Episode 345: Amateur Musicians in the Early United States

[00:00:00] **Announcer:** You're listening to an AirWave Media podcast.

[00:00:04] **Liz Covart:** *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of the Omohundro Institute and is sponsored by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Hello and welcome to episode 345 of *Ben Franklin's World*, the podcast dedicated to helping you learn more about how the people and events of our early American past have shaped the present-day world we live in. And I'm your host Liz Covart. Our study of music in early America continues with this third episode in our five-episode series. Our last two episodes have helped us better understand the musical landscapes of Native North America around 1492 and around colonial British America before 1776. In this episode, we're going to jump forward in time a bit to the early days of the United States. Glenda Goodman, an associate professor of music at the University of Pennsylvania, and author of the book *Cultivated by Hand: Amateur Musicians in the Early American Republic*, joins us to investigate the role of music in the lives of wealthy white Americans during the earliest days of the early American republic. Now, during our investigation, Glenda reveals the musical landscapes of the early United States, including instruments early Americans played, the development and cultivation of music education in the early republic, and the impact women in the postrevolutionary generation had on the development of musical culture in the new United States.

But first, our friends at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation have come through for us again. The music examples you'll hear in this episode come from the albums and work of Colonial Williamsburg musicians. I've listed the pieces we've used and link to the albums they come from in the show notes, which you can find at benfranklinsworld.com/345. Okay, are you ready to explore music in the early United States? Let's go meet our guest historian.

Our guest is an associate professor of music at the University of Pennsylvania. She's a historian of music who has a research expertise in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American music. She's the author of numerous articles and a book, *Cultivated by Hand: Amateur Musicians in the Early American Republic*. Welcome to *Ben Franklin's World*, Glenda Goodman.

[00:02:42] **Glenda Goodman:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:02:43] **Liz Covart:**. Glenda, I wonder if we could begin our conversation with having you tell us a bit about the musical landscape of the early American republic. Could you tell us about this landscape, what it sounded like, and what kinds of music people were singing and playing during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?

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[00:03:01] **Glenda Goodman:** You know, it really depended on where you were and who you were, because of course, the early republic was socially and demographically so diverse. So if you were spending your time inside in a tavern, perhaps, or a coffee house, you might be hearing the latest political songs that would be sung from a broad side or from a pamphlet. If you were in someone's parlor, you might be hearing the most recent imports of sophisticated music from Europe, the concert music that was considered most fashionable. If you were witnessing agricultural labor, you might be hearing work songs. And one of the things that's really interesting is that the languages would've been really diverse as well. You'd be hearing songs in English and French. In Indigenous languages and dialects. So it's a hard question to answer, but it really depends on who you are and where you are.

One of the ways that scholars make sense of this sort of cornucopia, cacophony of music is to divide it in terms of the function that the music played. We like to think about sacred music and secular music. Sacred music that allowed people to worship whatever deity they considered most holy. And secular music sort of covers everything else. So a lot of what I write about in my book is how both sacred and secular music was so important to musicians, and within the secular music we can think about it in terms of vernacular or folk music—music that would circulate orally often—as opposed to concert music that would very likely require some level of music literacy and greater financial resources to experience. So that's some of the ways we think about it. The variety is just quite tremendous in the period.

[00:04:49] **Liz Covart:** Now how do you as a scholar get a sense of what music sounded like in the early republic? How do you know what instrumentation early Americans may have used to play a song or orchestral piece? How do you know what their lyrics sounded like and how can we know what music sounded like when we don't have any audio recordings from the early republic?

[00:05:11] **Glenda Goodman:** We definitely do not have recordings from the eighteenth century. Although, you know, we do have things like musical clocks and barrel organs and other kinds of mechanical instruments that were made in this period. So we can get a sense of some things like tempo and phrasing, so it's not completely lost. But no, we don't have gramophones, photographs, CDs, MP3s, etc. When you look at the written record of written music of this time period, it can be maddeningly vague, so it'll just be like a line of music that gives you no information about what instrument, how fast, how loud it should be played. And a lot of what we can deduce about the way it would've sounded actually just comes from descriptions of when it goes wrong. Like when someone does a bad job of performing, they might say, oh, it didn't work out so well that time. You know, my instrument went flat, or so and so was rushing, etc. So we can look for descriptive sources that will give us some sorts of clues, and they're often quite lively and interesting to read anyway because it gives you a sense of people's petty grievances and enjoyments, which is really a pleasure to read about.

