

2021

Root and Mason, "Pecuniarily Interested"

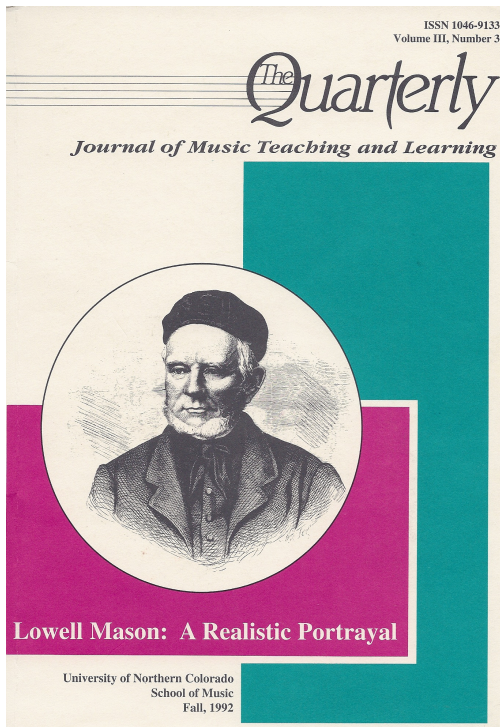
Polly Carder
Morristown, New Jersey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme>

Recommended Citation

Carder, Polly (2021) "Root and Mason, "Pecuniarily Interested"," *Visions of Research in Music Education*: Vol. 16 , Article 25.

Available at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol16/iss3/25>



Title: Root and Mason, “Pecuniarily Interested”

Author(s): Polly Carder

Source: Carder, P. (1992, Fall). Root and Mason, “pecuniarily interested”. *The Quarterly*, 3(3), pp. 24-30. (Reprinted with permission in *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 16(3), Autumn, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>

It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Root and Mason, “Pecuniarily Interested”

By Polly Carder

Morristown, New Jersey

George F. Root and Lowell Mason were associated from 1838 to about 1862. Together and separately, they taught vast numbers of people in music classes. The people who attended their classes bought books and in many cases went home to teach their own classes. For Root and Mason, teaching and publishing went hand in hand. Their books earned considerable amounts of money. They became, as Mason wrote, “pecuniarily interested;” that is, financially interested in each other’s work.

The evidence we have of their relationship is scant and uneven. Letters written by Mason in mid-century were never intended for public examination, while Root’s autobiography, written mostly in 1889, was intended for the public to read.¹

On October 1, 1838, 18-year-old Root went to Boston to find work. He wrote, “One of the great things in going to Boston was that I should probably see LOWELL MASON.”² Within a year, Root was teaching with Mason in the Boston Public Schools.

If my getting on so fast in a city like Boston seems unaccountable, I must explain...that music was in a very different condition then...It was just emerging from the florid but crude melodies and the imperfect harmonies of the older time. Lowell Mason had but just commenced what proved to be a revolution in the “plain song” of the church and of the people, and his methods of teaching the elementary principles of music were so much better and so much more attractive than anything that had before been seen that those who were early in the field had very great advantage. We had no competition and were sought for on every hand.³

Polly Carder is Supervising Recordings Editor in the Music Department at Silver Burdett Ginn, Morristown, NJ.

Writing years later about church-choir work in Boston in those early years, Root called Mason “the best musical disciplinarian that this country has ever seen.”⁴

In 1844, Root moved to New York City. During the winter months he taught a variety of classes there:

The summer vacations in New York were longer than those of Boston, so I could continue my connection with the great Teachers’ Classes of the Boston Academy of Music and of similar gatherings under the direction of Messrs. Mason and Webb in other parts of the country. This was from 1845 onward. It was also a great delight to go with Mr. Mason, when I could, to the day school Teachers’ Institutes, which were conducted by Horace Mann and other great educators of that day. They prized Mr. Mason’s lessons exceedingly. Mr. Mann said he would walk fifty miles to see Mr. Mason teach...⁵

In 1852 the publishing phase of their relationship began. Root’s collection of vocal music, *The Academy Vocalist*, was published by Mason Brothers. It contained “an elementary course taken from Mr. Mason’s books.”⁶ From 1852 through 1860, the Mason family firm published all of Root’s books and cantatas—four cantatas and seven books, one of which, *The Musical Album*, had four editions. Root’s cantata *The Haymakers* (1857) was suggested by Lowell Mason, Jr., who “took a great interest in this work, and to a great extent planned it, not only as to characters and action, but as to what, in a general way, each number should be about.”⁷

