

Ethel May Earnist – The True Composer of *Peanuts*

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It has long been thought, and put forward as a conclusion in many ragtime texts, that **Ethel Earnist** was a pseudonym for **Charles L. Johnson**; therefore, he was the composer of *Peanuts: A Nutty Rag*. Recent information to the contrary has been discovered by the author that indicates this information to be incorrect. Ethel Earnist was indeed a real person, and the composer of *Peanuts*, not Charles L. Johnson.

Current Background: In 1978, and again in 1988, *Rags and Ragtime* by **Trebor Tichenor** and **David A. Jasen** was published and revised, and in both editions, *Peanuts* is included in the timeline for Charles L. Johnson. It also appears in *That American Rag* (2000) by Jasen and **Gene Jones**, with Ethel Earnist shown in the index of *Pseudonyms Used by Composers*, with Charles L. Johnson as the person behind that pseudonym. There are good reasons to have made this assessment, and they have further been supported by **Phil Stewart**, Charles Johnson historian.

There are some issues that come up, however, especially in light of **Fannie Bell Woods**, composer of *Sweetness*, having been located and verified as another non-pseudonym for Johnson. This given, *Peanuts* would remain the only piano rag that Johnson wrote using a female pseudonym, much less any pseudonym other than **Raymond Birch**. Given that many other facets of Johnson's otherwise consistent history do not point to something like this which could be perceived as, perhaps, erratic or out of place, the question also needs to be asked if Ethel Earnist may actually have existed.

One place to start is to examine the rags and other compositions composed by women that Johnson published under his own label, including *Peanuts*. One composer thought to be a woman, Zena A. Smith, was actually found to have been male. The remaining pieces are as follows, according to data collected by historian Nora Hulse:

Frizzles – Kate Myers Stith – 1907

Pine Needles Waltz – Kate Myers Stith – 1907

The Tickler – Frances Cox - 1908

Yes I Am Dreaming – Susan E. Wren - 1908

The Fraternity Waltz – Maddalena M. Herye - 1908

Slivers/Splinters – Maude Muller Gilmore - 1909

Peach Blossoms – Maude Muller Gilmore - 1910

Moonbeams – N.D. Taylor - 1911

My Loyal Kansas Girl – Mrs. A. E. Bingham - 1911

That Irresistible Rag – Lucy B. Phillips - 1912

Lorelie – Maude Muller Gilmore - 1910

Honey Girl – Enola Kempka & Elva Tarlton – 1918

Note that *Sweetness* was published by Johnson's friend **Fred Forster**, and the reasons behind its mistaken parentage is noted in a separate essay by the author

Of these pieces listed above, which all came from Johnson's own company, as did *Peanuts* somewhere in the middle, none have been attributed to him. This becomes more prescient when one finds out that the definitive existence of Lucy Phillips, Frances Cox, or Enola Kempka and Elva Tarlton cannot be fully ascertained. So why not Ethel Earnist? The funny-sounding name perhaps?

Add to this some of the stylistic facets of *Peanuts*. The very issue of who wrote this rag was brought to my attention by historian **Terry Parrish** in 2006 when he and I were discussing Fannie B. Woods and uncovering of new information. He brought up the fact that *Peanuts* is very far removed from virtually every other Charles L. Johnson rag on many levels and proffered a suggestion not only that Johnson did not write it, but a possibility of who may have either written or influenced the piece - **Theron C. Bennett**. I said I would follow up on this.

Analysis of Differences: In a nutshell - forensically, there are so many variances between *Peanuts* and virtually any other Johnson piece that doubt CAN easily be cast on authorship. The consistent use of the A section pattern starting on the & of 1 and ending on 4 with no cross-bar syncopation for starters is not at all a characteristic Johnson pattern, and he was reliable for those. The octave and a half phrase at the end of the A section (which would be the alleged Bennett component Dr. Parrish was referencing) is also uncharacteristic. The only real syncopation in the A section occurs in ms. 8. The B section is way out there, and really too repetitive and/or static for Johnson works of that period. The lack of key change into the trio is another Johnson non-hallmark, as is the ascending pattern in that section, even given some similar attributes in *Cum-Bac*. Johnson trios are very predictable in a sense, more often than not following the circle of fifths or a similar pattern.

So put *Peanuts* head-to-head with any Johnson rag (I have done so), especially those composed from 1910 to 1913, and it is WAY out there. Perhaps it was a moment of inspiration to do something different, but something like is hard to verify. This same methodology of analysis worked for the identification of *Silver Swan* before a duplicate roll with Joplin's name on it actually appeared, and it worked well (with concurrence) when I was able to positively identify **Al Marzian** as **Mark Janza** (in league with Dick Zimmerman) by comparing *Angel Food* with *Lion Tamer* and *Aviation Rag* at many levels.