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But most of the written record is vexingly vague. This actually points to just the limits of what we can know about and how we can interpret primary sources from the past. One of the really enjoyable aspects of researching music history is that we can also collaborate with living musicians today who can perform this repertoire on instruments that date from the same time period, or our replicas of instruments that date from the same time period. And that can really help bring this music to life and give us a sense of what it might have sounded like. But we really have to accept just a certain amount of contingency of not knowing if we're getting it exactly right. But honestly, getting it exactly right isn't necessary in order to start to understand what it meant and why it matters.

[00:07:16] **Liz Covart:** So if we look at this early period in the early republic, what kinds of instruments would people have used to play music? Haley would like to know more about the types of musical instruments people in the early American republic learned to play.

[00:07:31] **Glenda Goodman:** If you are picturing a parlor, you know, a lot of people think of scenes described in novels by Jane Austen, for example, or Charles Brockden Brown, to give an early American example. You would expect to find some sort of keyboard instrument that is a very handy instrument for domestic entertainment because you can sit down and play it, and honestly, a keyboard is fairly forgiving. You can't mess it up and play accidentally out of tune when you're touching the keys, unlike say, a violin where it's really easy to play out of tune. So a keyboard instrument is very forgiving and handy for social entertainment and keyboard instruments like clavichords, harpsichords, and in the early nineteenth century, forte pianos—or what we would just call now pianos—were very popular, although kind of expensive. So that's one main kind of instrument, and both women and men enjoyed playing those instruments.

You also find a lot of violins and fiddles. Flutes and pipes of various kinds. Guitars and harps. The harp was a very popular instrument among young women. All of these are instruments that would've been really suitable for interior entertainment. Other instruments like the trumpet, you really wouldn't hear that so much inside, it was frankly just too loud.

[00:08:52] **Liz Covart:** I can picture myself in this parlor you've described with its Jane Austen like scene of an upper-class family listening to a member play the pianoforte. But we know that this scene would've only been possible for a very small percentage of early Americans. So what if we don't have the economic success and advantages of upper class families? Say we're members of the middling, or poor groups of early American society. Or perhaps we live in a rural area instead of inside a port city. What kinds of instruments might we have around our homes in these cases?

[00:09:25] **Glenda Goodman:** That's such a good question because it doesn't take a journey that far from the urban centers of the eastern seaboard to suddenly have far less access to the

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consumer products that allowed musicians to accumulate and enjoy playing music. It kind of makes common sense when you think about how difficult it might be to transport a piano, even a hundred miles inland if you don't have a river to help you make the journey. There were far fewer stores and emporiums in the interior in the early republic than there were in the major cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore.

But there weren't zero stores. It was possible, and one of the things that I became interested in in my research for this book was just figuring out what people had in their houses. Probate inventories for what was in houses when people passed away was really useful to figure out like, oh, they did have a piano, or they had a violin, or they had a violin case, which makes me think they at one point had a violin. That was very useful and I used that kind of resource to figure out, for example, what was in the home of one amateur, Betsy van Rensselaer, who lived just outside of Albany, New York, which of course is more accessible because it's on a river. I also built on similar research by the historian Barbara Lambert, who went through tons of probate records for colonial and early national Massachusetts, in particular, to see what instruments were around. And she found just an abundance of instruments, especially string instruments, which are very portable. So like violins, violas, guitars, cellos, you know, you can sort of pick them up and carry them. They don't require a ton of equipment. So she found that those were actually fairly common, even in the more middling households.

[00:11:22] **Liz Covart:** Now that we have an idea of the instruments that were available to early Americans and that they would have in their homes, I'd like to go back to people like Betsy van Rensselaer, an amateur musician that Glenda mentioned earlier, because Glenda's book, *Cultivated by Hand*, specifically focuses on the lives of several amateur musicians. So Glenda, I wonder if you could tell us who qualified as an amateur musician, what made someone an amateur musician versus say, a professional musician in the early republic?

