

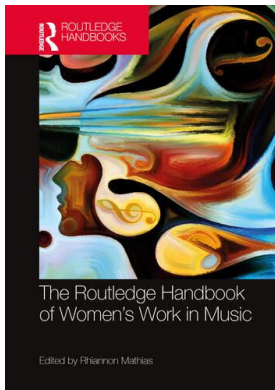
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Rhiannon Mathias

Mary Carlisle Howe (1882–1964) and Adella Prentiss Hughes (1869–1950): creating an arts culture in America, one woman at a time

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Jennifer Cable

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MARY CARLISLE HOWE (1882–1964) AND ADELLA PRENTISS HUGHES (1869–1950): CREATING AN ARTS CULTURE IN AMERICA, ONE WOMAN AT A TIME

Jennifer Cable

39.1 Introduction

In 1910, *Musical America* published a piece by an anonymous writer, who stated:

[...] one hundred thousand women in American homes are spreading the gospel of music far and wide in this country. Through their unselfish and indefatigable efforts ... a musical foundation is being built that nothing can topple over (C.A. 1910, pp. 3–4).

Many of these stalwart music supporters were members of amateur music clubs, possessing varying levels of performing skill. These women sacrificed time with family, resources, and, in some cases, relationships, in pursuit of the collective dream of bringing musical opportunities to themselves and to others in their communities. This chapter considers the work of two women who were at the forefront of creating an enduring musical culture in the American cities of Washington, DC, and Cleveland, Ohio. Mary Carlisle Howe, raised in Washington, DC, was a pianist, composer and a force behind the establishment of the National Symphony Orchestra. Cleveland native Adella Prentiss Hughes, herself a fine pianist, earned her living as an impresario, regularly bringing symphony orchestras and international performing artists to Cleveland. She was also the founder of the Cleveland Orchestra and served as that ensemble's first general manager. Howe and Hughes were defined by their outstanding leadership, creative thinking and deep passion for music and performance, leaving a rich cultural legacy for the cities they called 'home'.

Mary Howe and Adella Prentiss Hughes were members of amateur music clubs, which were vehicles for music discussion and performance for women (and some men) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The members of these clubs were what Linda Whitesitt called the 'keepers of culture' in her essay of the same name (1997, p. 73). Amateur music clubs

of this era typically began when a small group of women came together regularly in their homes to talk about and perform music. Groups eventually invited friends to join them and before long, 'at home' meetings were no longer possible, given the large size of the group. The amateur music club has, at its roots, connections to the nineteenth-century salon. Thus, I consider relevant Evelyn Gordon Bodek's recognition of the role of the salon for women, in particular, as:

[...] an informal university for women – a place where they could exchange ideas, avail themselves of some of the best minds of their time, receive and give criticism, read their own works and hear the works of others and, in general pursue in their own way some form of higher education (Bodek 1976, p. 185).

These exchanges were, in many ways, identical to the kinds of interactions which took place in the amateur music clubs: performances were given; music research was discussed; new works were premiered; guest artists offered recitals (often for a paying audience, profiting the club); opportunities were available for coaching and counsel; and finally, women had a place to freely share and celebrate their achievements in music.

39.2 Mary Howe and the Friday Morning Music Club

Mary Carlisle Howe was a member of the Friday Morning Music Club (FMMC) of Washington, DC. Begun in 1886 as an opportunity for friends to share music study and performance, the club was formalised in 1890. A tiered membership system was established, mirroring what was common practice for other amateur music clubs across the USA: a performer membership, which required regular performing on club programmes (as well as continued development on one's instrument); and an associate membership, which did not require performing and, instead, expected members to serve as hostesses for club events. FMMC membership included women with significant musical training, with some having studied in conservatories in America or Europe. Leadership roles were, at the beginning, all held by women, though men participated in programmes after 1920 and, by 1966, were admitted as full members (Shear 1987, p. 69).