So Who Is The Composer? If not Johnson or Bennett, is the name Earnist contrived? My initial research found several Earnists still living in the United States, including in Virginia and Iowa, but none in Illinois or Kansas or Missouri where I might have expected. It is a real last name, however, so perhaps not so comical to them. Note that researcher **Sue Attalla** discovered that **Webb Oungst**, the lyricist listed for *They Gotta Quit Kickin' My Dawg Aroun'*, was a real person in spite of how weird THAT name is. So some searching for the REAL Ethel Earnist uncovered the following confirmable candidate:

Ethel May Earnist was born in eastern Nebraska in July 1888. Her father, **William H. Earnist** (sometimes spelled as Earnest), was listed usually as a manual laborer in official records, and later as a night watchman. Her mother, **Belle (La Gourgue) Earnist**, was a homemaker. Ethel was the only surviving child of three and had no children, so it was hard to determine any history from relatives since none could be found. There was a chance William had been a farmer and abandoned that vocation for the more reliable labor work force. The family is listed in Omaha in the 1900 census, and again in 1910. In the latter, Ethel at 21 was a pianist working in a department store in Omaha, which was a short day's ride from Kansas City if she wanted to pursue the music business there or submit a publication. William is listed this time as a painter with his own shop.

It is interesting to note that the family was listed in the 1911 Omaha directory and the 1912 Kansas City, Kansas directory, which means that they moved at some point in mid-1911. This would readily coincide with the publication of *Peanuts* in mid-to-late 1911, initially copyrighted under her name on July 17. William was listed as a laborer, again likely with his own shop, but no other family members at that time. He was listed consistently in the directories through 1916. The family shows up in Independence, Missouri, in 1918. Ethel is shown as in sheet music retail and living with her parents. The same goes for 1919 and 1920. In the 1920 Federal census she is shown as working in the music department of a variety or drug store, which may be a slightly skewed description. The 1922 through 1924 Independence records have her employer as publisher **J.W. Jenkins Sons Company**, likely the same thing she had been doing since 1918 as a local agent. The 1924 listing was moot since it was given in 1923 just before her wedding.

Ethel married **Obe (or Ober) G. Hamilton** (1/23/1888) in late 1923 in Wichita, Kansas. In the late 1910s he was a coffee salesman for the **Paddock Coffee & Spice Company of Kansas City**. As of the early 1920s he worked in sales of extermination chemicals for farmers. They were seen in S.E. Kansas in 1926, but back in Kansas City, Missouri, by the 1930 census. In the 1920 census, William was listed as a night watchman in a hospital, and in 1930 as the same for a bank patrol. In 1940 the couple was still living with Mr. Earnist. Ober died in 1948 from a heart attack. Ethel died of lung cancer in 1957 in Kansas City. Her death certificate showed her as a musician. Research found no descendants of the couple on either side.

Conclusion: The likelihood of this Ethel Earnist, who worked in music for much of her adult life and directly with a Kansas City publisher, being the composer of *Peanuts* is almost certain given the demographics cited. Add to this that Johnson had published rags by other composers of both sexes and no credit has been given to him for their work, the odds increase. As with Fannie B. Woods, the impact of this discovery is hardly earthshaking, but it does add one more female composer to the compendium, and removes one more pseudonym from the Johnson repertoire, giving more consistency to what he was known for as a composer.

Information derived from Ancestry.com, Mormon genealogy database, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Federal census records, Omaha Nebraska, Kansas City Kansas, Kansas City, Missouri, and Independence Missouri city directories, with assistance from historian Nora Hulse and enthusiast John Dawson.

Father William H. Earnist born October 1862 in Iowa

Mother Belle Earnist born. July 1859 in Ohio

1900 Federal Census listing:

Head: William H. Earnist, age 37, Profession hard to discern; may be painter or laborer Married 10 years.

Address: 2719 North 24th Street, Omaha. Owned home

Wife: Belle., age 41. (interestingly, her mother was from Canada but her father from French Jamaica)

Daughter: Ethel May, age 11, born July, 1888 (year is inconsistent here and should be 1889)

1910 Federal Census listing:

Head: William H. Earnest, age 49 [should be 48], Painter – own shop, married 20 years

2218 South 21st Street, Omaha. Renting home.

Wife: Belle., Age 51,

Daughter: Ethel May, age 21, Occupation: Pianist – Department Store.

1920 Federal Census listing:

Head: William H. Earnist, age 57, Night watchman - Hospital

Address: 3828 Brooklyn Avenue, Independence, Missouri. Owned home (not rented)

Wife: Belle, age 61, No occupation.

Daughter: Ethel May, age 30, Occupation: Music department – Drug store (may be Dept Store)

1930 Federal Census listing:

Head: William H. Earnist, age 67, Watchman, bankers patrol

Address: 3828 Brooklyn Avenue, Independence, Missouri. Owned home, Valued at \$6,000

Wife: Belle, age 71

Son-in-law: Ober G. Hamilton, age 43, Occupation: Exterminator – Manufacturer.

