

**Second-Hand Smoke: James Maurice Hubbard and the Search for the  
Elusive Author and Composer of America's Second Favorite Song**

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**Abstract:** First published in 1844, “My Last Cigar” was a popular and widely-anthologized college song in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to an 1887 newspaper account, its popularity was second only to “Home Sweet Home.” James Maurice Hubbard (1822-1900) has long been named as the composer of the tune. Hubbard identified Charles Condit (1827-1876) as the writer of the lyrics. This paper demonstrates that both claims are false. While Hubbard published an art song titled “My Last Cigar” using lyrics that he might have received from Condit, those lyrics were written by Joseph Warren Fabens (1821-1874). Further, the original art song Hubbard wrote was replaced around 1860 with the tune of “Dearest Mae,” a minstrel song written by James Power of the Harmonions. It was according to the Power tune that “My Last Cigar” enjoyed its tremendous popularity. In sum, the composer of America’s second favorite song, circa 1887, was James Power and the lyrics were by Joseph Warren Fabens. For the first time, with this publication, the correct attributions are made for “My Last Cigar.”

## **Second-Hand Smoke: James Maurice Hubbard and the Search for the Elusive Author of American's Second Favorite Song**

By Daniel Paul Morrison, M.A., M.Div.  
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The year was 1887. Grover Cleveland was the rotund bachelor occupying the White House and the very first Groundhog Day was celebrated in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. It was also the year the *Chicago Evening Press and Mail* assured its readers that “My Last Cigar, or, ‘Twas Off the Blue Canaries,” was America’s second most popular song, coming in behind “Home Sweet Home,” and that it had been written by a Chicago post office employee named James M. Hubbard.

This was not the first time a journalist misrepresented the song beloved by rascals, rogues and rascallions. Nor would it be the last. Before the printer’s ink dried and the presses went silent, the scribblers of America’s first rough draft of history put forward no fewer than six unrelated men as the true author of “My Last Cigar.” One was a football coach. A second was a federal judge. A third was the United States Consul to Nicaragua. A fourth was an Ivy-educated Brooklyn lawyer. A fifth we only know by a common English name, perhaps a pseudonym. And the sixth was the aforementioned Chicago postal worker.

And that is just the controversy surrounding the lyrics of the sentimental ballad. There is also the problem of who composed the music. Whenever a composer is listed, whether on sheet music or in songbooks, Hubbard is always the man. But 16 years after the song first appeared in print, an alternate tune was married to the lyrics, and it is that later tune which carried the song to such popularity as lauded by the *Chicago Evening Press and Mail*.

And that raises the vital question: “Who wrote the second melody, Hubbard or another tunesmith?”

This paper sets out to solve the double mystery of “My Last Cigar,” identifying both the writer of the lyrics and the composer of the second, more popular, tune. Comparing data from newspaper accounts, songbooks and sheet music, books and government publications, as well as genealogical records, this paper settles many questions surrounding this song, though some new mysteries emerge and invite further research.

This paper builds on the pioneering work of William Baierl who, in 1995, provided the first scholarly treatment of Hubbard and his most important song.<sup>1</sup>

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"TWAS OFF THE BLUE CANARIES,  
OR

**MY LAST CIGAR**

a Song,

*Written by a Student*

OF

**HARVARD UNIVERSITY,**

*Composed & Dedicated to the*

**STUDENTS OF YALE COLLEGE,**

by

**James M. Hubbard.**



NEW YORK:  
HAMILTON S. GORDON, 139 FIFTH AVE.

Cover of the earliest (1844) edition of "My Last Cigar"

## The Life of a Popular Song

The *Chicago Evening Press and Mail* supports its claim that “My Last Cigar” was America’s “second most popular song,” by asserting that “over a million copies have been printed and sold in this country by a single publishing firm.”<sup>ii</sup> The output of that publisher, Oliver Ditson of Boston, does not exhaust the distribution of this song as other publishers also issued *My Last Cigar* as sheet music. Also, the song was anthologized in many collections, particularly in college songbooks very popular in the second half of the nineteenth century.

While the comparison is not perfect, we get a rough sense of the saturation of this song into American culture by comparing it to *With the Beatles*, the 1963 breakout album of the Fab Four which sold a million copies in the United Kingdom by 1965. In 1887, when Chicago papers claimed sales in excess of one million copies for *My Last Cigar*, the population of the United States was roughly the same as the population of the United Kingdom in 1965.<sup>iii</sup> It is not farfetched to infer that *My Last Cigar* was as well-known in its day as *All My Loving*, the hit single from the Beatles’ debut album, is known in our day.

But “My Last Cigar” was not an overnight success. Hubbard originally published his song in 1844. Ditson’s edition appeared as early as 1854. In 1860 and 1862, the song was anthologized in two songbooks. Except for a few newspaper advertisements for the sheet music, we see no reference to this song in the press during the 15 years of its existence.

But then in 1860, for the first time, the song was set to a new tune, and with that change quickly became a popular “college song.” In the next decade and a half, “My Last Cigar” with its new tune, shows up in college songbooks at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia. Less distinguished colleges aped the Ivy League and a mania swept the nation.

From the mid-1860s through the end of the century, “My Last Cigar” seemed to appear everywhere in popular culture. It was sung at banquets. It was sung at high school graduations. It was sung wherever sentimental men gathered. And in 1890, a silver-plate manufacturer tried to capitalize on the popularity of the song by etching a smoking cigar and the opening measure of the song onto a silver tray.

