 1877 speech, a number of signs suggest that by the last years of his life Dresel was beginning to lean toward this sort of resignation. As he struggled with mounting pressures and setbacks both personal and professional, he reportedly felt a deepening disillusionment with America.<sup>36</sup> While he left no explicit record of any such change in perspective, in the end his actions may have spoken louder than his words.

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Beneath the busy professional, political, civic and public musical engagements of Dresel's life lay a deeply troubled soul. His life ended suddenly and tragically when on 5 January 1881, he killed himself by a gunshot to the head while alone in his office. His eldest daughter Alma reportedly suffered the trauma of finding the body in a pool of blood. According to several newspaper accounts, he left a note in which he expressed profound despair: 'Here sit I again in my lonely office – I want to think but cannot – weakness of old age, devoid of sense – No business, no task, no friend, no prospect. One thing only remains to me – my family – all, all. My guilt, my guilt. Frightful. Darkness in my head – as if in prison. Air! Air! A . . . .' The news shocked Columbus; many struggled to grasp why this prominent citizen, a husband and father of five – his youngest daughters were only 8 and 12 – would take his own life. A writer for the

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<sup>36</sup> Deepening disillusionment with America: Rattermann in *Der Deutsche Pionier* (above, note 17).

German-language newspaper *Der Westbote*, who knew him well, warned against too-easy moral judgments: ‘Who can solve the puzzles of the human heart?’<sup>37</sup>

Both English- and German-language accounts of his suicide asserted that money troubles were not a major cause of his despair, yet we have evidence to suggest that they did at least play some role.<sup>38</sup> The panic of 1873 had brought on an economic depression that lasted through most of the decade. Otto’s career suffered and never fully rebounded; meanwhile several of his investments collapsed. In 1874 he and Louise vacationed in Germany for several weeks, leaving their children at home; the trip shows all the earmarks of an escape from mounting pressures. His physical health took a rapid downturn in the mid-1870s, further harming his professional life; the fullest account of his demise states that over his last years Dresel ‘had little work to do as a lawyer’.<sup>39</sup> His main effort at published writing, the semi-autobiographical novella *Oscar Welden*, was a near-total failure financially.<sup>40</sup> More direct testimony to money troubles is at hand: in the

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<sup>37</sup> *Der Westbote*, 13 Jan. 1881. ‘Ein erschütternder Fall: Otto Dresel erschießt sich in seiner Office.’ A different translation of the suicide note was printed in the Washington, D.C. *Evening Star*, 8 Jan. 1881.

<sup>38</sup> The 1881 portrait in *Der Deutsche Pionier* stated that even though Dresel retained substantial resources, several failed investments and other financial losses had led him to imagine that he and his family were sinking rapidly into poverty. *Der Westbote*, ‘Ein erschütternder Fall’, reported that ‘Dresel had suffered physically for a long time, and on top of that came a deep depression, a brutal onslaught that drew him into complete despair.’ According to this report he left an estate of \$50,000. The *Evening Star* (8 Jan. 1881) stated that ‘his wife brought him a fortune of \$60,000.’ Both of these claims are uncertain, but it is quite possible that Otto, in the role of breadwinner, was too proud to touch Louise’s inheritance.

<sup>39</sup> The account in *Der Westbote* of January 1881, ‘Ein erschütternder Fall’, indicates Dresel’s dwindling work as an attorney. On the summer trip to Germany see *OSJ*, 24 Apr 1874; 30 Apr 1874; 24 Aug 1874. No reports indicate that any of their children accompanied the couple. The trip was occasioned partly by the lifting of Dresel’s outlaw status following German unification; it may have been financed in part by an inheritance from Louise’s mother, the now widowed Louise Silbernagel, who died in September 1873 (notice in *Der Westbote*, 18 Sep 1873).

<sup>40</sup> *Oscar Welden* (n.p., 1876), available at *Internet Archive*:

<https://archive.org/details/oscarweldenovel00dres/page/n10/mode/2up>. The one surviving book-form copy of this work, held by the Ohio State University Library, is pasted together from pages

spring of 1878 he placed newspaper advertisements in a patently urgent effort to sell his family residence.<sup>41</sup> Yet apparently the home was not in fact sold, and published post-mortem assessments concluded that the financial worries existed more in Otto's mind than in his actual circumstances.<sup>42</sup>

The roots of Dresel's despair appear to have gone far deeper than financial woes, deeper also than the palpable losses and discouragements he and Louise had suffered beginning with the death of their first child, and deeper than the mounting disappointment he reportedly felt about American politics and the nation itself.<sup>43</sup> Already as a young man newly arrived in the U.S., his

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apparently cut out of an edition published by the *New-Yorker Tages-Nachrichten* in the fall of 1876, to which I have not gained direct access. Dresel presented the pasted copy to the Columbus Public Library in March, 1877; see *OSJ*, 26 Mar 1877. The novella follows the revolutionary and romantic exploits of a young law student and political agitator from the town of 'D' (obviously Detmold) in central Germany who escapes capture by the authorities and takes secret passage on a ship to Baltimore to start a new life in the land of freedom, where further adventures unfold. He submitted the work to a novella contest for a German-American literary award sponsored by the Cincinnati *Westliche Blätter (Sonntagsblatt)*; for the announcement see *Der Westbote*, 18 Nov 1875; and for the announcement of the prize see *Der Westbote*, 22 Jun 1876. On 1 April 1876, Dresel wrote a pathetically anxious letter to his friend on the prize committee, H.A. Rattermann, inquiring about his chances of winning, and how soon the prizes—two hundred dollars for first, one hundred for second—would be announced. He did not win. (Heinrich A. Rattermann Collection of German-American Manuscripts, Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign).

<sup>41</sup> Advertisement to sell his house: *OSJ*, 3 and 9 Apr 1878: 'For Sale, Cheap and on Long Time – My modern built family residence, one of the best and finest in the city, No. 38 East Friend street, in first class neighborhood with large lot (63 by 187 ½ feet). Otto Dresel.' The house was located not far from Dresel's office on South High Street in Columbus. Dresel had placed similar ads for the sale of other properties in Columbus in *Der Westbote*, 18 May and 15 Jun 1876. Whether or not Dresel owned these properties is unclear; both were also residences.

<sup>42</sup> See above, note 38.

<sup>43</sup> Perhaps a last straw for him psychologically was the defeat in November, 1880 of Democratic presidential candidate Winfield Scott Hancock, whom Dresel had supported ardently, even composing and publishing an original campaign song for him. His dejection over Hancock's loss was noted by Rattermann in his sketch in *Der Deutsche Pionier* (above, note 17). Dresel's enthusiasm for Hancock's candidacy is evident in the verses and melody he wrote to the song 'With Hancock Union, Liberty!' with a chorus composed by his friend and musical collaborator, the violinist Hermann Eckhardt. This buoyant song was published at Boston in 1880; one

writings showed an unusually morbid streak, as for instance in an 1850 poem titled ‘To Live and To Love’ (*Leben und Lieben*). What is our life, he asked? A restless striving for a shiny nothing.