[00:11:54] **Glenda Goodman:** One of the words I really like to use when I think about amateur and professional is actually to swap in the word "occupational" instead of "professional." I think there's a bit of a value judgment that has come to be ascribed to amateur versus professional. "Amateur" being less serious, maybe more of a dilettante, possibly less disciplined, less skilled. "Professional" maybe places a lot of emphasis on attaining a certain level of training and accreditation. And that simply wasn't the case in the early American republic. The distinction wasn't between how good you were and how hard you worked, but actually whether you were doing this as an occupation in order to earn a living. And there are very few people for whom it was ambiguous whether they were doing this for a living occupationally or not, is actually pretty clear. Like, You were copying music and performing music and giving lessons for pay, and you can trace that sometimes in financial records, or you were not.

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So an occupational musician is doing this as a source of revenue, and some occupational musicians found that music wasn't the only source of revenue they needed. They had to also maybe run a store or teach in other ways, maybe be a writing instructor, etc. And this class of musician is socially distinct from the amateur musicians who I profile in my book. The amateur musicians who I write about in my book, tended to be more socially and economically elite. They had more financial resources and this translated to more leisure time. So one of the ways that I ended up thinking about amateur was not in terms of level of seriousness or commitment to music. They were quite serious and quite committed to music. But actually in terms of a class identity and a social status position where music occupied personally and also socially the way they were perceived. Music occupied a role in their lives that was about promoting an image of having leisure, having the ability to pursue music purely for enjoyment, even though that leisurely enjoyment actually required quite a lot of hard work.

[00:14:10] **Liz Covart:** Yeah. I wonder if we could talk a bit more about the musicians that you chose to study in your book, *Cultivated by Hand*. Why did you choose to study elite musicians or musicians from elite backgrounds versus say, musicians who came from middling and poor backgrounds?

[00:14:27] **Glenda Goodman:** There are hundreds of sources available that can give us clues about what amateur musicians were up to in the early republic. These sources are mostly music books into which amateurs wrote music by hand themselves. So there's tons and tons of sources that people, not necessarily elite people, were making these music books in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. So I didn't have to focus on elites. But I really wanted to show not just *that* people were making music, but dig into what it meant to them in their daily lives, in their family lives, in their different life stages. And to do that, I knew I wanted to have access to other kinds of primary sources, like letters and diaries and other kinds of materials that would give me insights into what they were thinking and doing in their daily lives. And as I was looking at music books and sort of triangulating those against available archival records, I found, unsurprisingly, that it was much easier to find that kind of granular, detailed information about more elite people. So I decided to just go for it and focus on those more elite people. Not to say that they were more important, but just to say that they allowed me to tell the kind of intimate histories that I wanted to get at.

And I was surprised by what I was able to find, even. I thought I might find some information about, you know, genealogy and when and where people lived, etc. But what I ended up finding were fairly personal documents that describe things like courtship and death and losses of all kinds and frustrations and business hardships. All of that came through in the historical record I ended up working with.

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[00:16:19] **Liz Covart:** And it sounds like music books form perhaps the keystone of your project. This was a primary source that helped lead you to other historical accounts or primary firsthand accounts about amateur musicians in the early republic and what their lives were like and what music would mean to them, both playing music and perhaps sharing music with their families. So since music books seem to be so important to your work in *Cultivated by Hand*, could you tell us more about this source? Could you take us through a music book and tell us what it looked like and what information we would find inside if we were to open up a music book?

[00:16:55] **Glenda Goodman:** I love these sources because each one is different. It's really hard to generalize about all of them, but that's their charm. I can tell you that they do take the form of a book, so they are in some way bound up pieces of paper with pages that you can turn, and the pages have music notation written on them. The binding might be just some scraps of wastepaper, or it might be like fancy leather. That varies quite widely. The number of pages varies from just a handful of loose scrap paper, like eight pieces of paper, to maybe two hundred or three hundred pieces of paper. Sometimes they are really high-quality raw materials and sometimes they're really quite poor. But all of them share this common denominator, which is that they speak an intention to gather together in one place a collection of repertoire for future use and for sharing with others. So that's the definition that I ended up working with in this book, that this corpus of music books that I worked with, all of them in some way provide this access to a musical past that was about sharing music out of the pleasure of sharing music with others.

