Charles Kinkel: The Maestro of Science Hill

When Charles Kinkel stepped onto the campus of Science Hill Female Academy in 1858, he didn't just bring sheet music; he brought a symphony of musical talent. For nearly three decades, this German-born professor of music turned the halls of Science Hill into a concert of creativity, discipline, and charm.

Born in Wattenheim, Germany, Charles was a scholar of languages and music, fluent in Latin, Greek, and French before he ever taught a single scale. Charles was a cousin to the founders of the Kunkel Brothers Publishing Co., a prominent music firm based in St. Louis. Known for their virtuosic piano performances and their monthly Kunkel's Musical Review, the brothers helped shape the musical landscape of the American Midwest.

Their influence in U.S. music publishing was significant, especially among educators and composers like Charles, who shared both their name and their passion for melody. The surname was anglicized to Kinkel by one branch of the family and Kunkel by the other.

After the Revolution of 1848 nudged him toward new horizons, Charles boarded the ship Kosivas and landed in New York in 1849. He soon connected with the Peters Music Company and began teaching near Cincinnati, Ohio. But Kentucky soon captured his attention when a door opened in Shelbyville.

By 1858, Charles had accepted the role of professor of music at Science Hill Female Academy. It was here that his legacy truly began. He wasn't just a teacher—he was a composer, conductor, and cultural force. His first published piece, "Mountain Belle Schottische," had already made waves in 1854.

Enter Florence Norvell, a gifted young musician from West Virginia. At just 15, she'd already served as organist for St. John's Episcopal Church in Wheeling. Florence joined Science Hill as Charles's assistant and co-composer, bringing her own flair and reputation to the Academy. Her favorite saying? "I love music for it is the only thing we can take with us to heaven."

BOBBIE SMITH BRYANT

Charles and Florence, along with the dedicated school superintendent Mrs. Julia Tevis, collaboratively raised the standard of music education at Science Hill to new heights.

Charles and Florence married in 1864, and their partnership extended far beyond the classroom. They raised four children—two of whom died in infancy. They built a home at 611 Main Street, which they shared with a nurse, a nanny, and house servants. Their surviving children, Florence Norvell Kinkel Mack and Karl Norvell Kinkel, carried forward the family's musical and entrepreneurial spirit.

After the Civil War, Science Hill faced financial hardship. In 1876, Charles stepped up as business manager, proving he could balance budgets as skillfully as he balanced a musical career of teaching, writing, and publishing. By June 1877, the Academy had dodged bankruptcy and proudly graduated its 52nd class.

Florence's health began to fail, and in May 1878, she passed away at just 37. That November, Charles resigned from Science Hill, closing a chapter that had defined his career and this community.

Though he left the Academy, Charles never stopped composing. He wrote over 100 musical works, many of which are registered with the Library of Congress. His name graced pieces like "Pearl and Daisy Polka," "Polymnia Polka," "Postillion d'Amour," "Mabel Mazurka," "Angel of Night," and "Lover's Serenade." He also authored instructional guides, such as *Kinkel's New Method for the Reed Organ*, and co-wrote *The Gymnasium: A Daily Program of Exercise*.

And if you spot names like Julius Becht, Guillaume Vilbré, Karl Kinkel, or Henri Allard on a score? That might be Charles in disguise, as he used several aliases throughout his professional career.

Charles passed away in 1891 from typhoid fever and a heart condition. His will reflected a life of generosity and foresight. He left stock shares, property, and music royalties to his daughter. His son was named executor and received the remainder of his estate. He was laid to rest beside Florence at Grove Hill Cemetery, the final movement in a life composed of love, music, and purpose.

*****

Articles similar to this one are available now in the recently released "Legacy of Refinement: Science Hill Female Academy, Science Hill Inn, and Wakefield-Scearce Galleries." Limited quantities are available for purchase at $20 per copy at these locations in Shelbyville: Shelby County Historical Society, 6th and Main Coffeehouse, The Paddock, and Wakefield-Scearce Galleries.

The perfect Christmas gift!

$20 tax included

A **Shelby County Historical Society** publication on the history of
- Science Hill Female Academy
- Science Hill Inn
- Wakefield-Secearce Galleries

This 98-page magazine is filled with articles written by numerous local authors, giving a delightful and educational history of the iconic Washington Street building and its occupants.

The magazine can be purchased at:
- 6th & Main Coffeehouse
- The Paddock, corner of 7th & Main
- Wakefield-Scearce Galleries
- Shelby County Historical Society

Visit our booth at Celebration of Lights
Nov. 8