For several years in the 1850s, Root contributed music for publication in each issue of *The Musical Review*, a monthly magazine published by Mason Brothers. The December 12, 1857, issue said “Lowell Mason, William B. Bradbury, and George F. Root will continue to take an editorial interest in the

REVIEW, and our readers may expect constant communications from their pens.”⁸

According to his own recollection, Root persuaded Mason to head a new teachers’ class, a normal school for music, but not without considerable effort. Root convinced Mason that the class would offer a great opportunity to disseminate his ideas, and then spoke with Mason’s sons about the potential for book sales resulting from the class:

Early in 1852 I conceived the idea of having a

three months’ session for this work. It must be in the summer, because then the teachers had more leisure. It must be in the city of New York, for I must be there where my work was. I knew the expenses of advertising and place of meeting would be large, but I believed that from all the States and Canada enough teachers, and those who wished to become such, would come, to save the enterprise from pecuniary loss. I went immediately to Boston, where Mr. Mason still lived, and told him my plan. It did not strike him at first as feasible. He did not believe any considerable number of persons could be induced to come, especially from a distance, on account of the great expense of travel-

ing and of such a stay in New York City, in addition to the cost of instruction. I said, ‘Well, I am going to have such a class. You are the proper person to appear at the head of it, and to be the real head when it comes to the teaching, but I do not expect you to do any of the work of getting it up; I’ll see to that. It will be a better opportunity than you have ever had to make your ideas of notation, teaching, and church music really known, for you will have time enough thoroughly to indoctrinate people with them, and that you know you never have had in Teachers’ Classes and Conventions.’ I knew this would move him if anything would. No word of money or remuneration for his services passed between us, and I take this opportunity to say that Lowell Mason was the most misjudged man in this respect that I ever knew. He had plenty of money. It

“I do not believe [Mason] ever made a plan to make money... In his musical work it was always ‘Is this the best thing--will it be received--will it do the most good?’”

came in large sums from his works, but I do not believe he ever made a plan to make money, unless when investing his surplus funds. In his musical work it was always “Is this the best thing—will it be received—will it do the most good?”...

Then I went back to New York, and with Mason Brothers, the publishers, I took a different line of argument. I said: “It will be a great thing for the sale of your father’s books to have his methods and music better understood than they can be in the shorter gatherings. (I had no books of my own then for such work.) Will you do the work of making the right people know of this all over the country?” They said they would, and they did.

Despite the agreements reached, however, the class did not proceed as planned. Although responses from prospective students were very encouraging, the initial class had to be postponed: A few weeks before the time set to begin, Mr. Mason wrote that he could not be back until in the summer, perhaps not until the autumn. He had found work to do in England that delighted him, and that he felt was useful, and we must go on with the Institute without him, or defer the opening until the next summer. The

brothers said, “We believe this is going to be a success, and if you will put it off we will not only pay all the expenses incurred thus far, but all the expenses of advertising it for next year.” To this I readily agreed, as I did not wish to begin without the “master.” So the notice of postponement, with explanations, was sent wherever the Institute had been advertised, and to all who wrote about coming, and the matter rested....

The first Normal Musical Institute was held in the summer of 1853, and the founders were very pleased with its success:

Its sessions were in Dodworth’s Hall, Broadway, New York, and continued three months. The principal teachers were Lowell Mason, Thomas Hastings, Wm. B. Bradbury and myself; assistant teachers, John Zundel, J. C. Woodman, and some others, for private les-

sons, whose names I do not now recall. The terms were \$25 for the normal course; \$50 if private lessons were added. There were upwards of a hundred from abroad, and enough singers from the city to make a good chorus."⁹

In 1855, Mason was granted an honorary doctorate. Root took the initiative in arranging for Mason to be honored in this way, approaching Dr. Ferris, whom Root had known at Rutgers Institute and who was then Chancellor of the New York University:

[I] said to him, "Could your institution confer the degree of Doctor of Music?" "Certainly." Root presented the suggestion that New York University confer the title, Doctor of Music, on Mason, whom he called America's greatest musical educator. Ferris thought so well of it that it was promptly done.