Club meetings began in the fall and continued through spring. Programmes were varied, as they were for many American amateur music clubs of the time. Formal performance programmes made up the largest number of meetings, followed by presentations on musical topics (sometimes by a visiting scholar), themed programmes (a patriotic holiday or Valentine's Day) and, on occasion, special events including a costume recital – sometimes representing a specific character, such as a musician or stateswoman (*ibid.*, pp. 27–28). Newly composed works also found their way onto FMMC programmes, including works by American women composers. Today, the FMMC continues to thrive in the US capital, 133 years after it was formed, offering free public concerts throughout the week (no longer limited to Friday mornings), and providing members 'with a host of outlets for their talents as well as delighting audiences in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia'.¹

Friday Morning Music Club member Mary Carlisle Howe was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1882. Growing up in Washington, DC, her early education included music, with piano lessons beginning in 1891. In Howe's words:

I can very well remember that I was not taught any music until I was nearly nine years old. But I can't remember at all a time when I didn't play the piano after a fashion, or

sing I can't remember a time when I didn't use music wherever it touched daily life – popular songs, hymns, classics, accompaniments, being “band” for the Old Guard group of steady companions (Howe 1959, p. 78).

Performances across Howe's early years, usually given at home, were mainly for family and friends. In 1900, she entered the Peabody Conservatory, studying piano with Ernest Hutcheson. In 1904, at age 22, Howe travelled to Europe with her mother; while in Dresden, she met Richard Burmeister, the then director of the Conservatory of Dresden. Howe studied piano with Burmeister in May and June: two lessons a week and three hours of practice a day (Indenbaum 1993, pp. 105–106). While Howe was primarily focused on classical music, she did not distinguish between music in classical or popular idioms. In fact, following a classical concert in 1907, Howe, her brother, and some friends hosted a party where they played ragtime. In Howe's view, all music was to be played, or experienced through performance, and enjoyed (*ibid.*, p. 45).

In 1910, Howe again enrolled in Hutcheson's piano class at Peabody, seeking a more formal and intense musical experience (*ibid.*, p. 47). She was 28 years old at the time. Dorothy Indenbaum, in her outstanding dissertation on the life and work of Mary Howe, writes that 1910 was a difficult year for Howe, who was concerned that she had not yet experienced a meaningful romantic relationship. Howe travelled to Europe that spring, and wrote (in German and French) of her emotional state, expressing her feelings of despair and self-doubt in her diaries:

Lord, let fall from my face, buried in my hands, the mask of anguish that constrains me / Lord, let not my two hands leave on my mouth, the froth of fierce despair. / I am sad and sick, perhaps because of You / perhaps because of another, perhaps because of You (Howe, cited in *ibid.*, p. 51).²

Despite this bleak time in Howe's life, she forged ahead, immersing herself in music study and performance. Within two years, on 12 January 1912, Howe married her childhood friend and one-time neighbour, Walter Bruce Howe. Their marriage was, by all accounts, one of love, great happiness and a deep respect for one another (*ibid.*, p. 56).³ Howe managed her performing and composing work while raising three children – Bruce born in 1912, Calderon in 1916 and Mary (Molly) in 1918 (*ibid.*, p. 63). Though Howe was a devoted mother, she also had help in the home, a privilege which she recognised, and one that afforded her the opportunity to advance her career in music. While she was well organised, rearing her children with strictness and warmth, Howe was also an energetic and vibrant parent, possessing a sense of humour and providing her children with a rich, cultured family life (*ibid.*, p. 77). Rehearsals and club meetings often took place in her home (she had two grand pianos in her living room), allowing Howe to keep a close eye on the comings and goings of her family. Once married, Howe sought to separate her personal life from her professional one in terms of how she was identified. Mrs. Walter Bruce Howe was used in formal situations when she was involved in social activities as the wife of Walter Bruce Howe, though Mary Howe was the name she insisted be used in connection with her professional work (*ibid.*, p. 82).

The principal performing outlet for Howe was with her duo-pianist partner Anne Hull (1888–1984): Howe and Hull met when both were studying at Peabody. While the two were very active as a duo across the years 1913–31, their performances were limited to venues east of the Mississippi, and tours were never of a long duration due to Howe's responsibilities to her family. The two women remained dear friends across a lifetime, as letters filled with warmth,

support and honesty from Howe to Hull attest.⁴ Howe also performed regularly on the FMMC programmes as a soloist and as a collaborator. The club provided her with an opportunity to reach beyond her familiar surroundings and, as societal norms expanded, to gradually transition to public concert performances. With young children at home, it was convenient for her to appear in Washington in less formal circumstances and, at the same time, maintain her professional musical standards. In her appearances for the club, she performed as soloist, accompanist and as duo-pianist with Hull. She was also able to share her compositions on club programmes, with a recital in 1925 comprised entirely of her works for piano, cello and voice.