[00:18:12] **Liz Covart:** Now it seems like another advantage of studying elite musicians—musicians who were from an elite class—would've been their access to musical education, and Lydia is very curious to know how early Americans learned to play music. So Glenda, could you tell us a little bit about musical education in the early republic? Was music education like it is today, where you go to your local public school and learn how to play an instrument or sing in a choir?

[00:18:39] **Glenda Goodman:** Well, we've been talking about instrumental music a lot so far, but actually the way many people learned music and especially learned to read music notation was not instrumental, it was vocal, it was singing, and they would learn that through the church or through municipally sponsored but still sacred music–focused evening classes. There's this fascinating phenomenon in the eighteenth century called the singing school, where you would have men, they're all men, who were called singing masters, who would arrive in a town and offer a short-term music class that would meet twice a week, perhaps. And if you attended that class, or if you sent your children to attend that class, they would learn roughly how to read music notation and how to sing from that music notation and sing together. This helped make church singing sound much better and eventually led to more particular singing societies that were more advanced. But to a large extent, that was how people learned how to read music. So it

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was actually separated out from the physical and technical side of playing an instrument. But people did learn to play instruments as well, and by the end of the eighteenth century there's another interesting phenomenon, which is the popularity of published manuals for how to play an instrument.

Many of these were reprinted from Europe, and we would buy one or borrow one, and it would be a manual for how to play the violin or a manual for how to play the oboe. And there would be charts and diagrams that would show you where to put your fingers and how to position your body. But if you didn't have a teacher to make sure you were doing it right, you could imagine how successful or unsuccessful these manuals were at actually teaching how to play an instrument. Ultimately, amateur musicians did require some sort of music teacher, but fortunately, by the end of the eighteenth century, there were music teachers who were floating around or settled in particular cities who were available to offer instrumental music lessons to those who could afford them.

[00:20:50] **Liz Covart:** And of course the analog today is learning how to play an instrument via an app. That's how I've been teaching myself how to play ukulele. It's been all through the Fender app.

[00:21:00] **Glenda Goodman:** But of course with an app you can probably hear examples of what it is supposed to sound like. Can you imagine trying to figure out how to play a violin if you only have a rough idea of what holding a violin is supposed to look like? Or if you don't know how the strings are supposed to be tuned, it kind of boggles the mind to imagine the attempt at disseminating that kind of information without any sort of aural cues available.

[00:21:29] **Liz Covart:** And I'm thinking how hard it would be to learn to play a brass instrument this way. For example, I learned to play trumpet in grade school and played it all through college, and you can't really learn to play the trumpet unless you know what the different notes sound like when you use those three valves in different combinations.

[00:21:47] **Glenda Goodman:** And what to do with your mouth, with your embouchure. There's so many minute details of physical control that go into any sort of music making that just can only be very roughly approximated by written instructions.

[00:22:02] **Liz Covart:** Now, I'm curious if any of the amateur musicians you studied learned to write and compose music. That seems like a very distinct skill that requires a lot of knowledge beyond just learning how to play an instrument or put notes on a page, or really even singing song in a choir. So did any of the amateur musicians you studied learn how to write and compose music?

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[00:22:22] **Glenda Goodman:** It's a very different skill and it simply wasn't emphasized in any of the educational settings we've been talking about so far, or in any of the social performance settings, it was just not valued. So unlike how people might be encouraged to write a poem and share it with their friends or a loved one, no one was being encouraged to write a new melody and harmony to circulate among their friends, or if they were, it's really not showing up in any of the sources that I looked at. I started to notice that in these manuscript books that we were talking about earlier, that there just aren't new compositions. It just was not a matter that amateurs concerned themselves with. And instead, they were more concerned with how to copy music in a beautiful hand and then perform it gracefully and in a way that didn't embarrass themselves in front of their friends.

[00:23:18] **Liz Covart:** From other conversations we've had on this podcast, we know that most early Americans were taught very different skill sets based not only on their social class and social rank, but also on their gender. And we just discussed how status and class played roles in someone's ability to access instruments and musical education, but how did gender influence someone's ability to learn and play music? How did it impact their opportunities to perform their music? Glenda, I know you're keen to answer this question, but let us first take a moment to thank our episode sponsor.

