

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAREER, METHODS, AND PHILOSOPHY OF
THADDEUS P. GIDDINGS AND HIS INFLUENCE
ON MUSIC EDUCATION

by

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Thaddeus Giddings was a leader in music education at the turn of the century. He authored or co-authored methods texts and textbooks for classroom use. Giddings was an eccentric who was notoriously critical and difficult. His personal life extended into his professional life through his various hobbies.

The *Giddings system* used the *song approach* which emphasized using the child's voice toward the goal of sight-singing. The system used precise procedures for classroom teacher use. Classrooms were arranged for individual work lead by *pattern singers*. Textbooks filled with *pattern songs* organized in a sequential manner were used. Students moved from "rote to note" the beginning of the second grade.

As one of the "Keokuk Pioneers", Thaddeus Giddings made the motion to found the *Supervisors National Conference* in 1907. The symbiotic relationship between Giddings and the organization continued through varied projects. He pleaded for the establishment of a music education professional journal and he sat on the first research council. Giddings promoted MENC movements such as community singing and instrumental music. He co-founded and funded a generous portion of the National Music Camp located at Interlochen, Michigan.

Children "learned by doing" in the Giddings' classroom. He believed ground work in music be firmly established at the elementary level. Singing was integral and he emphasized smooth tone through respiration. Giddings believed singing was a learned behavior and encouraged all to participate.

Musical performance in Minneapolis Schools during Giddings' era was superb. Standardized and performance testing indicated a correlation between knowledge, aptitude and performance. He made good use of direct instruction, effort-based assessment, and individual work. Classroom management was based on continuous music making and minimal teacher talk.

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Chapter I

THADDEUS P. GIDDINGS

Every work day, I drive by a big rock. On the rock is the following inscription: "DR. A. W. GIDDINGS SETTLED HERE IN THE YEAR 1854."

The rock is located in front of a gray house on Ferry Street on the Rum River and only fifty steps from Main Street of Anoka, Minnesota, where I teach music in Wilson Elementary School.

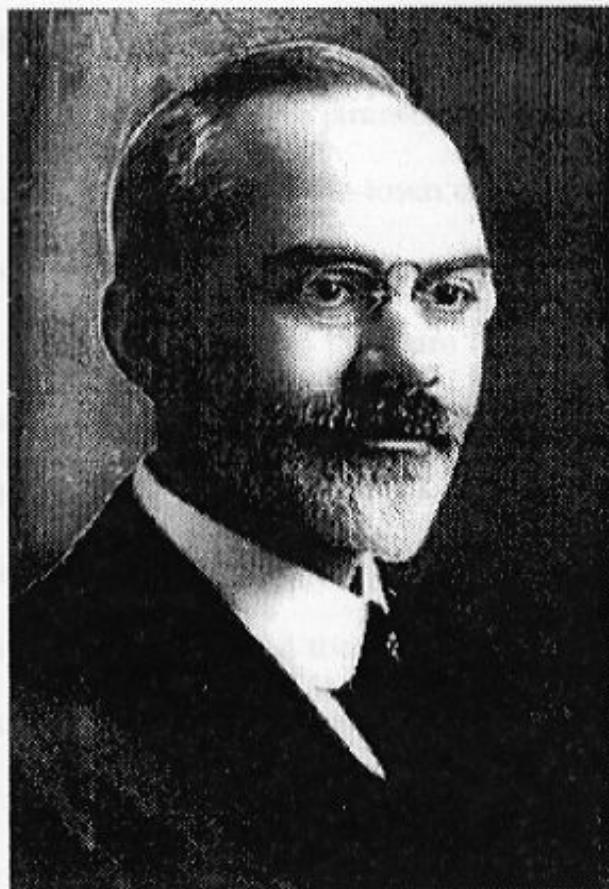


Figure 1. Thaddeus Philander Giddings
(Milham, 1951)

When I began this project, my purpose was to learn more about a music educator from Minnesota and specifically his methods of teaching music. My curiosity came from comments made by a few "mature/musical" people who felt the *Giddings system* to be a solid method of teaching elementary music. Never in my wildest imagination did I expect to find that Thaddeus Giddings' life revolved around the rock I've looked at so often while waiting for the light to change.