Howe began composing as a child; her first work, *The Mariposa Waltz* for piano solo, was written at the age of nine (Indenbaum 1993, p. 127). While she continued composing throughout her early life, and received her diploma in composition from Peabody in 1922 (having studied with Gustave Strube), Howe marked 1924 as the onset of her identity as a composer. Much later, looking back on her life, Howe wrote in her book, *Jottings*: 'I can only say it was because the gates had been opened and I wanted to go into those fields and pastures and towards those hills and mountains that had always seemed the property of other people' (Howe 1959, p. 87). She goes on to explain:

I must say that in spite of all my enjoyment of the piano playing experience, composition was like coming home, to a place where you had the right to be. Hence, only as late as 1924, did I really even begin to compose, and for close to twenty years before that I had been listening to every available piece of music, probably with traditionally conservative ears, but pricked forward, alert for new sensations, like a Puritan on a holiday. I have always felt that one foot was in the past and the other stepping forward into the new elements of the future. I have never known any phase of modern music that was not natural to me, and have found all phases stimulating and many enlightening (ibid., pp. 89–90).

In 1933, during a trip to Paris with her daughter, Howe had four sessions with renowned composition teacher Nadia Boulanger. Howe showed her several works, including *Sand* for chamber orchestra (1928), a work which, according to Howe, Boulanger found 'charmant' (Howe, cited in Indenbaum 1993, p. 133).⁵ Howe candidly continues:

She gave me good points on orchestration and said she thought I read too few modern scores. She more or less advised me to get an up-to-date métier. It's true about the scores and some of the orchestration. As to the modern métier, if it grows on me, I'll accept it, but not unless it happens (ibid.).

Howe was actively composing for well over 44 years, ceasing only in 1966, two years before her death. Her works encompassed chamber, orchestral, solo piano and vocal genres. She wrote of composing:

I liked being considered seriously as a musician and composer; I liked having works published and performed. Inside I feel grave and humble about any work of mine that speaks truly aloud. In some ways I feel there may be a place for my music. Possibly the same inhibitions and hedging about that trammelled me are expressed in it, with the wide openings to air and light that it gave me. Life would not have been the same to me without it ... (ibid., p. 97).⁶

Howe maintained friendships with many composers across the course of her career, including Amy Beach, Aaron Copland and Douglas Moore. Howe considered Beach, 20 years her senior, to be a mentor. Howe maintained warm relationships with other notables of her time, including Ethel Glenn Hier, Willa Cather, Gena Branscombe, Marion Bauer, Harold Bauer, Leopold Stokowski, Celius Dougherty, Thornton Wilder, Hans Kindler, Carl Engel, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge and Marion MacDowell, along with many others. Periods spent at the MacDowell Colony (Howe's first visit was in 1925) and the Huntington Hartford Foundation brought Howe into close company with leading figures in the arts. She also held memberships (and some leadership roles) in several organisations, such as the National League of Pen Women, Society of American Women Composers, Washington Composers' Club, ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) and the ACA (American Composers Alliance), as well as ongoing associations with the Library of Congress and the Chamber Music Society of Washington. Howe's life was rich, bringing her into contact with composers, publishers, music colleagues and other performers. Friends across these groups joined artists and individuals from the worlds of business and government, Howe inviting them into her home and life (*ibid.*, p. 82).

It was Howe who brought the idea of supporting a symphony based in the nation's capital to the FMMC. The FMMC Board of Governors unanimously decided on 28 March 1930 to act as guarantors for the new National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) to the extent of \$100 a year for five years (Shear 1987, p. 25). The following year, with strong support from FMMC president Alice Byrnes, the club contributed \$5,000 toward the establishment of the NSO, becoming one of the founders of that organisation in 1931 (*ibid.*, p. 27). Howe's husband was the chairman of the symphony board, thus Howe herself was able to remain tangentially, yet importantly, connected to the organisational work of the orchestra. The archives of the NSO contain the names of those who served on the many women's committees established to support the symphony; supervising the work of each of these committees, Howe held numerous leadership roles, both formal and informal.⁷ Under her leadership, membership in the women's committees grew from 19 in 1941 to 800 by 1949. The unwavering support that the Howes gave to the NSO makes their departure from that organisation all the more startling. Their break with the NSO came in 1948–49, caused in large part by a board coup that sought to remove Hans Kindler from the Music Director position. The split was shattering for Howe given her deep, passionate and long-lived commitment to the orchestra. In 1952, several years after the separation with the Howe family, the NSO showed their admiration of Howe by performing a programme devoted solely to her compositions.