Both the words and tune were known to everyone, it seems. So popular was the tune that often it was chosen for new compositions. For example:

- In 1868, a campaign song for President Ulysses Grant’s reelection titled “The War “Smoked Out,” was written to the tune of “My Last Cigar.”<sup>iv</sup>

- In 1880, the *Albany Journal* published “a lively campaign song” for presidential hopeful James A. Garfield, titled “General Garfield Proceeds to the Front,” to be sung to the tune “’Twas Off the Blue Canary Isles.”<sup>v</sup>

The words of the song were so well-known that they became the foil for new poems, advertisements, jokes and other literary productions. For example:

- In 1869, an advertisement for a Decatur, Illinois, cigar merchant reads: “The Last Cigar.—’Twas of the Blue Canaries, and in the month of May, that a certain home-sick fellow trod the quarterdeck and puffed his cares away in what he termed his “last cigar.” Since then he settled in Decatur, and now buys his fragrant Havanas [at] Kepler & Van Dyke, on Bank Avenue.”<sup>vi</sup>
- In 1880, a spoof poem, “My First Cigar,” was regularly published in newspapers in conjunction with “My Last Cigar.”<sup>vii</sup>
- In 1883, this humorous note ran in an Iowa newspaper: “Last Sunday one of the Dubuque ministers preached a sermon on “Marriage,” and the organist very appropriately played the “Wedding March” as the postludium. And last summer another minister of the city preached on “Smoking,” and the organist accompanied the people out of the church with the old college tune, “My Last Cigar.””<sup>viii</sup>

In 1874, thirty years after Hubbard birthed the song and 15 years after it acquired a new tune that carried it to heights of popularity, Dr. William A. Smith, speaking to the Tennessee Philosophical Association, could nostalgically observe: “Few things have been the occasion or rather the subject of as little poetry as tobacco although many poets have seen airy fancies in smoke, and we may even yet sometimes hear that old and favorite song, “I smoked my last cigar.””<sup>ix</sup>

Without a doubt, the *Chicago Evening Press and Mail* did not overstate the case when it declared in 1887 that “My Last Cigar” was the second most popular song in America. The song was everywhere, known by everyone. It was part of the popular cultural landscape of the nation after the close of the Civil War until the dawn of the twentieth century

But who wrote it?

### **The Lyrics: Six Putative Authors**

Hubbard never claimed to have written the lyrics of “My Last Cigar” and on the title page

of his publication of the song refers to their author only by the vague designation, “a student of Harvard University.” In the course of a half century, six different men have been named in print as the author of the much-loved lyrics. They are Walter Chauncey Camp (1859-1925), Charles Condit (1827-1876), Joseph Warren Fabens (1821-1874), Francis Miles Finch (1827-1907), James Maurice Hubbard (1822-1900), and William Jenkins (no dates). In the following, we examine the merits of each claim.

**Walter Chauncey Camp (1859-1925).** A desirable candidate, Camp was a BMOC at Yale College. He is known as the “Father of American Football” and invented the line of scrimmage and the system of downs used in our national gridiron sport today. In a review of “Class Day” at Yale College, the *New York Tribune* of June 30, 1880, mentions “The Last Cigar” and suggest that it is “by Walter Chauncey Camp, of New-Haven, Conn.”<sup>x</sup>

We can quickly dispense with this journalistic error by observing Camp was born in 1859, long after “My Last Cigar” was first published.

**Charles Condit (1827-1876).** In an 1894 letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, the 72-year-old Hubbard seeks to set the record straight regarding “My Last Cigar.” He writes, “The words of “My Last Cigar” were written by Charles Condit, a temporary student of Harvard, but later a graduate of Yale. They were written at my request to commemorate his visit to the Canary Isles in search of health during a college vacation. I wrote the music.”

While, on the surface, it might seem that Hubbard’s letter settles the matter, the case for Condit as the author of the lyrics of “My Last Cigar” is not airtight.

Curiously, in this same letter to the editor, Hubbard says “I privately published the song, with original music, in 1848,” though the sheet music clearly bears the copyright date of 1844. Condit, who was born December 8, 1827, would have been 16 years old for the first 11 months and 8 days of the year “My Last Cigar” was published, a rather tender age to have been smoking cigars. And even if Condit acquired an early taste for tobacco, lines like, “I’ve watched above the blighted heart” and “I watched it as a friend would watch beside a dying friend” do not sound like the work of a 16-year-old. Further, if the song were set to music and published in 1844, it is reasonable to posit that the commissioned words were penned at least a year earlier, when Condit would have been 15, a fact which causes a sober mind to resist the suggestion that Condit wrote the lyrics of “My Last Cigar.”

Condit arrived at Yale College in 1844 and graduated in 1848. His senior year, he was

inducted into Skull and Bones, the secret senior society which produced dozens of United States senators and three US presidents. After leaving New Haven, Condit studied law in Columbus, Ohio, and New York City. He was admitted to the bar in New York in 1850. For the next quarter century, Condit conducted a successful law practice in Brooklyn, in partnership with his brother Stephen, who also graduated from Yale College. Given Condit's public prominence, one might imagine that had he written the lyrics of "My Last Cigar" someone would have taken note in print prior to Hubbard's 1894 letter to the editor, but such a mention of Condit's authorship has not been found.

Hubbard lived and worked as a musical instructor in New Haven during the years Condit was at Yale, so they certainly could have known each other. But if the copyright date on the first edition of "My Last Cigar" is not in error, then it seems Condit could not have penned the lyrics.

Unfortunately, by the time Hubbard makes his claim to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, Condit had been dead for 18 years. The 1894 claim that Hubbard wrote the music and Condit wrote the words to America's second-favorite song was repeated in print at least twice before that year was over, compounding what might have been an error.<sup>xi</sup>

**James Maurice Hubbard (1822-1900).** Though Hubbard's name has always been associated with "My Last Cigar," he never claimed to have written the lyrics and ascribed them to another. Also, in the numerous songs composed by Hubbard, none of them have lyrics written by Hubbard. There is little reason to suppose Hubbard authored the lyrics of "My Last Cigar."

While Hubbard did not author the lyrics of "My Last Cigar," he is the man most largely responsible for bringing them to the attention of the American public. Thus, a few comments about his biography and musical career are in order.