As we've been hearing, music was an ever-present aspect of early American life. And our friends through the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation have a new exhibition in the art museums of Colonial Williamsburg called *Making Music in Early America*. *Making Music in Early America* will immerse you in the musical world of the eighteenth century, a time when you could hear songs sung in the work fields, at militia drills on town commons, and places like churches, ballrooms, and family parlors. This exhibition at the art museums of Colonial Williamsburg will allow you to see the instruments used to enliven dinner parties, theaters, and life in enslaved quarters. It will also allow you to see how music changed over time and created communities and community life. To learn more about Colonial Williamsburg's *Making Music in Early America* exhibition visit benfranklinsworld.com/music. That's benfranklinsworld.com/music.

Glenda, how did gender influence someone's ability to access instruments, musical education, and the opportunities they would've had to perform music in the early republic?

[00:24:56] **Glenda Goodman:** One of the big differences, actually, is how they were trained to make music and for whom they were making that music. One of the things that I write about in my book is the idea of music as a particularly feminine accomplishment. The kinds of educational priorities you were describing, like needlepoint, maybe drawing and dancing, if those are available to you, would be considered feminine accomplishments. Accomplishments that make a young woman look particularly impressive socially and might help with courtship. Music was definitely one of those accomplishments, whereas for men the point of making music

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was more about homosocial sociability. Being able to join a music club at Harvard, for example, which existed, and make music with your friends that way. So at least in terms of the conversations about women's education and all of the publications saying like the right and wrong way to educate women, all of the emphasis when it comes to music is on how to make women as pleasing as possible to men, whether that be their fathers or their potential suitors. And of course you don't get any of that baggage when it comes to music education for men. They aren't told to make sure they're being very pleasing, but instead are told to make sure they just don't embarrass themselves by taking it too seriously. So there's this social aspect about the music education that prioritize different goals for women and men.

But then there's also the repertoire itself. What was considered appropriate for women and for men to perform. One of the things I found really enjoyable was to dig into the music that women were copying, because it actually sort of undermines all of the arguments telling them to just make music that will please others, because the music that they made, ultimately, I think, was most pleasing to themselves. These beautiful, straightforward, but quite lovely songs that could be performed just for their own pleasure and enjoyment and didn't necessarily have to impress others.

[00:27:04] **Liz Covart:** As you were looking at music books and other sources you consulted to write your book, *Cultivated by Hand*, did you come across any instance where a gentleman said, "I definitely fell in love with my wife because she could play music," or perhaps a woman who said, "I captured my love's attention because I was able to sing and play the harp?"

[00:27:23] **Glenda Goodman:** That's a great question. The answer is no. Mostly what I found was whether a potential husband encouraged or discouraged a woman from making music. I was very interested to find in one case, a couple that I write about, Sarah Brown and her husband, Charles Hereof. He actively encouraged her quite devoted interest in music and continued to do so after they were married and even promised her sister that he would continue to do so. So during their courtship period, he's always buying music and sending it to her, and then as soon as they are married—for a while he's trying to convince her to elope with him, and during that period as well—he says, don't worry. Wherever we move, I will make sure there's a piano for you. And he does. He makes sure there's a piano for her. So I was more interested in figuring out whether courtship and marriage obstructed women's interest in music. But I didn't find any slam dunk proof that showed, yes, this was what sealed the deal in a potential mate.

[00:28:24] **Liz Covart:** And what about an answer to your research question? Did you find instances in these historical sources where marriage actually obstructed women from appreciating and playing music?

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[00:28:35] **Glenda Goodman:** To go back to the example of Sarah Brown and Charles Herreshoff, sometimes the duties of running a household and childbearing would interrupt. Sarah collected quite a bit of music during her life, but there are these long periods of pause. She has five children with her husband, all of whom survived childhood, so understandably there are periods where she just stops copying music and then resumes subsequently. But I didn't find any examples of music being shut down. It really gets to the misogyny that's in some of the printed primary sources that are about whether or not women should be taught to perform music. This was actually a fairly active debate in the late eighteenth century in the United States and also in England. Whether this was a worthwhile pursuit or just a frivolous, costly, time-consuming hobby that was unnecessary, and that shouldn't be encouraged. People like Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster both wrote on this topic and said, you know, this is really only something that the most wealthy can afford to do, otherwise you really shouldn't bother and you shouldn't bother, because once you're married, your husband won't care anymore and your piano will just become a dusty piece of furniture in the corner. And honestly, they were probably right some of the time, but not all of the time. And I think it just speaks to the discomfort with women taking pleasure in their own pursuits. That was maybe a broader problem in the time period.