What is love but a bitter draught of tears? And so,

Where shall I find peace?

Where a gentle slumber,

puts my suffering and grief

to bed in the grave.<sup>44</sup>

Similar expressions of gloom continued into his later years. He wrote that by the mid-1870s life had become a burden to him, ‘because I became a burden to myself and to others’.<sup>45</sup> His 1876 novella *Oscar Welden* concluded forebodingly with the stabbing death of the alter-ego protagonist by a spurned German lover, who then fatally stabs herself. It would not be a hard leap to find here the expression of inescapable, even congenital feelings of sorrow and self-accusation.

According to the *Westbote* writer who reported on his suicide, his depressed state had for several years been ‘quite generally recognized’ by those who knew him. He had long suffered both physically and emotionally, such that he was driven first to melancholy, then to utter despair. Meanwhile ‘he withdrew, perhaps misguidedly, from all public engagements, and sought distraction and comfort only in his family, who showed the greatest love for him.’ Most

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wonders whether confusion arose over Dresel’s authorship, since the well-known Boston Dresel also regularly published music with Ditson (see Dresel, ‘With Hancock Union, Liberty’, Boston: Ditson & Co., 1880, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1880.12896/>).

<sup>44</sup> I have found only one published version of this poem: See ‘Leben und Lieben’ in *Der Deutsche Pionier: Erinnerungen aus dem Pionier-Leben der Deutschen in Amerika*, Vol. 14 (Cincinnati: Deutsche Pionier Verein, 1882–83), 122.

<sup>45</sup> See the Rattermann biographical sketch in *Der Deutsche Pionier* 13 (above, note 17), 489.

significantly for our purposes, the same source reported that he had ‘pursued music within his family with great pleasure’; indeed ‘music was the only means that could raise him out of his melancholy brooding.’<sup>46</sup> In the end, not even the harmonies of home and loved ones could save him from a crushing sense of sorrow, failure and guilt. But through the decade of the 1870s, amid mounting disappointments, declining health, and the fading of his faith in America, his domestic world would grow more crucial as his main source of emotional comfort.

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Our volumes by themselves leave no doubt that in addition to his many involvements outside the home, Otto encouraged and took frequent part in domestic performances, playing music for violin with piano accompaniment and no doubt singing with his family as well. His wife Louise seems to have shown considerable keyboard proficiency, and almost certainly played often as accompanist to her husband’s violin. Like Otto, Louise was also a singer, most likely a soprano; in light of Otto’s own obvious love of vocal music and the evidence to be explored in the family volumes, we can presume that her gifts as a vocalist were likewise far from minor. Although we have no concrete evidence that Louise ever had formal training, it is obvious that both husband and wife had been raised in families that exposed them to extensive lessons, and they clearly wished the same for their own children. It is also more than probable

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<sup>46</sup> *Der Westbote*, ‘Ein erschütternder Fall’. The report stated that four years earlier (in 1876 or 1877) Dresel returned physically ill from a trip ‘to the South’ and had never recovered; the illness had been one cause of the depression that ended in suicide. According to the Rattermann sketch, however (above, note 17), his physical decline began with his 1874 trip to Germany with his wife. Notably, I have found no evidence of his direct participation in public concerts or the *Männerchor* after the early 1870s. The latter group did sing at his burial service, at which the Masons presided: *Westliche Blätter*, 9 Jan. 1881.



that the two played together before they were married; such activity was warmly encouraged for courting couples in this era.<sup>47</sup>

Otto sought out serious musical instruction for his surviving son Herman, and found it in the person of ‘Professor’ Hermann Eckhardt, a fellow Forty-Eighter and violinist who had played under no less a figure than Richard Wagner in Germany, then briefly with the Germania Orchestra in the U.S. as well as with the other, far more renowned Otto Dresel in Boston before landing in Columbus.<sup>48</sup> Herman played in a string quartet comprised of the sons of members of his father’s ensemble, the De Beriot Club, and with this and other groups he sometimes performed at public occasions. We can fairly surmise that as the eldest living child he took frequent part in family music-making as well.<sup>49</sup> Herman’s next sibling, Alma, was born around 1863 and as a young adolescent had already emerged as quite an accomplished pianist; she would later perform at her high-school graduation. Clara too would become admired as a pianist and vocalist. The youngest of the sisters, Marie Louise (affectionately known as ‘Lulu’), took up

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<sup>47</sup> In a volume of piano accompaniments, at the bottom of the first page of the overture to Boieldieu’s *Le Calife de Bagdad*—a light and pleasant work – someone has pencilled in ‘Miss Louise – x’. Was this score a gift, perhaps one among several, from her suitor? Friends and family regularly gave each other gifts of sheet music, which could serve as powerful symbols of shared memories. On music in nineteenth-century American courtship and sheet music gift-giving, see Stafford, ‘Binders’ Volumes’, 74–82. In the volume containing Otto’s violin parts, a handwritten note on the score of *La Melancolie* by Prume reads: ‘Vous êtes une bonne chanteuse. Adieu Louise’. The awkward, formal use of French could be the expression of a young man who played music with her, heard her sing, and left a romantic inscription. In this case, though, a more poignant speculation might look to a connection with Otto’s suicide.

<sup>48</sup> In Columbus, Eckhardt directed the *Männerchor* and taught music lessons in the 1870s and 1880s. See *Grove Music Online*, ‘Eckhardt, Hermann’.

<sup>49</sup> At age 14, Herman played in a quartet for the 1872 Commencement at Columbus High School; a reporter wrote that ‘these young gentlemen are especial pupils of Professor Eckhardt, and have acquired such a thorough instrumental skill that competent musical critics are most enthusiastic over them.’ (*OSJ* 21 Jun 1872). In March 1876 he played a violin duet by Kalliwoda with Eckhardt’s son, and also in a Haydn quartet, in a ‘Grand Concert’ to aid the poor of Columbus. (*OSJ*, 29 Mar 1876).

the violin rather than piano, an openly progressive step at a time when the traditional taboo against female string players was only beginning to loosen; in fact she would be later noted as a highly accomplished player who performed in high-profile concerts. While evidence regarding the musical activities of daughter Flora has thus far remained elusive, it is clear that the Dresel home was rich in aptitude as well as demonstrated musical talent.<sup>50</sup>

Of the five family volumes in question, two are identified as Otto's, two as Louise's, and one as daughter Alma's. As a violinist, son Herman must have had his own set of scores, but our set includes nothing from him or from the younger children. Unfortunately as well, we do not know just when or even how the various scores were obtained, but they were most probably purchased singly or in smaller sets during the later 1860s and the early- to mid-1870s. Most were from German or other European musical publishers, and some may have been ordered directly from those firms. But many would have been available through American outlets, including several much-advertised music shops in the City of Columbus; indeed a number of pieces carry stamps identifying two major local music dealers. All of the volumes appear to have been bound at the Dresels' request by the same Columbus bookbinder, possibly at different times but in no