Our hero was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, in January 1822 to Anson and Elizabeth Hubbard, who were married in September 1818. Hubbard's parents gave him the name James Morris, which he later fancied to James Maurice. He was baptized at six months of age in the Litchfield Congregational Church by the Rev. Amzi Benedict. Hubbard's brother John, two years his junior, died at age five. In 1835, the Hubbard family moved to Plymouth, Connecticut.

Hubbard claims to have been a professor of music at Yale College, but the truth may have been more modest.<sup>xiii</sup> He seems to have been in New Haven in the 1840s, during the time when both Charles Condit and Francis Miles Finch were there. "My Last Cigar" seems to have been Hubbard's first musical publication, appearing in 1844. Several other songs quickly



followed, including “The National Blues Quick Step” in 1845 and the “New Haven Gray’s Grand March” in 1846.

In the 1850s, Hubbard moved to the Midwest, perhaps Chicago. In 1854, he met Sarah A. Blakey, whose family was a traveling musical troupe, touring opera houses and concert halls from western New York to Saint Louis. Hubbard joined the troupe as a violist and before the year was out had married Sarah.

In 1857, Hubbard joined the music faculty of Kalamazoo College, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. His wife joined the faculty as a music instructor in 1859. With the outbreak of the American Civil War, Hubbard enlisted in the United States Army as a musician. He was discharged on May 8, 1863. The Hubbards’ only child, Genevieve, was born in Kalamazoo on October 9, 1864. Hubbard and his wife continued to teach at Kalamazoo College until 1867.

By 1870, the Hubbards had relocated to Chicago where he was employed by the Post Office. He continued to perform as a violinist and was involved in the larger musical life of the city as the Librarian and Treasurer of the Beethoven Society.<sup>xiii</sup> Hubbard’s initial connection to Chicago may have been through the music publishing firm of Root and Cady, which published many of Hubbard’s songs and compositions in the 1860s and 1870s.

Mrs. Hubbard made a name for herself in Chicago as a prominent “lady journalist” – the literary and scientific editor of the *Chicago Tribune* – and frequent speaker at women’s clubs.<sup>xiv</sup>

During his long life, Hubbard composed more than 100 pieces of music. He was a well-known singer and violinist in Chicago and remained active in promoting the musical life of Chicago up until his death in 1900. An 1897 report in a Chicago paper may best capture his place in the musical firmament with its description of Hubbard as “well known as a violinist in early Chicago amateur musical circles.”<sup>xv</sup>

Hubbard died on October 21, 1900 and is buried in Chicago.

**Francis Miles Finch (1827-1907).** Another admirable candidate for the honors of having written the words to “My Last Cigar” is Francis Miles Finch, a native of Ithaca, New York. Curiously, Finch knew Charles Condit at Yale College, having graduated from the Connecticut school in 1849, the year after Condit. Like Condit, Finch was a member of Skull and Bones in his senior year. He went on to a distinguished career in law, serving for 15 years as a Justice on the New York Court of Appeals. After stepping down from the bench, Finch served as the Dean of Cornell Law School and President of the New York State Bar Association.

While at Yale, Finch was known as a songbird and lyricist. As his classmate Andrew Dickson White remarked, “All thru my college course at Yale, I had joined in the singing of his songs. Many songs had been written during the previous history of Yale, but those songs by Finch of ’49 differed from most others in the fact that, as Carlyle once said of certain other true poems, they “got themselves sung.””<sup>xvi</sup> White, who appears several times in this narrative, was co-founder of Cornell University, a school established in 1865 in Finch’s hometown. Finch would serve the upstart university both as professor and dean.

Throughout his life, despite his responsibilities as a jurist and academic, Finch wrote and published poems. His most famous, “The Blue and Gray,” was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in September 1867. It is an irenic memorial to the war dead, from both sides, in the recently resolved American Civil War. Finch wrote, “My whole life as a lawyer has been a battle against literary longings. I have kept the most earnest part of my nature in chains.”<sup>xvii</sup>

A smattering of reports that Finch was the author of the popular college song “My Last Cigar” appeared in New York newspapers in October 1881, upon his nomination by the New York Republicans to become a Judge on the Court of Appeals.<sup>xviii</sup> The story of his authoring our beloved song was repeated by the New York City press upon his death in August 1907.<sup>xix</sup>

As recently as 2007, the claim that Finch was the author of the “My Last Cigar” was made in an academic publication. A long and glowing biography of Finch in *The Judges of the New York Court of Appeals: A Biographical History* (ed. Albert Rosenblatt, New York: Fordham University Press, 2007) claims that the New York jurist is the author of “The Last Cigar.”<sup>xx</sup>

But speaking from beyond the grave, Finch set the record straight in *The Blue and Gray, and Other Verses*, a collection of poems published posthumously in 1909. Andrew White of Cornell University explains the circumstances of the publication of this volume:

“From time to time his friends sought to gather [his verses] from song-books, magazines, and newspapers, and have them put into more permanent form. To this he generally showed himself indifferent, or even averse, but at last, not long before his death, which occurred in 1907, he consented to make the selection from them and to prepare the short preface to them now presented.”<sup>xxi</sup>

Finch wrote a few notes about the poems in this collection and regarding “Smoking

Song” he said:

“The Smoking Song was a college-boy performance written in 1848, and first published in 1849, in Vol. XIV of the *Yale Literary Magazine*. It has sometimes been confused with a poem which floated on the surface of the Press entitled “My Last Cigar.” I did not write that, and though the subjects are the same, the two bear no resemblance to each other.”<sup>xxii</sup>

And so, we know, contrary to press reports, that Finch is not the author of “My Last Cigar.”

**Joseph Warren Fabens (1821-1874).** One man, and only one man, claimed to have written “My Last Cigar,” but his claim is not without problems. He was Joseph Warren Fabens.