[00:30:08] **Liz Covart:** To your point about how childbearing and childrearing could put a pause on playing music, there was this idea in the early republic called the "republican motherhood," and it was thought to be part of the mother's job to raise her children to be civic-minded, good republicans, or members of the early American republic. And the idea was that mothers would educate their children. So you mentioned that Sarah Brown had five children and that she was a pretty accomplished musician. Would it have been up to Sarah Brown as a mother to teach her children music, or was this just something that was hired out to a music instructor to do during this time?

[00:30:47] **Glenda Goodman:** Someone like Sarah Brown definitely would've been capable of teaching her children music, and in her case, I suspect she did. Or at least taught them to treasure music by her own example. But someone like her certainly would have been able to afford a music instructor for her five children. She was from an enormously wealthy family, the Brown family of Providence, Rhode Island. Her father was John Brown, the merchant and the slave trader who helped to found Brown University. And I suspect that just as it might be prudent to hire a writing master and a dancing master, hiring a music teacher also would've been socially appropriate for someone in her position. But I think where the idea of republican motherhood comes in is actually in cultivating the idea that these kinds of skills were worthwhile and necessary and could show that the new nation was capable of producing citizens who were sophisticated and fashionable and artistically minded, all of which were valuable traits.

[00:31:54] **Liz Covart:** Speaking of people like Sarah Brown, you make a point in your book, *Cultivated by Hand,* that historians often skip over this generation of musicians, this first postrevolutionary generation, who seemed to be this generation that was overshadowed by who

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they were caught between—the heroics of their parents and the revolutionary generation and the renown of their children in this early republic generation. So Glenda, I wonder if you would tell us more about this generation of musicians, this first postrevolutionary generation, and why you find them so fascinating,

[00:32:26] **Glenda Goodman:** Right. You know, in this time period you mostly find writings about composers like Mozart and then Beethoven. There's just not a lot of attention paid to what is happening in this kind of milieu or really in the United States generally. But what's really interesting about them is that they help bridge this gap between a colonial period of music making, where most—in the social class I'm writing about—most of the music that was really valued and available was what was sung in church. So it was very sacred oriented and there simply wasn't as robust a consumer culture to circulate sheet music and music instruments as there would be later in the eighteenth century. So you have this shift from a colonial music culture that has just less music circulating—some music circulating, but less music circulating—and a narrower range of music circulation to, if you jump ahead to the antebellum period in the early nineteenth century, the generation after the one I'm writing about, you have this just explosion of commercial mass produced music and parlor songs by people like Stephen Foster, giving rise to blackface minstrelsy, you know, there's just this total abundance of popular, commercially successful music that happens in the nineteenth century.

But in the period that I'm looking at, they're shifting between concerns of demonstrating a sufficient degree of piety, while also showing that citizens of the new nation were also sophisticated and cultured and worldly and aware of what was happening, especially what was happening in terms of musical trends in Europe, in order to demonstrate that the new nation had some degree of cultural wherewithal that should be taken seriously, or at least shouldn't be ridiculed too much as being too provincial. And so this generation really lays the groundwork for what can frankly be seen as the rise of a completely dominant US presence in the musical world that starts with blackface minstrelsy in the nineteenth century, that didn't just come from nowhere. The idea that the United States somehow should have that prominent role across the globe. But it really took this transitional generation, the generation I'm writing about, in order to help turn that corner from a more provincial to a more transnational and cosmopolitan presence on the musical stage of the world.

[00:34:52] **Liz Covart:** You mentioned that it was this generation, we're still speaking about this postrevolutionary generation that really laid the groundwork for a dominant American musical culture around the world. Could you tell us in what ways this generation laid that foundation? What this foundation was composed of?

[00:35:08] **Glenda Goodman:** A lot of foundation can be thought of in terms of infrastructure, educational infrastructure. This is a generation that has greater access to music education, greater

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access to commercially distributed music, printed sheet music, and, of course, demonstrates in the music books that they copied out by hand, greater interest in putting their own stamp on how that music circulated than was ever seen before. And so they really lay the foundation in terms of number of people who had these skills and who valued these skills and would want to see them promoted among their children than had existed before.