Formative Years

Thaddeus Philander Giddings was born in Anoka, Minnesota, in 1869. As a child, he often saw the Rum River jammed with logs during the height of the saw mill years. He also watched the town dry up when the logging industry faded. Often, Indians would carry their canoes through the family vegetable garden in order to get around the Rum River Dam as they made their way downstream. Thaddeus listened in wonder as his father told about pioneering and the fighting between the Chippewa and Sioux tribes which occurred close to their house (Milham, 1951).

The Giddings' ancestors crossed the Atlantic from England to settle in Ipswich, Massachusetts in 1635. Seven generations later, Thaddeus' father, Aurora Giddings, was raised in Ohio by an uncle, who was a prominent abolitionist U. S. congressman (McDermid, 1967). After Uncle Joshua funded Aurora's medical training, Aurora traveled by prairie schooner expecting to set up practice in St. Paul, Minnesota. On arrival, he found St. Paul had too

many physicians, so he moved twenty miles northwest to the Indian trading post of Anoka ("Date Of," 1917). Often making house calls in a covered sleigh, Aurora became a dedicated physician to the surrounding area (Milham, 1951).

As Aurora arrived, settlers were moving their families onto land and building houses as they gathered the lumber (Goodrich, 1905). Soon, Aurora sent for Mary Simon who came from Ohio to become his wife (Milham, 1951). They had one daughter and five surviving sons, all of whom became successful in their own right. Mrs. Lena Giddings Chase married a powerful lumberman in Anoka; her son eventually became a U.S. Senator. George J. Giddings became a court commissioner and banker in Anoka, and Jesse Giddings worked for the state government service after the pair gave up on prospecting for gold out west. Arthur E. Giddings became district judge of the eighteenth Minnesota District, while Paul Giddings became a major in the U.S. Army. Thaddeus was to become a powerful force in music education throughout the United States ("Date Of," 1917).

As a young child, Thaddeus experienced an unsuccessful introduction to school in Anoka. His parents then sent him to attend elementary school and live with the Garvey family in northern Iowa. He was very lonesome there, but successful (McDermid, 1967).

When he returned to Anoka at eleven years of age, Thaddeus decided he wanted piano lessons. His mother said, "Thaddy thinks he should have a piano. Well, what Thaddy wants, Thaddy gets." His father had a different

idea and told him that he would have to work for his lessons. Thaddeus was told that by helping the hired girl with her chores every week, he would receive fifty cents to cover the lessons (Jablonski, 1994). He took about thirty lessons from Mrs. D. S. Rose (McDermid, 1967) and spent a lot of his time practicing. After fifteen lessons, Thaddeus was good enough to play the only pipe organ in town (Giddings, 1927). The pipe organ had been hauled from South St. Paul by ox cart for the Congregational Church in Anoka. People came from miles around to hear the beautiful tone quality of this fine instrument (Church File #3). At the age of twelve, it also became Thaddeus' responsibility to teach parts to a vocal quartet every week for Sunday performances (McDermid, 1967).

In 1885, Thaddeus graduated from Anoka High School with two other boys and five girls (Milham, 1951). He spent eight months at the University of Minnesota ("Hello, Mr.," 1939) and, for an unknown reason, was abruptly asked to leave. As he left the university, Thaddeus took a one hour lesson in public school music. In that lesson, he was simply told that he was to make students sing what was in the book ("Today's Personality," 1940). Ironically, he was to return to the University of Minnesota years later as an instructor in that field.

He acquired the rest of his music teacher training in summer sessions after he had begun teaching. He attended the American Institute of Normal Methods at Lake Geneva in 1889 and in Highland Park, Illinois, in 1891 and

1892. At these sessions, Thaddeus became acquainted with an influential friend, Charles H. Congdon, who, admiring Thaddeus' *song-approach*, published Thaddeus' first book (McDermid, 1967).

Career

Thaddeus began his fifty-six years of teaching in his hometown of Anoka, Minnesota, at the age of seventeen ("Giddings Testimonial," 1939). During his two-month trial period, he taught at four schools for five dollars per month each. After the two months were up, he was not asked to stay (Giddings, 1927).

Thaddeus was offered a job in a rural school for the four winter months. So in 1886, he headed out on one of his father's mules for a job in the country (Giddings, 1927) that paid twenty dollars per month plus room and board (Milham, 1951). He had sixteen students and lived one week in each of their homes for his sixteen weeks of rural employment ("Hello, Mr.," 1939).