Born to a patrician Puritan family in Salem, Massachusetts – a paradigmatic Boston Brahmin – Fabens lived the life of a restless, reckless, roving adventurer.

At 16, he entered Harvard College, but poor health – or perhaps boredom – forced him to seek remedy in an ocean voyage to Europe. Upon his return, Fabens enrolled at Andover Theological Seminary but also left that school before earning a degree.

With the advantage of wealth and family connections, in 1843, at the age of 22 and already married, Fabens was appointed United States Consul in Cayenne in French Guiana, on the northeast coast of South America, far from the comforts of civilization.

In 1850, Fabens traveled to Morocco, where he hoped to acquire camels for the purpose of importing them into California. His 1851 work *The camel hunt: a narrative of personal adventure* (Boston: James Munroe and Company) recounts his journey and reads more like a novel than a travelogue. Indeed, some have claimed that it is a novel. His equally novelistic sequel to that book was *A story of life on the Isthmus* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1853) which continues his adventures in the isthmus of Panama.

In 1859, Fabens traveled to the Dominican Republic and became “a strenuous advocate of its annexation to the United States.”<sup>xxiii</sup> That project fell victim to the more pressing demands of the American Civil War. When peace returned, efforts toward the annexation of the Dominican Republic resumed, this time with the assistance of the aforementioned Andrew Dickson White, close friend of Francis Miles Finch, and then President of Cornell University.

When those plans came to naught, President Grant appointed Fabens US Consul in Nicaragua.

Fabens continued to promote the importation of camels, a beast of burden in Asian and African deserts, to be used in a similar manner in American deserts. To that end, in 1865, he published *The uses of the camel: considered with a view to his introduction into our western states and territories* (Washington: F. Taylor). He also published works on the geography and natural resources of the Dominican Republic.

Though he suffered from poor health his whole life and died too young at the age of 53, Fabens was a man's man, a fearless traveler to remote corners, a promoter of lost causes he believed in deeply. In sum, he was the kind of figure one might imagine being welcomed with open arms into the company of a cigar-smoking band of intellectually curious men.

And that brings us to yet another posthumously published book of poetry.

In 1887, a dozen years after his demise, Fabens' widow, Love Fry Stickney Fabens, published a volume titled "*The Last Cigar*" and other poems, a collection of verse attributed to the late Consul to Nicaragua. The forward to the book is written by none other than Julia Ward Howe, the poet who penned "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The title poem, "The Last Cigar," as it appears in this book, is, without question, related to the lyrics of our song, "My Last Cigar." While "My Last Cigar" contains 32 lines in four stanzas, "The Last Cigar" has 40 lines in five stanzas. "My Last Cigar" simply is an edited version of "The Last Cigar," which we reproduce on the following page from the 1887 book.

By comparing "My Last Cigar" and "The Last Cigar" we see that removing eight lines and reconfiguring the stanza produces a more streamlined product. Indeed, as a song lyric, "My Last Cigar" is an improvement over "The Last Cigar."

Subsequent to the 1887 publication of "*The Last Cigar*" and other poems, a number of anthologies in praise of tobacco included the 40 lines of "The Last Cigar" over the signature of Fabens.<sup>xxiv</sup>

So, perhaps that settles the mystery. Hubbard chopped Fabens poem and produced America's second-favorite song. Or perhaps not. For if Fabens had never published his poem in his lifetime, how would Hubbard have come by it? And why, in 1894, would Hubbard claim the lyrics were by Charles Condit?

And that brings us to our last candidate for the honors of authoring "My Last Cigar."

**William Jenkins (no dates).** On September 10, 1841, the *Vermont Mercury* of

*THE LAST CIGAR.*

’T WAS off the blue Canaries,  
A glorious summer day,  
I sat upon the quarter-deck,  
And whiffed my cares away ;  
And as the volumed smoke arose  
Like incense in the air,  
I heaved a sigh to think, in sooth,  
It was my last cigar.

I leaned against the quarter rail  
And gazed down in the sea ;  
E’en there the airy wreaths of smoke  
Were curling gracefully.  
Oh, what had I at such a time  
To do with wasting care ?  
Alas, the trembling tear proclaimed  
It was my last cigar !

I watched the ashes as it came  
Fast nearing to the end ;  
I watched it as a friend will watch  
Beside his dying friend ;—  
I could not speak,—I could not stir,  
But like a statue there,  
I whiffed the massy volumes out  
Of that divine cigar !

At length the pile of ashes fell,  
Like child from mother torn,  
And the smoke that I drew in and out  
Grew warm and yet more warm.  
I took one last, one lingering whiff—  
A long whiff of despair—  
And threw it from me—spare the tale,  
It was my last cigar !

I’ve seen the land of all I loved  
Fade in the distance dim,—  
And sighed above the blighted heart  
Where once proud hope had been ;  
But never have I felt a thrill  
Which could with that compare,  
When off the blue Canaries  
I smoked my last cigar !

*“The Last Cigar” as it appears in the 1887 “The Last Cigar” and other poems, published in 1887 after the death of Joseph Warren Fabens by his widow.*

Woodstock, Vermont, published a poem titled “The Last Cigar” by William Jenkins which we reproduce here. This poem is identical to the one published in 1887 by Fabens’ widow. A week later, the same poem with the same byline, was published in *Raleigh Register* in North Carolina. The poem appeared anonymously in newspapers in Louisiana (*Times-Picayune*, November 20, 1841), Pennsylvania (*Harrisburg Keystone*, December 22, 1841, and *Perry County Democrat* of Bloomfield, December 30, 1841), and Vermont (*Spirit of the Age*, Woodstock, December 31, 1841).

These 1841 appearances of “The Last Cigar” were in time for Hubbard to produce his song in 1844. But who was William Jenkins? We have no idea.