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<sup>50</sup> Alma Dresel's high school graduation is documented in *Der Westbote*, 9 Jun 1881. References to violin performances by Marie Louise ('Lulu') are found in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of 7 Jun 1891, 21 Mar 1891, 17 Jan 1892, and 7 Jul 1895. *The Union County Journal* of 28 Jan 1897 records that Marie Louise performed a violin solo in a high-profile concert in which the main attraction was the Dutch piano virtuoso Martinus Sieveking. Marie Louise also lived in and performed at several functions in Asheville, NC according to multiple issues of the *Asheville Citizen-Times* and the *Asheville Semi-Weekly Citizen* (Asheville, NC) in April and August of 1898. On Clara as pianist and vocalist, see the *Cambridge Chronicle* (Cambridge, MA) of 17 Aug 1895, which mentions Clara and her sister Marie Louise as performers in an evening of entertainment at Annisquam, near Gloucester, MA (Louise and these two daughters had relocated to Boston for a time after their return from Europe, in the 1880s or 1890s). Christina Bashford asserts that in Britain, 'the cultural taboo on women playing stringed instruments' was beginning to wane by the 1870s. 'Historiography and Invisible Musics', 304n.

case later than the mid-1870s.<sup>51</sup> Having them formally bound was itself a clear statement of the family's investment in its music.

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Otto's two albums form a twin set and constitute quite a rarity among nineteenth-century American binders' volumes: they were compiled by a man, and rather than songs and piano music, they contain music for violin with piano accompaniment.<sup>52</sup> One volume includes the violin parts; the name 'Otto Dresel' appears on the first sheet of nearly all these scores. The other is made up of the corresponding piano accompaniments. On the inside front cover of the book of violin parts, 'Feb 16, 1872' is written in pencil; this inscription provides our best evidence of the date Otto's volumes were bound. Seventeen composers are represented altogether. Although it is difficult to tell when the editions included here were issued, all of these works were originally published in the 1840s or earlier. A number of the scores are well-thumbed and were evidently used frequently. Several of the violin parts were marked up, presumably by Dresel himself, to indicate fingerings, bowings, and other points of technique and emphasis. We can be virtually

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<sup>51</sup> Several of Alma's and Louise's pieces, in particular, are stamped 'A. Barr & Co.', a 'dealer in pianos, melodeons, and musical merchandise' in Columbus. The Dresels also patronized John Seltzer's music store, and possibly those of Penniman and J.C. Woods, all of which operated in Columbus during the Dresels' residence there. More of Alma's scores than of Otto's or Louises's were also issued by American publishers, possibly an indication that they were purchased later. Among the German sales outlets (as opposed to publishers) identified on title pages are the firms of F. Müller, Friedrichshafen, and C.F. Peters, Leipzig. The bookbinder of Otto's volumes is identified as M.C. Lilley of Columbus, who probably bound all five volumes.

<sup>52</sup> The vast majority of extant binders' volumes were compiled by women; scholars have posited a variety of theories as to why this was so. Stafford notes that only three percent of the volumes in the Library of Congress collection whose owners were identifiable had belonged to men (Stafford, 'Binders' Volumes', 42–43). Binders' volumes compiled by men are much more likely to contain music for a solo instrument, such as flute, violin, or guitar, and accompaniment; Otto's volumes represent an example of this tendency.

certain that the volume with piano parts was mainly for the engagement of Louise as accompanist, but it might also have been used by Alma as her skills advanced through the 1870s.

The set of composers and works represented in Dresel's collection reflect a typical middle-class aesthetic of the mid-nineteenth century, though one reflecting a pronounced European, especially German bias. The selections show a broad internationalism and eclecticism of taste, from German abstract instrumental works to fantasies and potpourris on Italian and French operas. A majority of the pieces are arrangements from opera for violin and piano, and thus nicely suited to home recitals by husband and wife, father and daughter, or brother and sister. One is the overture to *Le Calife de Bagdad* by the French composer Francois-Adrien Boieldieu, while the rest are adapted from works of the first half of the century by Donizetti, Bellini, Rossini, Auber, Meyerbeer, Flotow and Spohr. Dresel's operatic selections demonstrate that the melodies of opera pervaded nineteenth-century instrumental music to an extent we have trouble appreciating today.<sup>53</sup>

The most extensive of these operatic selections were sourced from the Bohemian composer Leopold Jansa's Op. 60, *Der Junge Opernfreund*. These pieces, which Otto labeled 'selected melodies' in a handwritten table of contents, were first published in the 1840s; they enjoyed the height of their European currency through the middle years of the century. Jansa's Op. 60 comprises melodies or variations on selections from thirty-two operas, but in Dresel's

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<sup>53</sup> Scholars have long recognized the cultural prominence and popularity of opera – including its adaptation for home performance – throughout the nineteenth century. Katherine K. Preston, for example, has drawn attention to the growing public knowledge of and thirst for opera through her studies of the opera troupes that travelled the United States through the mid-century decades, as well as English-language opera performance in late-nineteenth-century America. See Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) and Preston, *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

collection only five appear: Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, *Belisario* and *La fille du regiment*, Flotow's *Alessandro Stradella* and Bellini's *Sonnambula*. Such works typified the music that had most likely surrounded and shaped Dresel during his adolescence and young adulthood. Flotow's *Stradella*, the only one of these five by a non-Italian, had become an especial favorite in the German lands, where Otto had undoubtedly heard it performed or at least heard some of its more famous passages in arrangements.<sup>54</sup> The Jansa selections thus represented the quite deliberate importation of popular pieces Dresel had already known well in his youth.<sup>55</sup> Playing them privately in the 1870s was to some extent a self-indulgent exercise in nostalgia for him—a nostalgia that he could indulge with minimal restraint at home.

As fond as he may have been of these pleasing adapted melodies, however, Dresel gave overall priority to original works for violin that were of a generally more sombre character – in some cases emphatically more. These were by nineteenth-century composers who achieved renown in their own time but in most cases suffer near-total oblivion in today's performance repertory. The first scores in the volume are the 'Elegie' by the Moravian-Jewish violinist Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst (1812–1865), and 'La Mélancolie' by the Belgian François Prume (1816–1849). These are followed by the 'Sonate Op. 12, No. 2' by the German Friedrich Wilhelm Kücken (1810–1881); farther along in the order are an 'Air Varié, No 7' by the Belgian

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<sup>54</sup> Notably, although excerpts from Flotow's *Stradella* were popular in American public concerts (especially those of German singing societies) throughout the latter half of the century, they appear extremely rarely in binders' volumes. Of some 32,000 individual pieces of sheet music in the Library of Congress and Carbonell binders' volumes collections, there are a total of only eight works based on excerpts from Flotow's *Alessandro Stradella*. Flotow's opera *Martha* apparently proved much more popular among American sheet music collectors.

<sup>55</sup> While Dresel had heard and perhaps played these compositions as a young man, it is less than plausible to imagine him bringing the scores to the United States as a stow-away in 1849. He almost certainly purchased them later through sheet music outlets in the U.S. or Europe.