Root mentioned nothing of this conversation to Mason until the pending honor was announced in a local newspaper. Root recalled taking a copy of the paper to Mason's home:

...I remember that I had considerable difficulty in getting the idea of the title fully into his mind...he never sought honors or distinctions any more than he did wealth. He gave himself wholly to his work, and if other things came they must come without any effort on his part."¹⁰

In 1856, the Normal Musical Institute was moved from New York to North Reading, Massachusetts, Root's former home. Mason, Webb, Bradbury, and Root continued on the faculty. The institute gained a reputation for high standards—the 1857 Normal Musical Institute in North Reading was described in *The New York Musical Review and Gazette* as "a sure cure for all diseases arising from too good an opinion of one's musical abilities." In the late afternoon, the students sang choruses, usually from the *Messiah*, but "sometimes when Dr. Mason is not present, we sing from the cantata of 'The Haymakers,' under Mr. Root's direction."¹¹ Apparently it was no secret that even though his sons' firm published Root's "Haymakers," Lowell Mason disapproved of it on the grounds that it was below his aesthetic standard.

Some of the events and personalities in the institute were noted over a period of years in correspondence between Lowell Mason and W. W. Killip of Geneseo, New York, who

was called "One of the most prominent members of the Institute at North Reading...a man of excellent abilities, musical and otherwise..."¹² Killip seems to be an observer of the rivalries that waxed and waned throughout this period. Writing to someone whose identity we do not know, Killip said, "To understand them you should know that G. F. Root and W. B. Bradbury were rivals. Root largely in the front and principally because Mr. Mason was with Root or supposed to be."¹³

In a letter to Killip, Mason revealed his dissatisfaction with the competition among convention and normal leaders. Without discussion or preliminary comment, and after his signature on the letter, like an afterthought, he wrote:

Bradbury versus Root and Perkins.
Bradbury versus Perkins and Root.
Root versus Bradbury and Perkins.
Root versus Perkins and Bradbury.
Perkins versus Bradbury and Root.
Perkins versus Root and Bradbury.
Every man's hand against every man.
Every man for himself and no man for any other man.¹⁴

"In 1860," according to Root, "the Normal was held in Chicago, Dr. Mason, Mr. Bradbury, and myself principal teachers. By this time other Normals were started by those who had been with us, and we no longer occupied the entire field. Still, the interest in that kind of school having increased, our attendance continued to be large."¹⁵

Writing from his home in South Orange, New Jersey, Mason told Killip that he was glad to receive his most recent letter, but continued:

Grieved was I to read, for the paper told me of deceptions, falsifications, perversions, double-dealing, misrepresentations, dissimulation, misreports, shuffles, garblings, [illegible] etc., etc....You know I have feelings of friendship for Mr. Root and also for Mr. B.¹⁶—that friendship continues notwithstanding all the drawbacks—they never either of them see me but they get a severe lecture of reprimand for the course they pursue in their profession; oh, that I could reach them (and my own heart too) with those great words "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me."

Mason continued the letter, cautioning Killip, "I would not wonder if I should find



George F. Root, Lowell Mason, and William B. Bradbury. An unknown photographer made this photograph about 1850. It was autographed by the three men and presented by Mason at a summer normal institute to J. Thomas Tilson, who later named his son Lowell Mason Tilson. The younger Tilson became a music educator at Indiana State Teachers College, Terre Haute, IN. Credit: Music Library, University of Maryland at College Park (Gift of Martha Tilson Amos).

in your course some things to weep over and lament exceedingly." Apparently dismayed and angered at the continuing controversy resulting from the rivalries, he told Killip that he could not discern who was right and who was wrong in the affair:

Do you see those hungry dogs—one of them has got a bone—how they [illegible] it! Trickery, guile, [illegible] bad for men, nay nay infinitely worse than those dog habits are for dogs. So I cannot go into the detail of your letter, yet there are many points on which I would not be unwilling to converse were I to see you....I am glad for your sake of this, viz. that you see some of your own errors and faults and are willing to confess them....I will tell you something of the present state of things, tho' I may not be telling you any thing new. Mr. R. very soon after our last Normal (1858) *turned round*, so far as Mr. B is concerned—it was a complete wheeling to the

right about face. I was not in the secret at all, but I could not help knowing the fact. I do not blame him for this, only I cannot see his consistency. I had been pleading for B. with him for a year or two, but he was bitter against him. But now, all at once, without any apparent reason he changed; I say without any apparent reason, but there is a reason not difficult to imagine by those who are near the Booksellers. [Illegible] copartnership in the Book business [illegible] agreement by which they [were] to publish together. My sons being deeply interested as publishers, they conversed with me from time to time, and (I must not dwell on details) after some time of *travail*, I authorized Mason Brothers to make any arrangement they saw fit by which I should also be bro't into the copartnership. The result is now, that we are all three of us, interested in one another's publications—i.e. I am as much pecuniarily inter

ested in Mr. R's and Mr. B's books as my own—I mean of those which are to come. The first by Mr. R will come as we suppose this coming summer.¹⁷ This arrangement has of course, influenced us as to *schools*. We have agreed to hold two or three normal schools together. First at N. R.¹⁸ We all expect to go there. Two other places have been talked of—Geneseo and Chicago.”