The name William Jenkins appears in the Library of Congress personal name index more than 70 times. None were born before 1841. Hathi Trust indexes reveal no William Jenkins in the correct time frame. Google Books turns up no William Jenkins who fits the needs of the present case. And WorldCat, the largest book catalog on the planet, offers no clues. In sum, using all the best search tool, I find no connection between the name William Jenkins and any nineteenth century poet. This fact suggests the possibility that the name is a pseudonym.

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### THE LAST CIGAR.

BY WILLIAM JENKINS.

’Twas of the blue Canaries,  
 A glorious summer’s day,  
 I sat upon the quarter deck,  
 And whiffed my cares away,  
 And as the volumed smoke arose  
 Like incense on the air,  
 I heaved a sigh to think, in sooth,  
 It was my last cigar.

I leaned against the quarter rail,  
 And gazed down in the sea;  
 E’en there the airy wreaths of smoke  
 Were curling gracefully.  
 Oh what had I at such a time  
 To do with wasting care?  
 Alas the trembling tear proclaimed  
 It was my last cigar!

I watched the ashes as it came  
 Fast nearing toward the end;  
 I watched it as a friend would watch  
 Beside his dying friend;—  
 I could not speak—I could not stir,  
 But like a statue there,  
 I whiffed the massy volumes out  
 Of that divine cigar!

At length the pile of ashes fell,  
 Like child from mother torn,  
 And the smoke that I drew in and out,  
 Grew warm and yet more warm.  
 I took one last one lingering whiff—  
 A long whiff of despair—  
 And throw it from me—spare the tale,  
 It was my last cigar!

I’ve seen the land of all I love’d,  
 Fade in the distance dim—  
 And sighed above the blighted heart,  
 Where once proud hope had been;  
 But never have I felt a thrill,  
 Which could with that compare,  
 When off the blue Canaries,  
 I smoked my last cigar.

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## The Music: One Song with Two Tunes

In 1844, Hubbard wrote original music for “My Last Cigar” but his tune was not the one that took the country by storm. As early as 1860, “My Last Cigar” was paired with an entirely different tune, the tune by which the song would become famous. The composer of that second tune – the 1860 tune – was never acknowledged in any printed version of the song, whether as sheet music or in songbooks.

As it turns out, three incidental words in an ephemeral college songbook provide the clue to the previously unrevealed identity of the composer of the more popular version of “My Last Cigar.” But before I disclose the identity of the composer of the 1860 tune, let us first consider the two tunes, each in turn.

**First Tune.** The 1844 tune was first published by Hamilton S. Gordon of New York City bearing the fulsome title, “Twas off the Blue Canaries, or, My Last Cigar, a song written by a student of Harvard University, composed and dedicated to the Students of Yale

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... three incidental words in an ephemeral college songbook provide the clue to the previously unrevealed identity of the composer ...

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College by James M. Hubbard.” That sheet music is reproduced on pages 4, 24-28 of this article.

The original song fills five full manuscript pages of music. It begins with 16 bars of runs and trills and pianistic drama. Between half-verses of the song, four bar interludes appear. Atop all the piano fireworks, a lilting melody supports the lyrics. And, finally, after all the words are sung, another four bars of towering piano chords finish off the piece. Hubbard 1844 composition is a none-too-subtle tune with plenty of pathos and comedy, depending on how you read it.

Joshua Adamson Bruce, noted Vassar-trained musicologist and invasive-weed ecologist, offered these observations of Hubbard’s 1844 music:

“Hubbard’s song is written for piano and tenor solo in a comfortable range. The rhythms in the piano part are different from the sung melody so it seems the composer imagined this piece being performed not by a singer sitting at the piano, but rather by a singer accompanied by another musician on the piano. The song features “tone painting,” a kind of musical onomatopoeia in which the rhythms in the vocal and piano lines illustrate the words sung. “I breathed a sigh” is elongate

as if sighing, while “Alas, a trembling tear proclaimed” is interrupted by rests to evoke a voice choked with emotion. The instrumental interludes do not lend themselves to group singing. All in all, this is a pretty-well composed piece, presenting a bit of classical technique with popularized themes. It is a schmaltzy, showy art song, probably too challenging for the average parlor piano player.”

Beginning in 1854, the song with its 1844 tune was pirated by Boston music publisher Oliver Ditson. According to the 1887 *Chicago Evening Press and Mail*, Ditson sold more than one million copies of this song.<sup>xxv</sup> But from secondary evidence we can conclude that it was not solely from the 1844 tune that Ditson saw such sales.<sup>xxvi</sup> Ditson published the 1844 tune both as sheet music and in a songbook and would later publish “My Last Cigar” with the 1860 tune in songbook. For details, see the bibliography.

The 1844 tune appears in two sheet music editions and two songbooks, none appearing after 1862. During that period, between 1855 and 1862, there is virtually no mention of the song in newspapers, journals or books, except for advertisements by music sellers. After 1862, however, as the tune of 1860 takes hold of the popular imagination, “My Last Cigar” with the updated tune appeared in no fewer than 15 songbooks and once in sheet music form.

**Second Tune.** The 1860 tune, the popular air that wormed its way into America’s ear and college songbooks, is a decidedly simpler creature. Compared with the 1844 tune, the 1860 tune moves very little, and when it does, it moves by baby steps and through familiar intervals that even a tipping collegian can manage. Rather than an art song, the 1860 tune sounds like a drinking song or a backwoods ballad.

As its popularity increased and its publications multiplied, “My Last Cigar” more and more frequently appeared in print with no mention of its author or composer. But when publishers did assign a name to the author of the piece, it was always James M. Hubbard, even once it began to be sung to the 1860 tune. And that raises the question: “Might Hubbard, who certainly wrote the 1844 tune, also have written the 1860 tune, perhaps to freshen up his song?” In response to this query, Bruce offers a decided, “Nyet!”