In speaking of the challenges of being a woman composer, Howe told her son Calderon: 'I wish that my name was Martin Howe and that would eliminate the whole woman question' (cited in Indenbaum 1993, pp. 195–196).⁸ Writing to Hull about the International Women's Council, Howe said: '... every piece of news & literature about it of course emphasizes the women very well – but did you ever think it keeps us more apart from the "men composers" than ever?'⁹ And in 1952, in an interview with the *Washington Post*:

Women composers should be played more than they are.... I don't think conductors have a prejudice against women composers now. But no one puts women writers or women painters in a class any more, and they still do so with women composers I know I considered it a handicap to be a woman when I started composing. I'm not a feminist. But I think I would have gotten along faster if I'd been a man (Howe, cited in Sharpe 1952, p. 25).

39.3 Adella Prentiss Hughes and the Fortnightly Musical Club of Cleveland

It is difficult to imagine the current classical music scene in Cleveland were it not for the work of Adella Prentiss Hughes. Hughes was born in Cleveland in 1869 and, as a part of her proper education, studied the piano, beginning at age six. She attended Miss Frances Fisher's School for Girls in preparation for making an application to Vassar. Following graduation from Vassar (in 1890), and a grand tour of Europe with her mother, she returned to Cleveland and, when asked, accepted work as an accompanist. More performing led to more success, and she turned professional in 1897.

Just as Mary Howe was a member of an amateur music club (with many members possessing the skills to be professional players), so too was Adella Prentiss Hughes; in her case, a music club that, often through her leadership, served Cleveland in vital and memorable ways. The Fortnightly Musical Club of Cleveland (FMCC) began with a meeting on 24 January 1894 at the home of Helen Curtis Webster, who, with six 'prominent' women, decided to form a musical club to 'further the interests of music in Cleveland'.¹⁰ Adella Prentiss Hughes was one of the charter members. In February of that year, invitations were issued for prospective members to attend the first regular meeting; more than 400 responded, indicating a strong level of interest for a group such as this.¹¹ According to Hughes, in the early days, members of the club played symphonies in four- or eight-hand arrangements (Hughes 1947, p. 44). For the several singers in the club, German lieder was favoured, perhaps, in part, because German was the only non-English language taught in the Cleveland schools at the time (*ibid.*). By 1919, the FMCC was the largest music club in the USA, numbering a staggering 1,529 members, and drawing an audience of 1,200 for its opening concert that same year (*ibid.*).

Multiple musical organisations in Cleveland owe their existence, in large part, to those six charter members of the FMCC. While the FMCC is no longer in existence, having disbanded in 2008, the Cleveland Music School Settlement, the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Cleveland Composers Guild remain active and valued participants in the arts culture of Cleveland, having been born through direct support from the members of the FMCC.¹² In 1918, the Cleveland Orchestra, founded by Adella Prentiss Hughes, received a gift of \$1,000 from the FMCC, the first organisation to contribute.

Hughes's early steps in the music profession were sure ones, beginning as a performer, then moving to the role of concert promoter and impresario in 1898, despite having no experience in that area. That year, following a FMCC performance of Liza Lehmann's *In a Persian Garden*, Hughes determined that she wanted to hear the work again, performed by 'celebrated' artists (*ibid.*, p. 45). A friend suggested that Hughes import a few musicians to perform and, in agreement, she quickly wrote to another friend in New York in order to explore options for three musicians for a concert in Cleveland which would include the Lehmann work. In Hughes's words:

My personal bank account at that time was fifteen dollars. I had signed contracts for \$750. My mother was alarmed. My father, a clear-sighted lawyer, looked at me gravely and then said, I think you can do it, daughter. The motives back of this undertaking were three-fold: I wanted to hear beautiful music beautifully performed; I wanted to advertise the fact that I was an accompanist available for engagements; and I needed to earn money, for the family had had serious reverses The net proceeds of this first concert amounted to \$1,000. It was invested in a Steinway piano which is still my dear delight after forty years of use (*ibid.*, pp. 45–46).