Mason explained carefully about not coming to Geneseo because it would interfere with Killip's normal class there: “I must add here, that I do not believe either Mr. B or Mr. R would be willing to come to G. if in doing so they must be in opposition to you, and also I will add I believe that both of the gentlemen would be happy to have you co-operate—and that should it so happen (which I do not think at all probable) that they should make a move toward G. they would not do so, until a full understanding and union had taken place between you and themselves. I hate the politics and chicanery of these musical [illegible], and I give thanks that I have been preserved from them in a great degree.”

The letter Mason wrote to Killip on February 26, 1860, asks: “What is your standard *musically*—‘The Messiah’ or ‘The Haymakers’...Do you keep up, or try to raise the standard which I labored to build up at North Reading?...In church music what is your standard—the little silly, unmeaning tunes that are *Bell’d* out in *Jubilee* times, or something more worthy of publication and of musical taste, etc.?”¹⁹ Mason may have been referring to Root's *Sabbath Bell*, published by Mason Brothers in 1856, with a preface that acknowledged “Dr. Lowell Mason, for permission to select from his manuscripts many valuable tunes which have never before been published,” and to a song collection by Bradbury called *The Jubilee*, published in 1857.

In 1858, the firm of Root and Cady was established in Chicago to sell music, books, and musical instruments. George F. Root continued his association with Lowell Mason.

Early in 1859 I took a room in the building in which the store was, and occupied it as a library and working-room between convention engagements. Not long before, Mr. Henry Mason, the youngest brother of my publishers, had formed a copartnership with Mr.

Hamlin, under the firm name of Mason & Hamlin, for the manufacture of melodeons. They prospered, and soon called their larger instruments harmoniums, and not long after, cabinet organs. Some time in 1862 the Masons asked me if I thought I could make an instruction book for these instruments. I said I would try, and the result was ‘The School for the Harmonium and Cabinet Organ.’ This was my first work of importance in my new quarters. It was published by Mason Brothers, and had a large sale.²⁰

The firm of Root and Cady was a distributor of Lowell Mason's books in the midwest.

In a letter to Killip dated August 2, 1861, Mason wrote, “I must now bind you to the *confidential* in all that relates to an agreement as to pecuniary concerns between Root, Bradbury, and myself in the publication of books. Let this be wholly between ourselves. I depend upon you in this thing. Let it not be known from your mouth or pen that there is a co-partnership between us.”

On August 20th, 1861, Mason wrote to Bradbury from North Reading at Root's request, asking Bradbury to teach with them at a place and time yet to be decided.

Early in the war, probably in 1862, the last normal in which Dr. Mason taught was held in Wooster, Ohio. Dr. Mason, myself, and Geo. B. Loomis were the principal teachers and the work continued six weeks. There was a good attendance, but the recruiting officers around us, and an occasional war meeting kept up an excitement that worked against us...²¹

In the first issue of *The Song Messenger of the Northwest*, the house publication of Root and Cady (April, 1863),²² Root explained in a column called “To Friends and Acquaintances” that he planned to have a home in Chicago by the first of May. In the next issue (May, 1863),²³ he wrote:

I am frequently inquired of in regard to the prominent men in our profession who are known by their works, and about whom there is naturally a curiosity to know other things that are not so public. This is especially true of Dr. Lowell Mason, in whom there does, and justly should center the greatest interest, by all who care for music and the art of teaching it, among the people, and by all who glory in its progress; a progress due in a large measure to this great man. Yes, I admit it! I *am* enthusiastic about Dr. Mason. Twenty years of opportunity to see his work



"Great Uncle Lowell in his study, Silver Spring." Lowell Mason is shown here surrounded by books and portraits of his colleagues. This photograph, taken by an unknown photographer in about 1865, was produced on a stereocard for viewing through a stereopticon. *Credit: Boston Athenaeum (gift of Miss Maud Mason).*

and to observe its results, and twenty years of benefits and kindness from him have given me the right to be, as they have others who have had similar advantages.