“From its simplicity and block chords, it is likely this music it was arranged by ear,” Bruce observed about the 1860 tune. “This is a song written for people who want to sing with one another and are not interested in impressing anyone. I would say the two songs were not

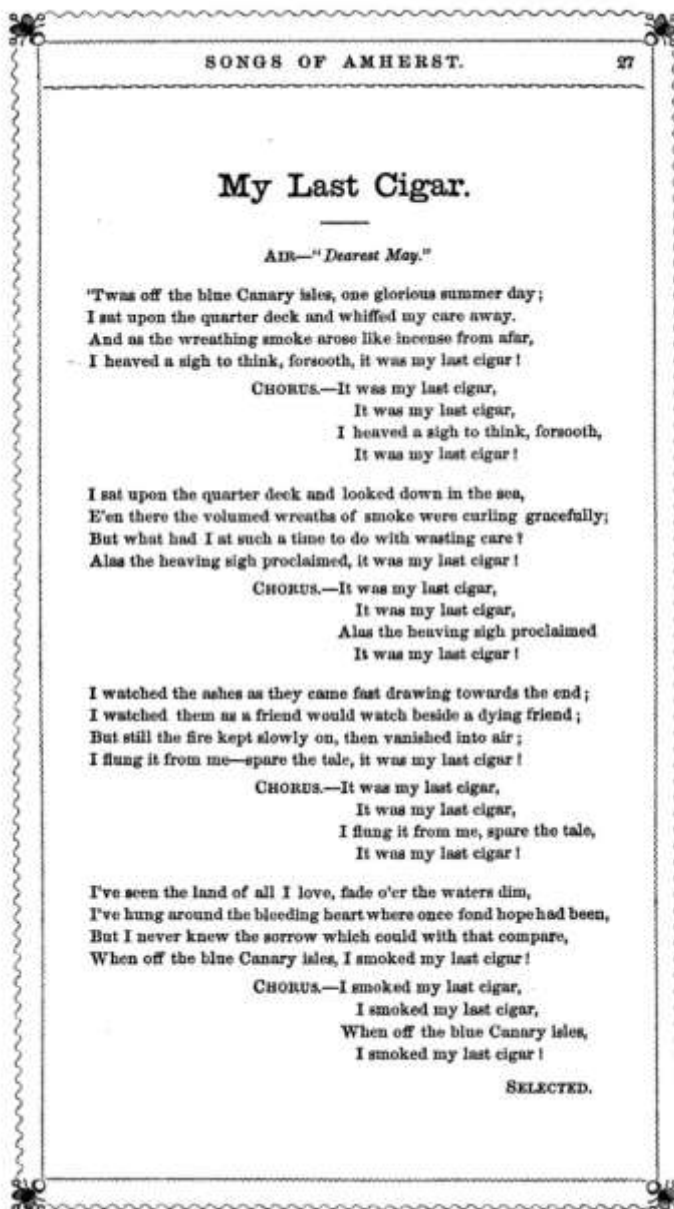


written by the same person. A composer who has the sophisticated musical sensibility we see in the 1844 song wouldn't be interested in stripping it down. The 1844 song is too clever. All the fun of that piece is in its cleverness," said Bruce, "something the 1860 song lacks entirely."

**Will the Real Composer Please Stand Up?** So, who wrote the tune to "My Last Cigar" sung by so many misty-eyed undergraduates in the late nineteenth century? Certainly not James M. Hubbard. The crucial contemporary evidence for the actual composer comes from three little words in *Songs of Amherst published by the class of '62* (Northampton: Metcalf, 1860). A modest 70-page booklet, this compilation contains 62 songs without music – lyrics alone. The tune to each song is indicated at the top of the lyrics, just below the title, with the name of the "air" to which it was to be sung. For example, on page 58, we read "Air—Marseilles Hymn" atop a song to be sung to the tune of the French national anthem.

On page 27 we find "My Last Cigar" in its 32-verse, four-stanza version, under the inscription "Air—Dearest May". As it turns out, "Dearest May" is a misspelling of "Dearest Mae", a song written and published by the Harmonions, a popular touring minstrel group from Boston. The original 1847

edition of "Dearest Mae" (Philadelphia: A. Fiot), illustrated on page 19, attributes the music of this song, and thus the music to the popular version of "My Last Cigar", to James Power.<sup>xxvii</sup>



*Songs of Amherst identifies the new and more popular tune of "My Last Cigar."*

In 1843, James Power (d. January 5, 1890) and his brother John Power joined with L. V. H. Crosby (d. March 26, 1884) and Marshall S. Pike (d. February 13, 1901) to form the Albino Family, a quartet sporting white rather than black face makeup. In 1844, they donned black face and changed their name to the Harmoneon Family and later the Harmoneons. Pike was one of the first female impersonators in minstrelsy and composed more than 100 songs. In 1847, the group sang for President Polk at the White House.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## Conclusions

“My Last Cigar” was once America’s second most popular song. But who wrote the words and the music? Here’s what our best conjectures and masculine intuition suggest.

First, in 1841, Joseph Warren Fabens wrote the 40 lines of “The Last Cigar” and published them pseudonymously as William Jenkins in a New England newspaper.

Second, in 1844, in the environs of Yale College, the 23-year-old James M. Hubbard met the 17-year-old Charles Condit, who passed off a 32-line version of Fabens’s poem as his own and Hubbard wrote some fancy music for it.

Third, from 1844 to 1860, the Hubbard-Condit-Fabens song limped along with a few publications and little notice.

Fourth, around 1860, a student, perhaps at Amherst College, realized the minstrel tune “Dearest Mae” by James Power of the Harmoneons fit the Condit-Fabens lyrics of “My Last Cigar” and made the transposition.

Fifth, with the perfect melding of heartfelt lyrics and catchy tune, “My Last Cigar” takes the East Coast colleges, and later the entire nation, by storm: words by Fabens, music by Power.