For higher pay, Thaddeus returned to Anoka in 1887 to be a combination substitute classroom teacher and music teacher. There were sixteen teachers. When no one was sick, he could teach music. *Moody and Sankey Gospel Hymns No. 2* was his textbook. His wages went from thirty dollars a month the first year to thirty-five dollars a month the second year. He received another five dollar raise the third year. When the school board refused to give him a raise the fourth year, he quit (Giddings, 1927).

In 1891, Thaddeus was offered a job in Centreville, Minnesota, which was located fifteen miles from Anoka. While at Centreville, he had 102 students in his classroom, thirty of them over the age of twenty. His largest barrier was language because many of the French Canadian students did not speak English. He described recess:

At recess all the boys from ten on got out their pipes and sitting in a circle smoked and spat at the stove. The girls stayed on their side of the room and whispered and giggled. I asked them if that was the regular program. I was informed that it was and that they were much surprised that I did not get out my clay pipe and join them. I said that it was hardly the thing to do: smoke in the presence of ladies, and that I did not smoke at all myself, and would they please desist. They were non-plussed at such a request, but did it cheerfully. (McDermid, 1967, p. 35)

The classroom was unbearably noisy, so Thaddeus began to wear moccasins to work and tiptoed around. Soon the students were following his example and the noise was reduced significantly (McDermid, 1967).

When he was twenty-one years old, Thaddeus got a teaching position far away from home in Moline, Illinois. He thoroughly enjoyed the years he worked in Moline as he found that everyone loved to sing. This is where he began to develop his Giddings system. Part of the system was influenced by the objectives of the *Normal Music Course* by Hosea E. Holt. In Moline, Giddings used the Holt textbooks for sequential presentation of sight-reading skills. Giddings advocated student independence, individual work, and the use of a soft, clear tone with distinct enunciation. Above the fourth grade, Giddings' students sang two- and three-part songs. He used a challenging

repertoire of material in the high school. When he requested the purchase of an oratorio by Haydn, the only school board member who was familiar with the work laughed. Giddings explained,

Now I had heard of "The Creation" but had not the vaguest ideas as to what it was. To be sure I grew up twenty miles from Minneapolis but it never occurred to me to go there and hear any music. I did not have the price. (Giddings, 1927, p. 15)

His third year in Moline, Thaddeus conducted a performance of the *Creation* and sang the tenor solo. Every pupil in the high school performed except the two who had the measles. This industrious undertaking was a success; it was performed two nights to packed houses. It was to be the first oratorio performed in a high school in the entire country (Giddings, 1927).

After his success in Moline, Thaddeus was offered a position in Oak Park, Illinois, for one hundred dollars a month. He loved to be near the cultural center of Chicago (McDermid, 1967) and he was to remain there for sixteen years ("Hello, Mr.," 1939). During the summer, Thaddeus taught at the Foresman School of Methods in Music which was organized by the publisher of the *Modern Music Series*. He became known as a "miracle worker" in Oak Park and attained national prominence as people came from all over the country to observe him at work. Nine hundred students met together each day for forty-five minutes of music. Giddings stood on a stage in the middle of the room with half the students facing the other half, all

singing antiphonally in eight parts. When he resigned, the school newspaper reported:

It was with regret that the announcement was received of the resignation of Mr. Giddings, who for sixteen years has been the supervisor of music in the Oak Park schools. Under his tutorage our schools have attained a place among the first five schools in the country. (McDermid, 1967, p. 81)

In 1910, when Thaddeus took the position of Supervisor of Music for Minneapolis, Minnesota, the city's population was three hundred thousand (McDermid, 1967). Giddings was to hold the position for thirty two years, (Hitchcock & Saide, 1986), working out of an office in Minneapolis City Hall (Gale Research Company, 1976).

When Thaddeus visited the grade schools in Minneapolis, he found only rote work being done. He found no part singing or individual work. He was very disappointed because standards were much lower than what he had left behind in Oak Park. He discovered teachers were using the same four books that had been used for twenty years (McDermid, 1967). He had little hope for immediate success at the high school level because no foundation had been built in the grade schools.