The June, 1863 issue included a continuation describing Mason's home and library:

...Let us go into the house. As a somewhat intimate acquaintance, I will take the liberty of conducting you up stairs into the Doctor's library. You perceive the odor of books—you'll not wonder at that when you get inside—many thousand volumes are arranged on every side, and in two alcoves of the large apartments, the finest and most valuable collection of musical works in America. I don't wonder you smile—every one does, at that little old piano mounted on a table—you will be still more amused if you touch it, and yet its tones bring to me many tender and grateful recollections, going back through a score of years; instruction, warning, counsel, and encouragement, connect themselves in my memory with the tones of that old piano and the odor of the books. And here is Dr. Mason at his desk, which, with its heterogeneous accumulations of papers and its odd position, you have been in vain striving to reconcile with any known principles of law or order; and yet every thing is in its place, and can be found at a moment's notice; order and system are paramount here, notwithstanding the appearance. The Doctor does not look up until he has finished his sentence

or phrase, and then his greeting is dignified and courteous. He wastes no words, talks no commonplaces, is an excellent listener, and all without the slightest pedantry."

On January 7, 1868, Bradbury died. Writing in *The Song Messenger of the Northwest*, Root recalled that 30 years ago in New England, three young men "were connected with" Mason in the "earnest rivalry of youth." Bradbury was the "brightest of the three."²⁴ Now only the youngest of the three remained—Root himself.


Mason died while the 1872 normal was in session at Chicago University. *The Song Messenger* quoted a telegram from Henry Mason saying "Father died peacefully last night at ten o'clock." Immediately the participants in the normal passed a resolution, "That in the death of Dr. Lowell Mason we recognize the loss of one who in matters of church music and musical education in this country is the great reformer of the century." All felt that as teachers, choir leaders, or writers of people's music we owed a debt of eternal gratitude to the man whose long life and noble work and powerful influence had done so much to place the musical profession in the honorable position it occupies at the present time."²⁵

Fifteen years later, in a song collection he compiled, Root described Mason as "The

greatest musical educator and composer of church tunes that America has produced. The first to introduce and apply the principles of Pestalozzi to musical instruction in this country. The first to introduce music as a branch of education in public schools. The father of the class teaching of notation in America and largely so of that, which is now so successful in England. A man of great natural powers, of untiring industry and of extraordinary attainments.”²⁶

Endnotes

1. Root, George Frederick. *The Story of a Musical Life*. Cincinnati: The John Church Company, 1891.
2. Ibid, 10.
3. Ibid, 26-27.
4. Ibid, 34.
5. Ibid, 43.
6. Ibid, 89.
7. Ibid, 113.
8. *New York Musical Review and Gazette*, Vol. VIII, No. 25.

9. Root, 85-88.
10. Ibid, 101-102.
11. *New York Musical Review and Gazette*, Vol. VIII, No. 13 (June 27, 1857).
12. Root, 108.
13. Unpublished letter from W. W. Killip, July 16, 1909.
14. Mason, Lowell. Unpublished letter to W. W. Killip, Feb. 21, 1859.
15. Root, 130.
16. Presumably William B. Bradbury.
17. In 1860 Mason Brothers published a book by Root called *The Diapason* and his cantata *Belsbazzar's Feast*.
18. North Reading, Massachusetts.
19. Mason, Lowell: Unpublished letter to W. W. Killip dated February 26, 1860.
20. Root, 129.
21. Ibid, 144.
22. Vol. I, No. 1.
23. Vol. I, No. 2.
24. Vol. VI, No. 2, February, 1868.
25. Root, 158-159.
26. “Eminent Composers” in: Root, George Frederick. *The Repertoire*. Cincinnati: The John Church Co., 1887, 218. 

Bulgarian Musicology

Published four times per year by the Academy of Sciences, *Bulgarian Musicology* is the only Bulgarian journal for traditional music, historical and systematic musicology, and for music psychology, sociology, and semiotics. It is published in the Bulgarian language with English transcriptions of titles. Each issue of 108 pages includes musical examples, diagrams, charts, and graphs.

Subscription prices: Personal, \$26.; institutional, \$35.; student, \$15.

Authors are invited to submit manuscripts for blind review and possible publication. If the manuscript is to be returned, include postage.

A full-page advertisement in *Bulgarian Musicology* is \$420. Other rates are available on request.

All prices quoted in US\$, to be paid by US Postal Service money order.

To subscribe or to receive more information, contact the Editor of *Bulgarian Musicology*:

Prof. Dr. sc. Dimiter Christoff
Mavrovets 7
1415 SOFIA-Dragalevtsi
BULGARIA