So, what do we do with James Maurice Hubbard? Though his name, and his name alone, long has been linked to America’s second most popular song, the evidence clearly tells us that neither its words nor tune are his creations.

And so, we, the lovers of “My Last Cigar,” are left to sigh above the blighted heart, where once proud hope had been.

Rev. Daniel Paul Morrison, M.A., M.Div.  
Willow Grove, Pennsylvania

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Cover of the earliest (1847) edition of "Dearest Mae"

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Forty lines, five stanzas.

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### **The 1844 and 1860 songs.**

Below we reproduce our song according to both the Hubbard and Power tunes. First is the song according to the Hubbard tune published by Hamilton S. Gordon in 1844 – the cover of this sheet music is reproduced on page 4. Following is song according to the Power tune in its first print appearance in *Carmina Yalensia* (New York: Taintor Brothers, 1867).

"TWAS OFF THE BLUE CANARIES,"  
OR  
MY LAST CIGAR.

Composed by

J. M. Hubbard.

Ent[ire] according to Act of Congress AD, 1844 by J. M. Hubbard in the District Court of Connecticut.



It was off the blue Canaries, A glorious summer day, I

sat upon the quarter deck, And whiff'd my cares away;

And

as the volum'd smoke arose, Like incense in the air, I

breath'd a sigh to think in sooth, It

This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The vocal line begins with a half note on 'breath'd', followed by quarter notes for 'a', 'sigh', and 'to'. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and a more active melody in the right hand.

was my last Ci . . . gar, I breath'd a sigh to

The second system covers measures 5 through 8. The vocal line continues with 'was my last Ci . . . gar,' on a half note, followed by 'I breath'd a sigh to' on quarter notes. The piano accompaniment maintains its rhythmic pattern.

think in sooth, It was my last Ci . . . gar.

*fz* *ad lib*

The third system spans measures 9 to 12. The vocal line concludes with 'think in sooth, It was my last Ci . . . gar.' on a half note. The piano accompaniment includes a dynamic marking of *fz* and the instruction *ad lib* in the left hand.

*sva*

The final system shows the concluding piano accompaniment for measures 13 to 16. It features a series of chords and melodic fragments in both hands, ending with a double bar line. A dynamic marking of *sva* is present in the right hand.

2<sup>d</sup>v. I leand upon the quarter rail, And look'd down in the sea, *Fin.*

there the purple wreath of smoke was curling graceful . . . ly,

Oh, what had I at such a time, To

do with wasting care, A . . las, the trembling tear pro . .

7

claim'd, it was my last Ci... gar A... las, the

trembling tear pro... claim'd, It was my last Ci...

*fz* ad lib

3

I watch'd the ashes as it came,  
 Fast drawing toward the end,  
 I watch'd it as a friend would watch,  
 Beside a dying friend;  
 But still the flame crept slowly on,  
 It vanish'd into air,  
 I threw it from me, spare the tale,  
 It was my last Cigar.

4

I've seen the land of all I love,  
 Fade in the distance dim,  
 I've watch'd above the blighted heart,  
 Where once proud hope hath been;  
 But I've never known a sorrow,  
 That could with that compare,  
 When off the blue Canaries,  
 I smok'd my last Cigar.

## LAST CIGAR.

*Dolce.*

1 'Twas off the blue Ca - na - ry isles, A glorious sum-mer day, I sat up - on the

quarter deck, And whiffed my cares a - way; And as the volumed smoke arose, Like

in-cense in the air, I breath'd a sigh to think in sooth, It was my last ci - gar.

*CHORUS.*

It was my last ci - gar, It was my last ci - gar, I breathed a sigh to think in sooth, It was my last ci - gar.

*ritard.*



3 I leaned upon the quarter rail,  
And looked down in the sea,  
E'en there the purple wreath of smoke  
Was curling gracefully,  
Oh what had I at such a time,  
'To do with wasting care,  
Alas the trembling tear proclaimed  
It was my last Cigar.

8 I watched the ashes as it came  
Fast drawing toward the end,  
I watched it as a friend would watch  
Beside a dying friend;  
But still the flame crept slowly on,  
It vanished into air,  
I threw it from me, spare the tale,  
It was my last Cigar.

4 I've seen the land of all I love  
Fade in the distance dim,  
I've watched above the blighted heart,  
Where once proud hope hath been;  
But I've never known a sorrow  
That could with that compare,  
When off the blue Canaries,  
I smoked my last Cigar.

---

PARTING SONG.

BY GEO. S. DICKERMAN, '65.

AIR— "Last Cigar."

1 Our tranquil day's last glimmering ray  
Fades o'er these cloister walls,  
And with its flight the dim twilight  
Around us sadly falls,  
While in the trees the whispering leaves  
Sing of the years now flown,  
And cast their staid and sombre shade  
In gloomy silence down.

2 At this last hour, an unseen power  
Calls up with magic spell,  
The hallowed ways of bygone days,  
To take our last farewell.  
And lingering here, 'mid hope and fear,  
We look toward that unknown  
Where in the strife of sterner life  
We each must war alone.

8 For here the road we long have trod,  
Breaks into untried ways,  
And forth we roam into the gloom  
Of life's wild, clueless maze.  
Then knit once more the bonds of yore,  
And grasp each proffered hand,  
While memories bright our hearts unite,  
As here we waiting stand.

4 One love controls our hundred souls,  
One pulse in each beats high,  
And one grief rests on every breast,  
At this, our last "good-by."  
And though we part, in every heart  
One bond shall still survive,  
While memory cheers the passing years,  
Old Yale and Sixty-Five.

---

PARTING SONG.

BY O. R. BURCHARD, '65.

AIR— "Evening Bells"

1 The ev'ning of our College days,  
So swiftly passing, yet delays,  
And draws its curt'ning twilight o'er  
These College joys, we'll know no more  
Save as their fading outlines rise  
From mem'ry's page, before our eyes.