Charles de Bériot (1802–1870), and the ‘Rondo Concertant’ Op 50 by the German Aloys Schmitt (1788–1866).<sup>56</sup> Dresel’s favourite work in the entire volume seems to have been Ernst’s ‘Elegie’, judging by its prominent opening placement in the volume, the well-worn paper, and the number of markings on the music. This piece, to be played ‘Adagio melancolico ed appassionato’, calls for uncommon musical sensitivity and technical prowess. Several passages require the performer to shift suddenly into sixth position, high on the fingerboard. Perhaps most impressively, an eight-measure passage includes notoriously difficult consecutive double stops of thirds, sixths and octaves.<sup>57</sup>

Already an advanced violinist when he came to America, Otto clearly continued to practice, indeed to challenge himself, throughout his life. His love of his instrument was passionate. In an essay of 1877 he extolled the violin as ‘the soul of the orchestra, which with its strong, lovely sound competes with the human voice better than any other instrument, and is able to express the most secret feelings and moods of the heart.’ Revealing his own aspirations to technical mastery, he proudly purchased his own violins from the German-American luthier Georg Gemünder, whom he ranked alongside the greats of Cremona.<sup>58</sup> The priority he gave to a daunting composition such as Ernst’s *Elegie* was undoubtedly a reflection of this same ambition. Indeed though the 1840s and 1850s Ernst was widely regarded as among the greatest performers in Europe and a worthy heir to Paganini, who had died in 1840; he was thus a model whom any gifted amateur violinist might have sought to emulate.

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<sup>56</sup> An exception to the ‘near total oblivion’ is De Bériot, whose works are still relatively popular among violinists.

<sup>57</sup> Ernst’s *Elegie* was taken from a three-piece set by the composer: ‘Trois Morceaux de Salon pour le Violon avec Accomp. de Piano’ (Leipzig, n.d.), a point that underlines Dresel’s selectivity in putting together his volume.

<sup>58</sup> Otto Dresel, ‘Deutsch-Amerikanische Künstler: Georg Gemünder und Gemünder-Geigen’ in *Der Westbote*, 15 Feb. 1877; reprinted in *Der Deutsche Pionier* 9 (1877–78), 84–89.

Yet while Dresel evidently loved playing and took personal pride in his instrument and his skill, he was not a professional musician and he showed no desire to be judged by such a standard. Evidently the works he gathered for his personal album were ones that he loved and wished to practice at home, without risking comparison with artists who performed regularly for the public. His choices were no doubt guided partly by his desire to play with his wife's or daughters' accompaniment, yet in this regard the available possibilities were nearly endless. Again it was above all his close identification with the music of his own past that shaped his collection. Ernst, Kücken, Schmitt and the others in this group were all at least half a generation older than Dresel, and all had flourished during his formative years. Together with operatic works such as those in Jansa's collection, pieces by these composers allowed Dresel to revel in the music he associated with his youth in Germany, which might help him escape from the depressing realities and experiences that checkered his life in the 1860s and 70s.

[Figure 3 here: Handwritten cover sheet for Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's 'Elegie' in Otto Dresel's volume of violin parts.]

Dresel's prominent choices suggest even deeper needs than a nostalgic longing for escape. Ernst's *Elegie* was described by a contemporary critic as a piece 'full of the purest, deepest soul-suffering' (Seelenschmerz).<sup>59</sup> In 1859, recognising the work's power and popularity, the German-American writer and Forty-Eighter Otto Rupprius sketched a tragic if probably fanciful story of the 'origin' of the *Elegie*, involving the heart-wrenching death of the composer's young beloved. In any case, commentators clearly understood the work to reflect a profound grief.<sup>60</sup> Prume's 'La Mélancolie', which came next in the volume, is a somewhat less

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<sup>59</sup> F. Wiest, 'Concert-Briefe aus Wien', in *Der Wanderer* (Vienna, 1844), Bd. 2, 1171–72.

<sup>60</sup> Rupprius's story about the origins of Ernst's *Elegie* may have appeared first in 1859 in the Leipzig music journal *Signale für die Musikalische Welt* (No. 27, 9 Jun, 289–291). Later the

heavy but nonetheless doleful tune.<sup>61</sup> As we noted earlier, Otto and Louise lost their first child, the young Otto, at the age of four in 1860. The effects of this personal and familial tragedy were unlikely to have been lessened by the subsequent years of civil bloodshed, when Dresel became embroiled in vicious political battles in which he was publicly denounced in exceedingly abusive terms, and which drove him out of public office. We have seen that the decade of the 1870s brought further troubles, including a faltering career and serious financial worries. All this together with evidence suggesting a strong congenital leaning to depression helps explain why his home and family would become more and more a refuge for him. While Otto's participation in and promotion of the Columbus *Männerchor* and other singing groups stressed patriotism, German cultural pride, fraternal warmth and *bonhomie*, and while his string ensemble aimed to cultivate musical appreciation in his community, the music he played privately at home with his wife and children likely provided one of his few ways of expressing a profound and abiding sadness, even as it offered personal comfort.

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This impression gains weight when we explore the two volumes belonging to Dresel's wife Louise, the most substantial and in some ways the most personalized books of the five in our set. The cover of the first is emblazoned with 'Louise Dresel' in gold lettering; the second carries an even more prominent and elegant name plate: 'Mrs. L. Dresel'. The size and relatively

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story appeared in several other publications, including Schirmer's 1895 edition of the *Elegie*. See Mark Rowe, *Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst: Virtuoso Violinist* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 40–42.

<sup>61</sup> Although Prume was an extremely precocious and talented violinist, his early death at age 33 made him a short-lived sensation. He attended the Royal Conservatory of Liège and the Paris Conservatory, was appointed as a violin instructor at Liège at age 17, and gave a concert tour in central Europe, Scandinavia, and Russia in 1839 (when Otto was in his mid-teens). Otto most likely became familiar with Prume around 1840, when his most famous piece, *La Mélancolie*, was published.



elaborate character of these volumes reflect Louise's status in the nineteenth-century gender hierarchy. Her roles as wife and mother made her the anchor of the domestic sphere, and probably ensured her involvement in most if not all household performances. Moreover, as a woman confined mainly to the home, she undoubtedly considered music a primary, indeed essential emotional and creative outlet. Much unlike her husband, she probably never performed publicly, although she may have played and sung at least occasionally for friends and visitors. Notably, though she was American-born she seems to have had no interest at all in American composers, and in fact seems to have eschewed them entirely. Her volumes consist entirely of European vocal music along with pieces for piano by German and Italian composers, several of which would have demanded no little talent and practice, both vocal and instrumental.<sup>62</sup> We cannot know whether or how far her choices were influenced by her husband; indeed, the likely strength of Otto's influence as *paterfamilias* should not be overlooked. But in general Louise's collections reflect considerable musical independence and sophistication. She evidently saw herself as capable of meeting the demands and capturing the subtleties of the most highly regarded exemplars of the European art song tradition.