By 1914, Giddings' influence over the community was already showing an effect. Because of his encouragement, parents purchased 1,786 tickets for each of the children's concerts given by the Minneapolis Symphony causing the six concerts to be totally sold out ("Children's Concerts," 1914). That

same year, Mr. Giddings directed a special choir in the Hippodrome where 550 children performed ("Teachers in Minneapolis," 1914).

By March of 1921, Mr. Giddings' style of music education was well established in Minneapolis where he lead a performance of Pierne's *Children's Crusade*. Three hundred fifty high school students, hundreds of glee club members, and 225 grade school students performed the cantata (Giddings, 1931). Eighty-six members of the Minneapolis Symphony accompanied the *Crusade* while soloists of national prominence performed along with the public school singers ("Every Voice," 1927).

Walter H. Hodgeson, who was an music instructor in Minneapolis Schools between 1926 and 1931, believed that the typical chorus work in the high schools of Minneapolis was better than the work of any other school system he had ever seen or heard (McDermid, 1967). Morrie Johnson, who observed Thaddeus Giddings for his college requirements, remembered that Peter D. Tkatch, a follower of Giddings, directed the West High A Cappella Choir. According to Johnson, it was considered to be one of the finest choirs in the country. Jefferson Junior High fed students into West High and both schools' choirs were absolutely marvelous. You could give them the pitch for an anthem and they could go through it almost perfectly. Johnson also remembered that students expertly read very difficult literature (1994). Typically, students were asked to read and sing Bach, Handel and Mendelssohn oratorio masterpieces (Giddings & Baker, 1932).

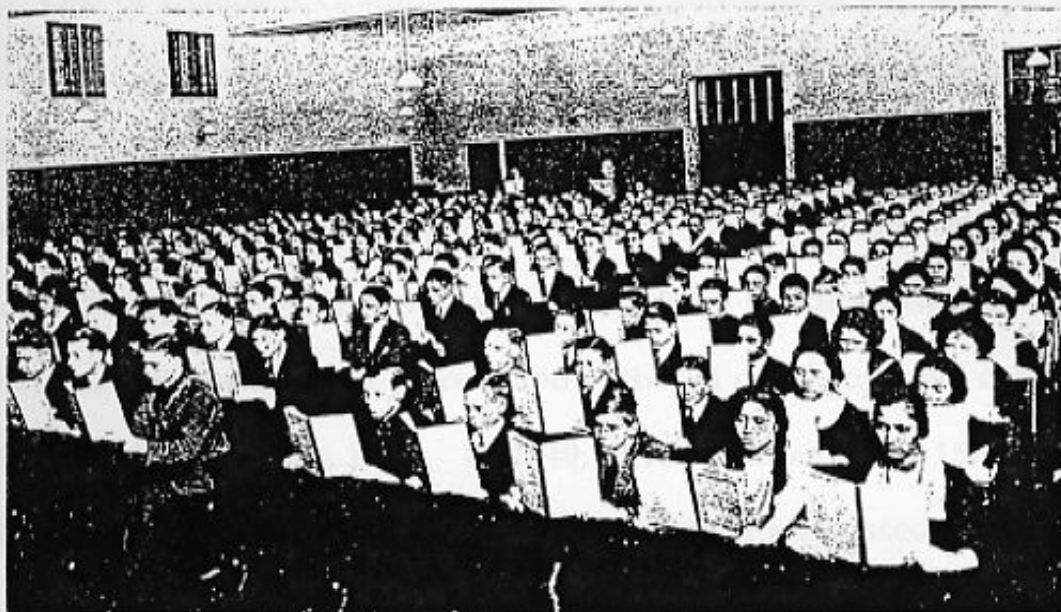


Figure 2. West High Music Room, Minneapolis, Minnesota
(Giddings & Baker, 1932, p. 74)

In 1935, Thaddeus was nominated to the Society of Arts and Sciences in recognition of his contributions in the field of music ("Giddings Named," 1935). The culmination of his work occurred in 1937 when eleven major concerts were performed by Minneapolis school choral and instrumental ensembles at the North Central Music Educators National Conference held in Minneapolis (McDermid, 1967). By his retirement in 1942, Thaddeus had established Minneapolis as a music center and ("Today's Personality," 1940) was considered a national authority in his field of music education ("T. P. Giddings Dies," 1954).