2 With sails unfurled we're on the stream  
Which bears us onward, like a dream,  
Into the great unknown of life,  
Into the years of manly strife—  
But yet a wreath of mem'ries dear  
We'd twine to-day, our hearts to cheer

3 We're leaving now this happy home,  
In the wide future's fields to roam;  
But ere we leave this pleasant land,  
We'd stop to clasp the parting hand,  
And with our brightest hopes in view,  
Our pledge of friendship here renew.

4 If in life's toils our courage fail,  
We'll nerve our hearts with thoughts of  
Yale;  
Or if the world should chance to lay  
Upon our brows the victor's bay,  
We'll place our honors on thy shrine,  
Dear Alma Mater—they are thine

- <sup>i</sup> William Baierl presented his findings on this topic at the September 5, 1995 meeting of Lair No. 1 of the Rascals, Rogues, and Rapscaillions in Pittsburgh. Mr. Baierl was consulted in writing this paper.
- <sup>ii</sup> “‘IT WAS MY LAST CIGAR.’” *Chicago Tribune*, March 26, 1887, p. 9. This story carries a *Chicago Mail* March 25 dateline and appears to have been reprinted entirely, though I have not examined the *Chicago Mail* version. *Chicago Mail* is the abbreviated name of the *Chicago Evening Press and Mail*.
- <sup>iii</sup> Census records show the US population in 1880 at 50,189,209 and in 1890 at 62,979,766.
- <sup>iv</sup> For example, in the August 18, 1868 edition of *St. Alban’s Daily Messenger*.
- <sup>v</sup> Reported in the *Hartford (Connecticut) Courant*, June 18, 1880.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Decatur Weekly Republican*, July 15, 1869.
- <sup>vii</sup> For example, in *The Appleton Crescent*, September 11, 1880.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, Nov. 6, 1883.
- <sup>ix</sup> “Tobacco.” *Herald and Mail*, Columbia, Tennessee, Jan. 23, 1874, p. 3.
- <sup>x</sup> “Class Day at Yale.” *New York Tribune*, June 30, 1880, p. 8.
- <sup>xi</sup> A newspaper article about the Life Underwriters’ Association Thanksgiving banquet notes that the song was sung following dinner, with a program note at the banquet repeated Hubbard’s claim that Condit wrote the words. *Daily Inter Ocean*, Chicago, Nov. 23, 1894, p. 4.
- <sup>xii</sup> The amount of detail presented in the *Chicago Evening Press and Mail* article of March 25, 1887, suggest a great deal of input from Hubbard himself. There the assertion is made that he was a professor at Yale, but William Baierl found no mention of Hubbard on the Yale faculty, though he was listed in a local newspaper as a music instructor.
- <sup>xiii</sup> “General News.” *Chicago Tribune*, June 4, 1874, p. 3.
- <sup>xiv</sup> “A New York correspondent of the Washington Post, under date of May 11<sup>th</sup>, says: . . . In Chicago, too, there is Mrs. Sara A. Hubbard, the literary and scientific editor of the Tribune, a distinguished looking lady of almost thirty-five years of age, with a tall, commanding figure and dark hair and eyes. She is perhaps the most scholarly woman on the American press, and is a veritable book-worm. Her husband is a musician of ability. He has composed a hundred or more pieces of one kind or another, the best known of which is the song “Off the Blue Canary Isles.” *The Farmer and Mechanic*, May 23, 1878.
- <sup>xv</sup> “Music and Musicians.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 28, 1897, p. 41.
- <sup>xvi</sup> “Francis Miles Finch,” by Jean Joyce. This biography appears in *The Judges of the New York Court of Appeals: A Biographical History*, ed. Hon. Albert M. Rosenblatt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). It was accessed on the web at <http://www.nycourts.gov/history/legal-history-new-york/history-legal-bench-court-appeals.html?http://www.nycourts.gov/history/legal-history-new-york/luminaries-court-appeals/finch-francis.html>. Retrieved 6 June 2019.
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- <sup>xviii</sup> *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, Oct. 7, 1881; *Janesville Daily Gazette*, Oct. 8, 1881; and *St. Joseph Weekly Herald*, Oct. 13, 1881.
- <sup>xix</sup> *New York Tribune*, Aug. 1, 1907; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 2, 1907.
- <sup>xx</sup> Joyce, op. cit.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Finch, Francis Miles. *The Blue and the Gray, and Other Verses*. New York: Holt, 1909, p. vii.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Finch, Francis Miles. *The Blue and the Gray, and Other Verses*. New York: Holt, 1909, p. 146.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Fabens, Joseph Warren. *The Last Cigar and other Poems*. New York: Holbrook, 1887, p. iv. This is taken from the forward to this book, which was written by Julia Ward Howe.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> For example, *Pipe and pouch, a smoker’s own book of poetry*. Joseph Knight, compiler. (Boston: Joseph Knight Company, 1895, pp. 140-141, and *Tobacco in song and story*. John Bain, Jr., compiler. (New York: Arthur Gray and Co., 1896).
- <sup>xxv</sup> “‘IT WAS MY LAST CIGAR’ The Author of the Second Most Popular Song James M. Hubbard of Chicago.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 26, 1887, p. 9.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> That evidence is the frequency with which the song is mentioned in secondary sources. Prior to its explosive popularity beginning in the mid-1860s, there is virtually no mention of this song outside of advertising by music sellers.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Margaret M. Mott comes to the same conclusion in her “A Bibliography of Song Sheets: Sports and Recreations in American Popular Songs: Part I,” *Notes Second Series*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (June 1949), p. 416. She writes, “Hubbard’s music, however, is not that used today with these words. In the college songbooks of the late 1860s, the words were adapted to the popular minstrel song, “Dearest Mae.””
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Rice, Edward Le Roy. *Monarchs of Minstrelsy: from “Daddy” Rice to Date*. New York: Kenny Publishing, 1911, p. 28.