A PROGRAM NOT GREATLY TO THEIR CREDIT:
Finding New Perspectives on the Germania Musical Society through the American Memory Sheet Music Collection

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Tuesday, April 22, 2014—12:00 pm
Coolidge Auditorium | Thomas Jefferson Building | Free & Open to the Public

For information about this event, please visit loc.gov/concerts, or contact Nicholas A. Brown at (202) 707-8437, nbrown@loc.gov.

ADA ACCESSIBILITY: Request accommodations 5 days in advance, (202) 707-6362 or ada@loc.gov.
AMS - Library of Congress Lecture Series  
Tuesday, April 22, 2014 @ noon  
Nancy Newman  
University at Albany, SUNY

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The American Musicological Society and the Music Division of the Library of Congress are pleased to present a series of lectures highlighting musicological research conducted in the Division’s collections.

Précis: The Germania Musical Society forms an important link in the evolving relationship between art and popular music in nineteenth-century American life. As a touring ensemble, the orchestra offered about nine hundred concerts to nearly one million listeners from 1848 to 1854. Long acknowledged for their frequent performances of Beethoven’s symphonies, Mendelssohn’s overtures, and the introduction of Wagner’s music to the U.S., the Germanians’ repertoire included lighter genres such as waltzes and polkas, many written by the orchestra members themselves. However, it was virtually impossible to gauge the quantity or significance of these pieces until they were available in online databases such as the Library of Congress American Memory digital history project.

My presentation will discuss the full range of the Germanians’ programs and their performances with virtuosi such as Jenny Lind, Ole Bull, and Alfred Jaëll. Their ‘mixed repertory’ concerts were typical of the ‘social orchestras’ that arose during the 1840s on both sides of the Atlantic. My analysis of more than 250 programs, culled from broadsides and serials, shows how the Germanians carefully calibrated their offerings to emerging local needs and taste in the towns they visited, with audiences eventually numbering in the thousands.

Online and on-site sheet music collections reveal about three hundred titles associated with the Germanians and published as piano arrangements for domestic use. Nearly one-third of these compositions are held by the LC Music Division. Particular pieces illuminate the orchestra’s history, such as conductor Carl Lenschow’s ‘Betty Polka,’ written for Zachary Taylor’s inauguration, and ‘Uncle Ned’ Quickstep, based on Stephen Foster’s minstrel tune. Many pieces by Carl Bergmann (later conductor of the New York Philharmonic) were associated with Newport, Rhode Island, where they spent summers. Far from being a less creditable feature of their programs, the Germanians embraced such ‘modern’ compositions for their ability to reach a broad public, contributing to the orchestra’s success and the flourishing of public concerts generally.

Open to the public, the series is held in the Library’s famed Coolidge Auditorium in the Jefferson Building.