In the 1830s, you start to get the first examples of music education in public schools. This starts in Boston with the work of Lowell Mason. And the idea that you would have music education as just a matter of fact in public schools would not have been available to people in the 1830s if it weren't for the previous generation that said no, actually I did invest quite a bit of time in learning to read and write music, and I think this is just a normal skill people should have. So one of the ways they lay the foundation is definitely in terms of education.

[00:36:23] **Liz Covart:** I also wonder if you could tell us a bit more about how studying early republican amateur musicians and their music books can help us better understand the history of the early United States. What roles did you find that music played in the early United States?

[00:36:37] **Glenda Goodman:** I can answer that in terms of the music that I write about because there's so many different kinds of music. So that answer would really change if you're focusing on a different kind of genre. I'm mostly thinking about more cultivated concert music and music that was popular among the elites. So the role that that sliver of music played was really in promoting the image of US citizens as being sophisticated, cosmopolitan, not just country bumpkins, but actually possessed of the latest fashions and tastes that were considered necessary and valuable in order to be taken seriously on an international stage. And that, I think, in terms of the reputation of the United States and in terms of building the idea that this was a nation that was not just establishing itself economically, politically, militarily, but also in terms of having a culture that could match other cultural spheres, was really significant.

But there's another side of it as well, because the amateurs who I write about in this book, these elite women and men who I'm profiling, they're all white. And the other side of how this sort of reflects or how music bears upon, then shaped, this time period was in terms of the racial hierarchy and stratification that this kind of music helped to promote. There are no examples I came up with of elite free Black or elite Indigenous peoples who left the same kind of marks in the historical record that I could trace and uncover. The music culture I write about really did establish itself as a white culture. And there are vanishingly few exceptions where we might know, oh, in Newport, Rhode Island, there was one formerly enslaved singing master, who we know about, for example, Occramer Marycoo. But these are exceptions that really prove the rule that this is a white culture, that elite culture was white culture.

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Episode 345: Amateur Musicians in the Early United States

[00:38:43] **Liz Covart:** So it sounds like we have a rich record that can really show us about this dominant white musical culture but we know that there were these other musical cultures from African Americans and Indigenous Americans, and yet we just don't have the archival sources to tell us about these musical cultures, or at least not as much about these musical cultures. It really sounds like a story of archival silences.

[00:39:06] **Glenda Goodman:** It 100% is, and when I say this elite culture was white, it's not a good thing. It reflects the lack of opportunities and the biases that people faced. But then, exactly as you say, it reflects conspicuous absences, things that were never documented and things that were documented but then subsequently lost. That is just endemic to early American sources in general. And it's actually something I, I've written about and I'm really interested in elsewhere because one of the figures who I thought would be in my book, and I ended up not putting in my book, because I'm going to write about him in my next, is Mohegan Christian Indian named Joseph Johnson, who in the early 1770s wrote a number of manuscript music books. He also kept a diary in which he describes writing out these manuscript music books. So we know he was doing them, he was doing them in Farmington, Connecticut, just west of Hartford, and he was giving them out to people in the town, both Native Christian people and to prominent English settler colonists in the town.

So he was quite sociable with his music manuscripts. But none of them survive. We know they existed for a while but his descendants in the descendant community, they don't know where they are. The local historical societies, no one knows where they are. There's a huge record of loss here that goes along with, when I talk about the abundance of the material record that I had to work with, actually, It's just a shadow of how much was also lost.

[00:40:38] **Liz Covart:** Let's move into the "Time Warp." This is a fun segment of the show where we ask you a hypothetical history question about what might have happened if something had occurred differently or if someone had acted differently.

Glenda, in your opinion, how might the experiences and opportunities of female musicians have been different if it had been acceptable for women to play music professionally or occupationally in early America?