As for her professional work as a promoter: ‘I had not been aware of the fact that the management of a concert was anything to be labeled or taken into consideration, for it had been handled in a way that was natural to me’ (ibid.). Following the great success of that first recital, the soloists thought Hughes to be outstanding and she quickly became their booking agent as well as their accompanist. Much of Hughes’s early concert promotion work came through the FMCC, initially to benefit the work of that organisation, and later, as a means of making a living. During the first 25 years of the FMCC, that organisation, with Hughes’s partnership, served as a concert agency for Cleveland, regularly bringing artists and ensembles to the city for public performances. In 1901, Hughes proposed to the FMCC that they divide the profits from these guest artist performances equally between them; the proposal was readily accepted.

Across the course of her adult life, Hughes engaged with an astonishing number of professional musicians, in addition to mixing with families of wealth and influence in the city of Cleveland.¹³ One such family was the Rockefellers, known to Hughes from an early age. John D. Rockefeller Sr. kept not only a town home in Cleveland, but also a summer home nearby at Forest Hill. After the death of Hughes’s mother in 1908, Hughes was asked by Rockefeller Sr. to spend more time with Mrs. Rockefeller. Hughes promptly agreed and accompanied the family on a cross-country trip and enjoyed regular visits with them when they were in Cleveland. Despite this great friendship, Hughes refrained from seeking funding from the Rockefellers but for three occasions, each outlined in her book *Music is My Life* (1947). First, John Rockefeller Jr. was one of the guarantors for her symphony orchestra fund, supporting Hughes’s efforts to bring symphony orchestras to Cleveland each season; second, the Rockefellers helped to support the French–American Association for Musical Art (along with William K. Vanderbilt, Augustus Juilliard and others), helping to bring French musicians to America following World War I; and finally, Rockefeller Jr. pledged funds for the building of Severance Hall, the home of the Cleveland Orchestra.

As a booking agent, Hughes contracted world-renowned artists (such as Fritz Kreisler, Yehudi Menuhin, Maud Powell, Emma Eames, Maggie Teyte and Madam Schuman-Heink, to name only a few), and through the Symphony Orchestra Concert Series, begun in 1901, she regularly brought orchestras to Cleveland, beginning with the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Cincinnati Symphony (starting in 1902), the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (from 1904) and the Boston Symphony (from 1906). Hughes believed that the resounding success of her orchestra concert series enabled her to sign other notable artists for Cleveland performances, some as soloists with the visiting orchestras, others through her Artist Series. Her exceptional work with both series sowed the seeds for what would become the Cleveland Orchestra.

The discussions surrounding the possibility of an orchestra for Cleveland began in January 1918, when Hughes met Nikolai Sokoloff at an event in New York City. Through the Musical Arts Association (MAA), of which she was secretary (and the only woman member), she devised a way for the MAA to hire Sokoloff, then allow him to donate his time to local city schools, working with teachers and young students across the city. At the same time, the FMCC began to hold lectures before performances. These two elements, incorporating pre-concert lectures and young people’s concerts, became an important part of the work of the Cleveland Orchestra. According to Hughes, this work was:

[...] the forerunner of the Cleveland Orchestra’s unique project, educational concerts with advance study of music appreciation in schools and clubs. Started in the orchestra’s first season by Mr. Sokoloff and myself, by visits to school auditoriums and churches on occasional Friday nights, the orchestra played for parents and children and our conductor talked on the music they were hearing (Hughes 1947, p. 142).

The MAA undertook the task of forming the orchestra. Hughes wrote to the MAA board, urging support of a new orchestra for Cleveland:

No factor is more far reaching or vital to the success of that great national endeavor than music. Cleveland with its seventy-three or seventy-five percent foreign born population is a great field. The Musical Arts Association has an opportunity and an obligation. Your secretary [Hughes herself] has given her life to the study and the furtherance of these matters (ibid., p. 251).