[Figure 4 here: Front cover of one of Louise Dresel's two volumes.]

Louise's tastes, much like Otto's, were varied. She obviously enjoyed opera arias and popular songs, which make up the bulk of the music in her first volume. In this gathering of forty-two pieces, many of which are specific choices taken from larger published assemblages, the vast majority are by German composers, although selections from Italian opera are sprinkled

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<sup>62</sup> Louise did not, for instance, collect any songs by Stephen Foster despite their enormous popularity. By contrast, nearly two-thirds of the binders' volumes in the Library of Congress collection from after 1850 included at least one song by Stephen Foster, and at least half of the volumes in the Carbonell collection bound after 1850 contained at least one song by Foster.

throughout. The latter include adaptations of famous arias from Verdi's *Ernani*, as well as Donizetti's *La Favorita*, *Don Pasquale* and *Lucretia Borgia*. The German composers represented here are rarely performed today; they include Franz Abt, Carl Krebs, Wilhelm Speier, Carl Keller and Carl Reissiger, among many others. Louise seems to have been especially partial to the music of the prolific F.W. Kücken, one of whose sonatas we found in Otto's volumes. Kücken's music tends toward the highly sentimental, with titles such as 'Dearest Sweetheart' and 'Gently Rest'. He is known today mostly for having claimed authorship of the song 'Ach, wie ist's möglich dann' ('Ah, how is it possible?'), a tuneful ballad popularized throughout the modern West in the twentieth century by Marlene Dietrich, and recorded in 1926 by the Austrian tenor Richard Tauber.<sup>63</sup> Other German songs in Louise's collection, such as 'Lovely Smiles the Golden Morning' by Carl Keller, 'Home' by Abt and 'Die Heimath' by Krebs, are redolent with this often saccharine style. Two of these selections came from a series of songbooks called 'Gems from the German', which also included works by Mendelssohn, Haydn and Weber along with many others, and proved popular among buyers of sheet music around mid-century.<sup>64</sup> Louise's aspirations as a pianist are evident here as well. Of the forty-two selections in this

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<sup>63</sup> Five works by Kücken were included here, more than any other composer. Kücken worked in several German venues, including Berlin, Stuttgart and Schwerin (at the court of Grand Duke Paul Friedrich of Mecklenburg-Schwerin), and was 'at one time an extraordinarily popular composer among the masses of the public, though never greatly esteemed by musicians.' At the time of his death, a rather severe critic wrote that most of his works 'are now forgotten, and even as a songwriter he may be said to have survived his reputation.' 'Musical Gossip,' *The Athanaeum* (15 Apr 1882), 483. Although Kücken's music was quite well-represented in public concerts in the United States, his works appear only sixty times out of the nearly 33,000 songs in the Library of Congress and Carbonell binders' volumes collections.

<sup>64</sup> Louise's copies in this volume of Abt's 'Now the Swallows are Returning' and Schubert's 'Der Erlkönig' were sourced from the 'Gems from the German' series, which was published variously by S.T. Gordon (New York) and Oliver Ditson (Boston). A similar series, 'Gems from German Song', was published by F.D. Benteen in Baltimore and W.T. Mayo in New Orleans. Not coincidentally, both of these series began publication in the early 1850s, just as the wave of German immigrants fleeing the 1848–49 revolutions was reaching a peak.

volume, eight are works for piano, including arrangements for four hands of the famous variations on ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ by Henri Herz, a theme from *Sonnambula* by Bellini, and – far from least notably – Beethoven’s lugubrious ‘Marche Funebre’.

Ten of the pieces in this volume are not published editions, but manuscript scores in at least four different hands. Louise may have received some of these manuscripts as gifts from friends in her community, or she may have produced them herself in Columbus. Possibly Louise or Otto copied several of them, or had them copied, during the couple’s time in Germany in 1874. Seven of the handwritten scores are bound consecutively and are in the same hand. None of these seven songs appeared frequently in American binder’s volumes, most likely because published versions were not easily available in the U.S. All but one of the identifiable songs are in German and by a German composer; here again the complete absence of American compositions is notable.<sup>65</sup> It is also worth noting that at least four of these handwritten scores are songs intended for male voice; whoever took the time to write them out no doubt envisioned Louise accompanying her husband on the piano while he sang.

Two interrelated themes come to the forefront when we survey Louise’s songs in this volume as a group. First, nearly three-quarters of the composers in the volume are German; the other quarter mostly Italian and French. A large proportion of the German works are either folk songs closely associated with German culture, or songs expressing yearning for one’s native land. For example, Louise chose to include Abt’s ‘Home’ in an edition bearing both German and English lyrics that describe the home country as a ‘parent land’, the ‘nurse of all our kindred band’. Similar songs in this volume include Carl Krebs’s ‘Die Heimath’, whose lyrics praise the

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<sup>65</sup> The single manuscript by a non-German composer—‘Love Smiles No More’ by the Swede Isak Berg, a song popularized by Jenny Lind—appears only once in the Carbonell binders’ volumes collection, and not at all in the Library of Congress collection.

beauty of the homeland; and Krebs's 'Der Deutsche Rhein', part of a wave of patriotic *Rheinlieder* composed in 1840 after the French threatened to annex all German territories west of the Rhine.<sup>66</sup> While Louise was American-born, her selections attest to her staunch identification with the German heritage and community that surrounded her, at the centre of which stood her husband and family. But we have no evidence that Louise had ever been abroad before her 1874 trip with Otto, and her physical separation from an ancestral land only dreamed of or briefly visited may have evoked or reinforced a forlorn sense of displacement and alienation in her. Indeed the lyrics of several others of her German songs, such as Reissiger's 'Zigeunerknabe im Norden' and Kalliwoda's 'Zigeunerlied', use the archetype of the perpetually wandering gypsy to express the despair of exile and homelessness.<sup>67</sup>

Second, a significant number of the songs in this volume show strikingly woeful lyrics. 'Love Not!', by the British composer John Blockley on a poem by British poet Caroline Norton, warns hearers never to love another, lest the beloved should change or die. Conradin Kreutzer set Johann Ludwig Uhland's 'Die Vätergruft', a poem describing a knight who has entered a dark chapel to lie down in a crypt and join his dead ancestors. Karl Curschmann's heart-rending 'Der Schiffer fährt zu Land' sets a text by the celebrated poet Friedrich Rückert; here a ship captain comes ashore anxious to marry his betrothed, only to realize that the bells he hears convey that

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<sup>66</sup> Krebs set his own poem for 'Die Heimath' and a poem by Nikolaus Becker for 'Der Deutsche Rhein'. On the role of music in the 'Rhine Crisis' of 1840, see Lorie A. Vanchena, 'The Rhine Crisis of 1840: *Rheinlieder*, German Nationalism, and the Masses', in *Searching for Common Ground: Diskurse zur deutschen Identität 1750–1871* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2000), 239–51.

