

Minnesota Musicians of the Cultured Generation

David Ferguson Colville
Baritone and Choral Director

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David Ferguson Colville

Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

David Ferguson Colville

Baritone and Choral Director

David F. Colville, baritone and choral director, was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 19 May 1848, the son of Samuel Colville and Miss Ferguson. According to records (not completely checked), the father Samuel Colville (1825-1886) was originally from Ireland. In America he led the life of itinerant manager of theaters. He settled in New York around 1866 where he opened Wood's Museum and had a great success with "his importation of Lydia Thompson and her British blondes in their musical burlesques." A number of his companies toured the country: the Colville Folly Company, the Henderson and Colville Opera Company and the Colville Opera Company which presented operettas.¹

At an undetermined date but seemingly very early in David's life, Miss Ferguson moved to St. Louis, Missouri, and David became a choir singer from the age of twelve in one of the largest churches of the city. Later, he was numbered among the "beaux" of the city.

Mr. David F. Colville, whose talent for music is so well known, is tall, handsome and courteous; a great favorite in the social world. Since the recent will of his father, the late Samuel Colville, a fortune adds to his attractions, as he is still a bachelor. Until he was grown Mr. Colville did not know of the existence of his father and a veil of romance is thrown over the story.²

As so many musicians, he was attracted by the opportunities in the Twin Cities: the conservatories and large churches. Colville and his wife, Elizabeth, joined the House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Paul, 28 January 1891, where he was the baritone and director of the quartette choir.³ The church history of 1905 states that in that season the "choir" met every Friday afternoon with Kenneth R. Runkel, the organist, and William W. Nelson, violinist. The "choir" consisted of:

Mrs. Jessica De Wolf, Soprano
Miss Minnie F. Stoddard, Contralto
Mr. Harry E. George, Tenor
Mr. D. F. Colville, Baritone

Jessica De Wolf served the church for many decades and maintained an active concert career as well.⁴

Colville studied under William Courtney in New York City in 1890. During the summer of 1895 he studied abroad with Frederick Walker.

Mr. D. F. Colville returned this week from a summer in London, where he found much that was both pleasant and profitable to him as a vocal teacher. He was elected the director of the vocal department of Carleton College, Northfield, and will take up his work at the beginning of the school year, spending a couple of days there each week.⁵

In the summer of 1898, June through October, he again went to London where he studied with George Henschel,⁶ and David Bispham.⁷ He taught "vocal culture" at Carleton College from September of 1895 up to June of 1901 when he resigned.⁸

After leaving Carleton, he became director of the chorus and vocal teacher at Stanley Hall, an English and Classical School for Girls, which in 1906 took over the Northwestern Conservatory of Music where Colville continued to teach. As he became well-known in the Twin Cities, he advertised specially in the City Directories and Blue Books.

David Ferguson Colville

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In the latter years of the nineteenth century, Clarence W. Bowen was the director of music for the University of Minnesota chapel services. In February of 1899, he had a quartette of Mr. and Mrs. D. F. De Wolf (tenor and soprano) and Mr. and Mrs. D. F. Colville (bass and contralto) sing the Vesper Service.⁹

Colville appeared on many programs. He and his wife, Elizabeth, gave a number of programs for the Schubert Club. He sang baritone solos in *The Swan and the Skylark*¹⁰ given by the Schubert Club Choral and Orchestral Association under the direction of Emil Ober-Hoffer¹¹ (later the director of the Minneapolis Symphony). He and Ober-Hoffer at the piano gave a program for the Ladies' Matinee Musicale of Windom, Minnesota, 17 February 1900, an occasion that marked "an epoch in the history of the Ladies Matinee Musicale as a factor in the promulgation of musical art in Windom." The Windom paper spoke highly of Ober-Hoffer and described the singer's contribution thus:

Mr. Colville's first number gave the audience at once an idea of his characteristic style and splendid ability. The resonant quality and smoothness of his tone were particularly pleasing. A variety of tone coloring was displayed in the "Monotone" redeeming it from what one would suppose must be inevitable monotony. The "Resurrection" and the descriptive piece "Once at the Angelus" deserve special mention. The rollicking "Gypsy John" left the audience in the best of humor with the singer and itself enabling everyone to carry away a keen sense of the pleasure of the evening.