[00:41:23] **Glenda Goodman:** Women did play music occupationally, or they did sing. There were lots of opera singers and other stage performers, but as you might imagine, they didn't occupy quite the same social status of the amateurs who I'm writing about. So it's not to say that there weren't professional musicians or occupational musicians who were women. There were. But if the women who I write about, these amateurs who had the leisure to make music just for fun, also could have said, you know what? I'm an extrovert. I'm a showboat. I want to take this show on the road. I want to go on stage and perform this. I think it could have had huge political

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consequences because the visibility that comes with being on stage, just in terms of representation, would have been tremendously consequential in order to show that yes, women are capable of holding their own and expressing themselves in an unabashed fashion. And in a highly personal fashion that would've been really remarkable. I think it would've helped accelerate some of the political progress that's stagnated in terms of women in representational politics in the early republic.

[00:42:35] **Liz Covart:** Now, you mentioned a few minutes ago that your next book is going to include a Mohegan musician. Would you tell us more about your new research project?

[00:42:44] **Glenda Goodman:** My new project looks at this same time period and a little bit earlier. I'm looking at the mid- to late eighteenth century, and I'm tracking the role that Protestant sacred music played in encounters between English settler colonists and Native Americans in the Native Northeast. So especially between Algonkian-speaking peoples and people in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. And I'm doing this because there are a lot of examples that show that missionary work and the attempt to bring Protestant, in particular, beliefs to these groups really relied on the use of hymnody and music to help sort of sell the message. And, fascinatingly, Native groups that took up these practices changed the music, changed the way it sounded, incorporated it into their own Indigenous systems of meaning making and belief systems in ways that really haven't been taken fully into account by music historians. So I want to understand sort of how hymnody was both a handmaiden of settler colonialism and an opportunity to resist and talk back to those settler-colonial forces.

[00:44:03] **Liz Covart:** And how can we contact you if we have more questions about music in the early United States?

[00:44:09] **Glenda Goodman:** You can look me up on my faculty page at the University of Pennsylvania Music Department. I also have a website, which is glendagoodman.org. I sometimes put updates about what I'm working on and archival photos and things that I think are really interesting.

[00:44:25] **Liz Covart:** Glenda Goodman, thank you for helping us better understand music as it factored into the lives of elite white families in the early United States.

[00:44:33] **Glenda Goodman:** Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

[00:44:35] **Liz Covart:** The early American republic represents an important period in the musical history of the United States. In the early days of the republic, music helped Americans mark the shift from their days of subjects of the British Empire to their days ahead as citizens of

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the new United States. As Glenda described for us, the generation who came of age during the American Revolution played a really important role in recognizing how Americans could use music to secure their place in the international and global world. This work to use music really started with elite white women like Sarah Brown, who took the time to educate their children about music and to instill in them a real appreciation for music. Brown and mothers like her really helped to make music a part of their children's civic education. And this appreciation for music really paid off as the new United States looked to help its people develop a national culture apart from the national culture of Great Britain. Music and Americans' appreciation for music became a marker of the cosmopolitan nature and sophistication of elite Americans—Americans who tended to have jobs in government, travel to Europe, and interact with European merchants, bankers, diplomats, and statesmen.

As the early republic turned into the antebellum, or pre-Civil War, period in United States history during the 1830s, it became harder and harder for Europeans to deny the cultural sophistication of the United States and its citizens. It also became harder for Europe to ignore the distinctive American culture that had developed in the new United States. As Americans demonstrated hallmarks of what the Western world deemed to be civilized culture, a type of culture that included an appreciation for sophisticated music, the Western world found it had to take the United States and its people seriously, both as contributors to Western culture and as full-fledged members of the Western world.

You'll find more information about Glenda, her book, *Cultivated by Hand*, plus notes, links, and a transcript for everything we talked about today on the show notes page, benfranklinsworld.com/345. As Glenda reminded us, the musical world of the early United States really extended beyond the world of elite white families. So next week we'll continue our series with a different view of how music contributed to the culture and work of the new United States. If you've been enjoying this series about music in early America, I hope you'll tell your friends and family about it. Production assistance for this podcast comes from the Omohundro Institute's digital audio team, Joseph Adelman, Holly White, Ian Tonat, and Dylan Holzer. Breakmaster Cylinder composed our custom theme music. This podcast is part of the AirWave Media podcast network. To discover and listen to their other podcasts, visit airwavemedia.com.

Finally, did our conversation with Glenda raise any questions about music in the early United States for you? Let me know and we'll see if Holly White and I can create a new episode to answer those questions, liz@ben franklinsworld.com. *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of the Omohundro Institute and is sponsored by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

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