<sup>67</sup> Reissiger's 'Zigeunerknabe im Norden'—alternately titled 'Fern im Süd das schöne Spanien'—sets music to a text by Emanuel von Giebel, while Kalliwoda's 'Zigeunerlied' uses a text by the German dramatist Joseph von Auffenberg. 'Zigeunerknabe' ('Gypsy boy') is sometimes rendered as the more colloquial 'Zigeunerbube'.

she has either died or married another.<sup>68</sup> These latter two pieces were among the handwritten scores included in Louise's volume. That so many of the songs she selected present such somber lyrical content suggests that much like her husband, she found in private family music-making a vehicle for emotional or even mournful release, as well as for intimate exchange.

The larger of Louise's two volumes is devoted exclusively to *Lieder* and *Ballades* by Schubert, poems set to music for one voice and piano accompaniment. These pieces were not individually chosen by Louise herself; rather they comprised the first three volumes of a six-volume set – advertised as the first 'complete and authentic edition' of Schubert's works – published by Ludwig Holle at Wolfenbüttel during the late 1860s or early 1870s.<sup>69</sup> The production is impressive, easy to read, and includes both the original German lyrics and French translations for most but not all songs. 'Mrs. L. Dresel' appears again in handwritten form at the bottom of the opening title page. Each of the three Holle volumes includes a table of contents in which someone, presumably Louise herself, has underlined a number of titles; most of these same titles also appear handwritten on a lined sheet bound among the volume's opening leaves. The underlined titles correspond fairly closely with thirty-six individual scores clearly identified

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<sup>68</sup> Blockley and Norton's original version 'Love Not' appears only once in the Library of Congress binders' volumes collection. The LoC collection contains an arrangement by Edward White called the 'Love Not Quick Step' (several other composers arranged the work under this title) as well as an 'answer song', Richard Clarkson's 'Love Now: Oh Life is Too Short to be Wasted'. The compelling text of 'Die Vätergruft' was set by many other composers, including Franz Liszt.

<sup>69</sup> *Franz Schubert's Sämtliche Compositionen. I (II, III) Band. Lieder, Gesänge und Balladen* (Wolfenbüttel, ca. 1860). Altogether the three volumes were made up of 37 'Hefte', or sets that could be purchased separately. On this edition in relation to other publications of Schubert's works, see Walther Dürr, Michael Kube, and Michael Raab, 'Vom Erlafsee zur Gesamtausgabe. Die Ausgaben der Werke Franz Schuberts', in *Musikeditionen im Wandel der Geschichte*, Reinmar Emans and Ulrich Krämer, eds (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 431–456; here 442. Holle's edition was published at Wolfenbüttel but sold by agents in London, New York, and Paris.

with one, two, or three large pencilled 'X' marks. Since the three Schubert volumes that make up this collection include well over 200 songs, these marks represent meaningful discriminations.

Perhaps surprisingly, Schubert's works were rarely included in binders' volumes of the period. German art songs of this strain, which often proved challenging to amateur performers, were evidently not among the parlor pieces for which collectors typically showed a preference.<sup>70</sup> More relevant here is that even in light of that era's culture of emotional overflow, a striking number of the *Lieder* specially identified by Louise, above all those with two or three 'X' marks, are songs with verses of a decidedly mournful character. Louise highlighted relatively few of the many feeling-filled poems about faith, adventure, the beauty of nature, or frustrated love; rather the prevailing theme was death, and often the loss of a loved one. While their verses were taken from a wide variety of Romantic-era authors, *Lieder* such as 'Gretchen am Spinnrade', 'Der Unglückliche', 'Klagelied', 'Der Tod und das Mädchen', 'Der Wanderer', 'Im Haine', 'Die Junge Nonne', and 'Des Mädchens Klage' shared a tone of deep bereavement, even graveside pathos. Von Meyerhofer's 'Schummerlied' offers sadly suggestive words about a boy borne away by nature and the 'god of dreams'. 'Sei mir gegrüsst', with verses by Friedrich Rückert, is a heartrending call to a dead child:

You who were bestowed on this heart by the hand of love,

you who were taken from my breast!

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<sup>70</sup> According to Candace Bailey, one 'would have to look through hundreds of binder's volumes to find Schubert, and even then it would be limited to a few isolated favorites, particularly "The Erlking"' ('Reconstructing Women by Reconstructing Repertory: Changes in Southern Women's Music Literature after 1865', presentation given at the 2015 meeting of the Southern American Studies Association[...], *Academia.edu*:

[https://www.academia.edu/11602285/Reconstructing\\_Women\\_by\\_Reconstructing\\_Repertory\\_Changes\\_in\\_Southern\\_Women\\_s\\_Music\\_Literature\\_after\\_1865](https://www.academia.edu/11602285/Reconstructing_Women_by_Reconstructing_Repertory_Changes_in_Southern_Women_s_Music_Literature_after_1865).

With this flood of tears

I greet you! I kiss you!<sup>71</sup>

And it surely bears noting that Louise's clearly marked selections in this published collection include one piece that she also chose for her first volume, namely Schubert's setting of Goethe's 'Der Erlkönig'. Perhaps not coincidentally, the top-right corner of the first page of the 'Erlkönig' score is folded in, the only such case in this large volume. Although other circumstantial evidence about Louise's life is scarce, we have reasons to suspect that her choices reflected feelings of grief shared with her husband: perhaps first and foremost the inescapable sorrow of having lost her first child at the age of four: '*das Kind war tot.*'

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Biographical records on the surviving Dresel children are barely less patchy than those we have for Louise. But from Alma we have a personal sheet music collection that can give us a fuller picture than we might otherwise possess, at least in regard to her teenage years. Her volume appears to have been bound when she was around thirteen or fourteen years old: to gather together the separate scores, the bookbinder created a spine from the *Ohio State Journal* dated 26 October 1876. As with Louise's volumes, the young musician's name adorns the front cover in gold lettering. Along with the character of several of the included selections, this sort of personalized identification implies a role for Alma's own preferences in compiling the collection. But other features of the assemblage suggest that her parents or an instructor may have been involved as well; instructional studies and technical exercises represent a significant

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<sup>71</sup> Friedrich Rückert, 'Sei mir gegrüsst'. Translation by Richard Wigmore. *Oxford Lieder*. <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2448>

portion of Alma's sheet music. While it is possible that Louise was her main or even her only teacher, the presence of these exercises makes it more probable that like her older brother Herman, she was assigned to formal lessons.