Colville was elected president of the Minnesota Music Teachers Association for the year of 1905 and presided at the Fourth Annual Convention of the MMTA held at Winona, 7-9 June 1905. He praised the decision of the previous year to initiate round table discussions in piano, voice, organ, and strings. The *Proceedings* of the music teachers now contained more elaborate articles that were becoming long enough to suggest the need for an official magazine.

Colville did not fail to give the usual uplifting remarks drawn this time from Philip Gilbert Hammerton's *The Intellectual Life*: "No painter, writer, or orator, who had the power and judgment of a thoroughly cultivated musician, could sin against the broad principles of taste." The group had booked Henry Edward Krehbiel,¹² the eminent writer on music and author of numerous books on opera and music. Unfortunately, Krehbiel fell ill and was unable to attend; Henry G. Hauchett of New York took his place and spoke on the link between life and music, especially the rhythmic aspects of both.

Once again MMTA had continued its publicity campaign and its endeavor to improve public school music so that the grade school teacher might make best use of "those precious twelve minutes a day." When they considered that, twenty-five years before, the state university was struggling and the Winona Normal School was the only institution of its kind west of the Mississippi, they realized the progress already made and were eager for more.

Great care had to go into the choice of a meeting site, one that would allow easy access from all over the state, one that would attract enough people to make the convention a financial success. Their choice fell on St. Paul but Mr. Murdock reminded them that the Biennial Meeting of the Federation of Music Clubs would take place in June and the National Sangerfest in July and so they opted for Minneapolis.

Colville sang a number of times for MMTA conventions: In 1904 two songs by Ernest Lachmund, the Duluth Composer ("O Moonlight Deep and Tender" and "Heighho, Daisies and Buttercups"), in 1906, baritone solos with O. B. Bass at the organ for the opening concert of MMTA.

List of Works

Vocal Music

Ms. or Print	Title	Dedication & Date Publisher	For	Location
	Arrow and the Quiver, The		Voice & Piano	
	Autumn Song, An		Voice & Piano	
	Prayer, A (By the Splendor in the Heavens) to a poem of J. Whitcomb Riley	To Mrs. Jessie Whitridge de Wolf Pub: W. J. Dyer & Bro Mpls & St. Paul, 1891	Voice & Piano	Mpls Public Library
Pr	Song the Children Sing, The to a poem by Clifton Bingham	To my friend and pupil Miss Marion Franklin Keller, St. Paul, MN Pub: W. J. Dyer & Bro Mpls & St. Paul, 1894	Voice & Piano	Mpls Public Library

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- 1 See the article on Samuel Colville in Gerald Bordman, *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
 - 2 From the clippings file of December 1886 of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
 - 3 Information from the *Jubilee Manual of the House of Hope Presbyterian Church, St. Paul, 1855-1906*.
 - 4 A scrapbook of Jessica [Whitridge] De Wolf is in the Minnesota Historical Society [ML 420.D5 S4]. See the *Musical Courier* 42 (29 May 1901), p. 17 for a full account of her career until that date. She was born in St. Paul. She studied for several years in London with Walker and Henschel and later in Berlin where she sang several successful concerts.
 - 5 Report on St. Paul, 28 August 1895, *The Musical Courier*.
 - 6 Sir George Henschel (1850-1934) was a student at Breslau and Leipzig and Berlin. He spent much time in London. He was selected as the first conductor of the Boston Symphony (1881-1883). He later returned from London to teach at the Institute of Musical Art, New York (1905-1908).
 - 7 Baritone (1857-1921) of London and New York. He sang at the Metropolitan Opera and was noted as a singer who sang Lieder in English. He organized the Society of American Singers for the presentation of comic opera in English. From 1902 on, he taught in Philadelphia.
 - 8 Information on his tenure and study from the Carleton College Archives and Bulletins.
 - 9 Report of Acton Horton (Mrs. Hinton Sherman), the music critic of the *Musical Courier*, 23 February 1899. See the Acton Hinton Scrapbook, Minneapolis Public Library, Special Collections. Beach, the nephew of President Northrop and later a very well-known musician taught music at the university for a few years at the beginning of a formal music department in the seasons of 1902-1904.
 - 10 A cantata by Arthur Goring Thomas (1850-1892), English composer interested in creating English operas. At the time, he was well-known but later was completely forgotten.
 - 11 The founder and first conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony in 1903-1904. In later days he spelled his name Oberhoffer.
 - 12 Henry Edward Krehbiel (1854-1923), prolific writer of books on music was for some 40 years music critic of the *New York Tribune* and author of the program notes of the New York Philharmonic.