The first season of the orchestra (1918–19) was a strong one, building upon the foundation that Hughes had already constructed through her Symphony Concert Series. The second season, in many ways, secured the future for the orchestra, as the MAA determined that year that it would support its local orchestra first, and any guest orchestras second (ibid., p. 263). Hughes became the orchestra's first general manager and remained in that position for 15 years. She was the primary figure who cultivated John L. Severance as an influential patron of the orchestra, eventually leading to the significant gift which helped to finance the construction of Severance Hall. She also worked closely with Dudley S. Blossom, who became the executive vice-president of the MAA in 1920 and later served as its president from 1936 to 1938: his son, Dudley Blossom Jr., served as trustee from 1946 to 1961. By naming their summer home the Blossom Music Center, opened in 1968, the Cleveland Orchestra recognised the sustained support of the Blossom family.

In 1933, following her retirement from the orchestra, Hughes was honoured on 3 June, celebrating the 35th anniversary of her first concert. Carl Engel, then chief of the music division of the Library of Congress,¹⁴ wrote a tribute to Hughes, which included the following:

[Her road] has been [one] of high accomplishment, always with the greatest good of the greatest number as the goal. It has been an enthusiastic, loyal and unselfish service to the cause of music, in the interest of art, and for the benefit of the city of Cleveland. It has been an example and an inspiration. No material reward or words of gratitude can do full justice to such an accomplishment. The only worthy form of appreciation must be the upholding, at any cost, and through sacrifices, if necessary, of the ideals to which Adella Prentiss Hughes has devoted, throughout her life, a keen intelligence, a fine discrimination, a disinterested and impartial spirit, and unwavering strength of character (Engel, cited in Hughes 1947, p. 288).

Both Howe, from the sidelines, and Hughes, in a principal role, were behind the creation of two major US orchestras. In fact, women were crucial to this important cultural work. As Whitesitt has argued:

[...] of the ten major cities that were the first to support permanent symphony orchestras in the years 1842 to 1919, women were actively involved in setting up nearly all of them (excepting the Boston Symphony Orchestra) and played a leading role in at least four: Cincinnati, Philadelphia, New York and Cleveland (1997, p. 72).

Mary Howe, Adella Prentiss Hughes, and so many women like them, from classes of significant wealth to those who participated as they could, contributed greatly to the musical growth and development in their respective communities. Often challenged in balancing private and public personas, Howe, Hughes and other women musicians faced untold obstacles in navigating the

demands of spouse and family, along with those related to maintaining and advancing a career in music. Their passion for music performance and teaching, for arts patronage and growth, fuelled the work of the music clubs that populated cities across the USA. American women in the first half of the twentieth century supported and sustained music outreach through their commitment and leadership, leaving a legacy that continues to benefit the generations that followed.

Notes

- 1 Friday Morning Music Club (FMMC) website. Available from: <https://fmmc.org/about-us/>
- 2 Translated by Dorothy Indenbaum from the French.
- 3 In a twist of fate, Howe and her new husband had a reservation on the Titanic, returning to the USA following their honeymoon, yet cancelled in order to extend their trip.
- 4 Anne Hull Collection 1905–1980, Library of Congress: <https://catalog.loc.gov/vwebv/search?searchCode=LCCN&searchArg=2016570572&searchType=1&permalink=y>.
- 5 Indenbaum cites a letter from Howe to Hull, dated 15 March 1933.
- 6 Indenbaum cites a letter from Howe to Calderon Howe, written in October 1937, to be delivered posthumously.
- 7 To the author's surprise, her great aunt was listed as one of the women who worked with Howe during the early years of the NSO.
- 8 Indenbaum quoted from a telephone interview between herself and Calderon Howe, 15 May 1990.
- 9 Letter from Howe to Hull, dated 9 April 1955, in Anne Hull Collection, Library of Congress.
- 10 Fortnightly Musical Club of Cleveland Centennial Book, 1894–1994, p. 5. Booklet produced by the FMCC's Centennial Committee.
- 11 The first regular meeting was on 6 February 1894.
- 12 FMCC Centennial Book, op. cit., pp. 6–9.
- 13 Details regarding Hughes's personal life are scarce. She married the singer Felix Hughes in either 1903 or 1904. Hughes frequently accompanied her husband's performances, including his annual recitals in Cleveland. He practically disappears from her autobiography after 1919, however, and the couple divorced in 1923.
- 14 Engel was also friend to Mary Howe and to the renowned music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge.

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