The exercises include several by the industrious German composer of student works Heinrich Lichner, as well as long sets of studies by Carl Czerny. Of the five such instructional series in Alma's volume, at least three have numerous fingerings and other markings written in, suggesting that the young woman showed dedication to improving her keyboard technique. Original works for piano include pieces by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the Welshman Henry Brinley Richards, the Dane Friedrich Kuhlau, and Germans Heinrich Lichner and Beethoven. Each of these scores except the Beethoven include extensive pencilled markings, which reinforce our sense that Alma pursued serious technical ambitions. In this regard, Alma's inclusion of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 31 no. 3 ('The Hunt') is particularly significant; this work requires considerable technical prowess. Whereas countless other binders' volumes belonging to young women included waltzes and other light works intended for amateurs and sometimes (usually speciously) attributed to Beethoven, Alma's volume contains an original composition by Beethoven intended for his own virtuosic performance.<sup>72</sup>

The works by Gottschalk, Richards and Lichner, among others, carry vividly illustrative titles, and would have appealed to many girls and young women of Alma's generation who were steeped in idealized Victorian imagery. The first piece in the volume, *The Dying Poet*, is a highly sentimental work by Gottschalk, the only American composer we find in any of the Dresel

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<sup>72</sup> For example, in the Library of Congress collection, works attributed to Beethoven appear only thirteen times, and five of these are 'Gertrude's Dream Waltz', a work first published in the U.S. in 1854 and most certainly not by Beethoven. The Carbonell collection contains 14 copies of 'Gertrude's Dream Waltz' as well as numerous other waltzes misattributed to Beethoven.



family's collections. This meditation was performed in public to great success in the 1860s and afterwards, and the placement of this work with marked fingerings and articulations at the very start of the collection argues for Alma's awareness of and participation in popular musical trends in the United States. Significantly, however, her copy of *The Dying Poet* is of the original work, not an arrangement intended for amateurs, of which many were produced.<sup>73</sup> Especially in this version, *The Dying Poet* very rarely appeared in contemporary binders' volumes; this was no score for amateur entertainment. Mastering this piece allowed her to liken herself to the most famous pianist in the Americas at the time, and to demonstrate her ability to play his virtuosic music. Alma's choice to include the work in her album thus points both to her seriousness as a musician and to her identification with the work's strongly emotional aspect.

[Figure 5 here: Alma Dresel's copy of Gottschalk's *The Dying Poet*]

Along with several of Alma's other selections, this piece also echoes the suggestions of mournfulness in the collections of her parents; had the daughter inherited from them, or absorbed, a general familial sadness? Again, we might view *The Dying Poet* as an entirely typical expression of the Victorian sentimentalism that pervaded the literature and parlor music of this period, a sentimentalism that many contemporaries thought especially appropriate for women and girls. Yet in light of the personal tragedy and troubles Otto and Louise had endured, as well as the nature of their collections and other circumstantial traces of the family culture, it was arguably no accident that Alma gave priority to a composition of such pronounced

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<sup>73</sup> S. Frederick Starr writes that 'those who wanted to play works like *The Dying Poet* but could not handle the intricacies of Gottschalk's style could buy simplified versions, which were issued in great numbers'. *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 444.

melancholy.<sup>74</sup> Among the other selections that she placed early in her volume is an adaptation of an aria from Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix*, an operatic tale of a young woman who is saved from madness by music.<sup>75</sup>

Was Alma thus the family's 'girl at the piano', the adolescent daughter who bore disproportionate weight in the musical as well as emotional life of the home? While we have no direct indication that she became the key musical figure in the household, we certainly have some signs of her valued role; her evident serious practice, technical facility, and ability to accompany a soloist must have pleased her parents. And when considered alongside the musical choices of both Otto and Louise, the prominence Alma afforded works such as *The Dying Poet* speaks to her active participation in a home environment shaded by pathos. If she was not the main vessel for family musical catharsis, she was at least an important one. As some final biographical details will help to show, neither she nor her siblings were likely to have remained untouched by a deep current of familial sadness.

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<sup>74</sup> Laura Moore Pruett dedicates an entire article to Gottschalk's *The Dying Poet*, arguing that although the work 'was one of his most popular and lucrative pieces', it was composed at a time when Gottschalk was suffering from 'discontent and melancholy' and thus reflects 'a poignant paradox'. See Pruett, "'Mon triste voyage": Sentimentality and Autobiography in Gottschalk's *The Dying Poet*,' *19th-Century Music* 36, no. 2 (2012): 146–158; here 157.

<sup>75</sup> Arrangements of excerpts from *Linda di Chamounix* are found quite rarely in binders' volumes: only about seven percent of volume owners in the Library of Congress collection, and in two percent of volume owners in the Carbonell collection.

The Dresels left to posterity at least one other musical memento, one that had its origins in an intimate family moment. In 1877, Otto published ‘Little Clara’s Song’, a very short work of only nineteen measures for treble voice with piano.<sup>76</sup> On the title page he credited his young daughter with the melody. A brief explanatory note appears directly above the score:

During the brief absence of her parents, little Clara, but six years old, composed this air. Sitting in her chair rocking, and weeping at thought of the dear ones far away, she sang it over and over amid her sobs. Touched by its tender pathos, on his return home, her father set the melody to appropriate words, and put it into its present shape.

[Figure 6 here: Clara Dresel and Otto Dresel, ‘Little Clara’s Song’, John Church & Co., Cincinnati, 1877. Title page.]

As noted earlier, Otto and his wife Marie Louise had taken a trip to Germany without their children in the summer of 1874, when Clara would indeed have been six years old. Evidently Clara conceived this little tune, or something approximating it, while her parents were gone, and upon their return Otto composed lyrics and an accompaniment, publishing the piece several years later. He decided to set the song in F major, presumably matching Clara’s vocal range. The vocal melody, in triple meter, is entirely diatonic save for a chromatic climb up through C#, and straightforward except for a rather awkward downward leap of a seventh, from F5 to G4. The song has several distinctive, even strange features, however. It begins with a full seven measures of piano introduction. Despite the vocal line’s scoring in F major, this introduction seems to begin in F minor and proceeds through a bizarre partial modulation to G minor before finally

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<sup>76</sup> Clara Dresel and Otto Dresel, ‘Little Clara’s song—Clarchens lied’, John Church & Co., Cincinnati, 1877, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1877.08938/>. The Library of Congress holds the score of another song by the Columbus Dresel (misidentified as A. Dresel) from around the same time: *The Tear of peace – Die thräne des friedens* (Cincinnati: John Church, 1877): <https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1877.08937/>.

establishing F major in the measure in which the vocal line begins. The harmonic instability of these first seven measures, along with the winding, unrelenting chromatic triplets in the right hand of the piano, lends a sense of unease, perhaps even dread.

[Example 1 here: 'Little Clara's Song', mm. 1–9.]

Musically, this introduction proves a strange bedfellow to the vocal line, a lyrical and emotionally innocuous eight-bar tune. But the reason for the incongruity of the piano introduction and the vocal melody becomes clearer when we consider Otto's three verses of text (in both German and English). The melody gains an almost totally different valence when we learn that in these verses, Otto turned Clara's longing for her absent mother into mourning for a dead mother whom she hopes to meet again 'in God's mansion above'. The singer is so grief-stricken at the loss of her mother that she wishes she had 'died in [her] stead'. In light of this text, the foreboding piano introduction makes a great deal more sense. Although once published 'Little Clara's Song' did not remain entirely within the intimate home sphere, the work nonetheless powerfully underscores the emotional intensity of the family musical culture, the persistent undercurrents of lamentation and loss in the Dresel household, and Otto's own depressive tendencies.

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We can easily imagine Otto, Louise, and their children playing and singing together in various combinations, filling their domestic cocoon with music. In all likelihood either Louise or Alma accompanied Otto while he played the violin; at other times Alma played while her mother sang. Mother and daughter almost certainly also played pieces for piano four-hands, several of which, as we noted, are included in Louise's collection. And it would be hard to picture this

scene entirely excluding either Herman or the younger daughters through most of the 1870s. In one sense these concerts reflected generational and gender differences entirely typical of the time: father or son on the violin, mother and daughter singing or playing piano. On the other hand, binder's volumes known to have belonged to men are relatively rare, and Otto's involvement in this aspect of the female-dominated domestic realm was by most indications unusually strong. His love of music, along with his training and manifest talent, naturally made it likely that whatever family life he established would incorporate this interest. The same could be said of many, even most German immigrants of his generation. If domestic music making took on new importance as an emotional refuge for Americans in this period, the trend was owing not least to Forty-Eighters such as Dresel.

In their home environment, family members showed little interest in keeping up with contemporary musical fashions, either European or American. Instead they worked to develop personal canons that served their individual musical tastes and emotional needs.<sup>77</sup> Within the limits of their nearly exclusive German and European orientation, these volumes exhibit wide-ranging tastes, from opera to *lieder*, from instrumental fantasies on operatic arias to sonatas with no extra-musical referent. This variety helped nurture and enrich the Dresels' home music making, providing them with various and contrasting harmonic and stylistic moods. Even if the prevailing mood of their intimate interactions was one of nostalgic longing and melancholy as I have argued, the breadth of their collections reflected their desire to embody the nineteenth-century ideal of domestic harmony through performing music together as a family.

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<sup>77</sup> If the Dresels thought in terms of cultural levels in music, the distinction seems to have been less between 'classical' and 'popular' than between European and American. In any event, precisely how and why Americans distinguished between 'high' and 'low' forms of music in the nineteenth century is still a matter of considerable debate and confusion.

Yet whatever harmony they managed to achieve was tragically fleeting. The domestic haven inevitably disintegrated in the wake of Otto's suicide, and its members lived far from happily ever after. Not long after his death, Louise fled abroad to Germany with two of her daughters (almost certainly Flora and Marie Louise), no doubt hoping that the land and culture so beloved of their husband and father might help fill the void his shocking exit had left in their lives.<sup>78</sup> Subsequent reports about the other children suggest that they never escaped the familial pall earlier reflected in their music but now immeasurably deepened by a dreadful loss. Alma simply vanishes from the available records after 1883, leaving no evidence of further connection with her home or family. Clara, despite her excellence as a student, bolted mysteriously for Europe even before her high school graduation; she would die in Denver, Colorado, aged only 32. Son Herman, who graduated with distinction from Annapolis and became a naval officer, would commit suicide in 1898, shooting himself in the head just as his father had done nearly eighteen years earlier. According to newspaper reports he had been under treatment for 'mental derangement', and his self-destruction was attributed to 'melancholia'; the likelihood of a congenital depression handed down from Otto seems difficult to dismiss.<sup>79</sup> Louise would sadly outlive all but two of her six children, returning to live in Washington, DC only around 1909; she died four years later at the age of seventy-seven.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Louise's move 'abroad' with her daughters is mentioned in several death notices, including *The Washington Times* of 16 and 17 September 1913. She must have waited at least a year after Otto's death, for she addressed a letter from Columbus to H.A. Rattermann in March, 1882 (Rattermann Collection of German-American Manuscripts).

<sup>79</sup> Alma is mentioned as a musician 'of the University' in 1883, but I have found no later record of her; see the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1883. Report on Clara's departure without graduating: *Der Westbote*, 12 Jun 1884. On Herman's suicide: *Cincinnati Inquirer*, 15 Nov 1898.

<sup>80</sup> Obituary: *Washington Times*, 16 Sep 1913. Otto, Louise, their first son Otto, and Clara are all buried in Columbus at Green Lawn Cemetery:

<http://www.centralohiogravesearch.com/uploads/cem-greenlawn-d.htm>

Whether by choice or by chance, at least some of the Dresel family sheet music volumes were preserved. As I hope to have shown, the music Otto, Louise, and Alma chose to have bound in their individualized volumes provides one window into their perhaps conscious, perhaps unconscious need for emotional release and personal consolation in intimate family music-making. Their private preferences and performances may well have exaggerated the darker, more extreme sides of the sentimentalism that pervaded this era. But especially in light of the enormous importance scholars ascribe to the overall role of German immigrants in shaping nineteenth-century American musical culture, the predilections of the Ohio Dresels can and should prompt questions about the distinctive functions of music in nineteenth-century American homes. Otto's public musical involvements reflected civic aims of brotherhood, national unity, and social uplift that were shared by many of his generation; in this respect he showed much in common with the Boston Dresel, whose fame and connections to luminaries in both Europe and the United States we noted early on. But like countless Americans who lived through the trials of the 1860s and the troubled years that followed, our Otto Dresel and his family had their share of reasons to mourn and to draw together for mutual comfort, and they did this not least by making their own more personal and emotional strains of musical expression integral to their domestic world.

## List of Figures and Musical Examples

**Example 1.** *Little Clara's Song*, mm. 1–9 (Clara Dresel, *Little Clara's song—Clarchens lied*. Church & Co., John, Cincinnati, monographic, 1877. Notated Music.  
[https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1877.08938/.](https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1877.08938/))

**Figure 1.** Otto Dresel in an 1845 portrait by Julius Geissler. Lippische Landesbibliothek:  
<http://www2.llb-detmold.de/html/BALP-5-31.html>; see also:  
<http://www.lippe-auswanderer.de/AuswandererLippe-USA/html/p010452.htm>

**Figure 2.** Directors of the Columbus *Männerchor*. Otto Dresel appears in the second-highest row, second from the right. [Note: I have been unable to determine the date of this image, but it cannot have been created prior to 1900, when Theodore Schneider (fourth row down, left) served as director of the Columbus *Männerchor*.] ‘Columbus Maennerchor Directors’, Columbus Memory, Columbus Metropolitan Library: <https://digital-collections.columbuslibrary.org/digital/collection/memory/id/48219/rec/2>.

**Figure 3.** Handwritten cover sheet for Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's ‘Elegie’ in Otto Dresel's volume of violin parts. (Property of author.)

**Figure 4.** Front cover of one of Louise's two volumes. (Property of author.)

**Figure 5.** Alma Dresel's copy of Gottschalk's *The Dying Poet*, Boston: Ditson, 1864 (mm. 1–9). Note the pencilled fingerings. (Property of author.)

**Figure 6.** *Little Clara's Song*, Title page (Clara Dresel, *Little Clara's song—Clarchens lied*. Church & Co., John, Cincinnati, monographic, 1877. Notated Music.  
[https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1877.08938/.](https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1877.08938/))