Daughter/Wife: Ethel M Hamilton, age 41. Occupation: none.

1940 Federal Census listing: Head:

Billy Earnist, age 81, widowed, no occupation

Address: 3828 Brooklyn Avenue, Independence, Missouri. Owned home, Valued at \$4,500

Son-in-law: Ober G. Hamilton, age 53, Occupation: Traveling salesman - wholesale drug concern.

Daughter/Wife: Ethel M Hamilton, age 51. Occupation: none.

1942 Draft record:

Obe Gentry Hamilson, 3828 Brooklyn, Kansas City, Jackson, Missouri, 55, 1/23/1887, Ethel May Hamilton, K.C. Park Department (Edwin Jacobson) @ 17th and Woodland

Directories:

1912 – 1916 - Kansas City, KS

Earnest, William H. - laborer

1918 - Independence, MO

Earnest, William 3618 Woodland Ave

Earnest, Belle, r., same address

Ethel, sheet music, same address

1919 – Independence, MO

Wm. H, painter, same address

Earnist, Ethel, sales, same address

1920 – Independence, MO

Wm. H., watch, 3828 Brooklyn Ave.

Earnest, Ethel, music, r., same address

1921 – Independence, MO

Wm. H, watch, same address

Earnist, Ethel, nurse, same address

(*Nurse* is likely a mistake. The word *music* could have looked like *nurse* to the person who transcribed it).

1922, 1923, 1924 – Independence, MO

Earnist, Ethel, clerk, - either J. W. Jenkins Sons Co, or in music, same address

1930 – Independence, MO

Hamilton, Obe G., exterminator (Ethel M.), 621 Grand Ave

1931, 1932 – Independence, MO

Hamilton, Obe G., traveling salesman (Ethel M.), 3828 Brooklyn Ave

1955 – Independence, MO

Hamilton, Ethel M., no occupation (widow Obe G.), 3828 Brooklyn Ave

Death Record:

THE DIVISION OF HEALTH OF MISSOURI
STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

44388
STATE FILE NUMBER

Registration District No. 149 Primary Registration District No. 1002 Registrar's No. 5821

FILED DEC 30 1957

1. PLACE OF DEATH
a. COUNTY Jackson

2. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived. If institution: Residence before admission)
a. STATE Missouri b. COUNTY Jackson

b. CITY (If outside corporate limits, give TOWNSHIP only) OR TOWN Kansas City Inside Limits Yes No
c. FULL NAME OF (If NOT in hospital, give location) HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION Gen'l Hosp. #1 Length of stay in 1b 43 yrs d. CITY OR TOWN Kansas City Inside Limits Yes No
e. STREET ADDRESS 3828 Brooklyn (If outside, give location) Reside on Farm Yes No

3. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or print) First Middle Last
Ethel May Hamilton

4. DATE OF DEATH Month Day Year
12 - 8 - 1957

5. SEX Female 6. COLOR OR RACE White 7. MARRIED NEVER MARRIED WIDOWED DIVORCED 8. DATE OF BIRTH July 15 1885 9. AGE (In years last birthday) 69 10. UNDER 1 YEAR - 11. UNDER 24 HRS. -

12a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) Musician 12b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY Jenkins Co. Odell, Nebraska 12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? U.S.A.

13a. FATHER'S NAME William Earnist 13b. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Belle La Touque 14. NAME OF HUSBAND OR WIFE Edna H. Hamilton

15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U. S. ARMED FORCES? (Yes, no, or unknown) (If yes, give war or dates of service) No 16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. - 17. INFORMANT Mrs. Thomas Brinkley Address 1424

18. CAUSE OF DEATH (Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c).)
PART I. DEATH WAS CAUSED BY:
IMMEDIATE CAUSE (a) Carcinoma of left lung primary
Conditions, if any, which gave rise to above cause (a), stating the underlying cause last: } DUE TO (b) _____
DUE TO (c) _____
PART II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DEATH but not related to the terminal disease condition given in PART I (a) _____
INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH 16 1/2 X

19. WAS AUTOPSY PERFORMED? YES NO

20a. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE 20b. DESCRIBE HOW INJURY OCCURRED. (Enter nature of injury in PART I or PART II of item 18.) _____
20c. TIME OF INJURY Hour Month, Day, Year a.m. p.m. _____

20d. INJURY OCCURRED WHILE AT WORK NOT WHILE AT WORK 20e. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.) _____ 20f. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION COUNTY STATE

21. I attended the deceased from 11-19-57 to Dec. 8, 1957 and last saw her alive on Dec. 8, 1957
Death occurred at 11:20 A.M. on the date stated above; and to the best of my knowledge, from the causes stated.

22a. SIGNATURE (Degree or title) [Signature] 22b. ADDRESS 21th & Cherry 22c. DATE SIGNED 12-9-57

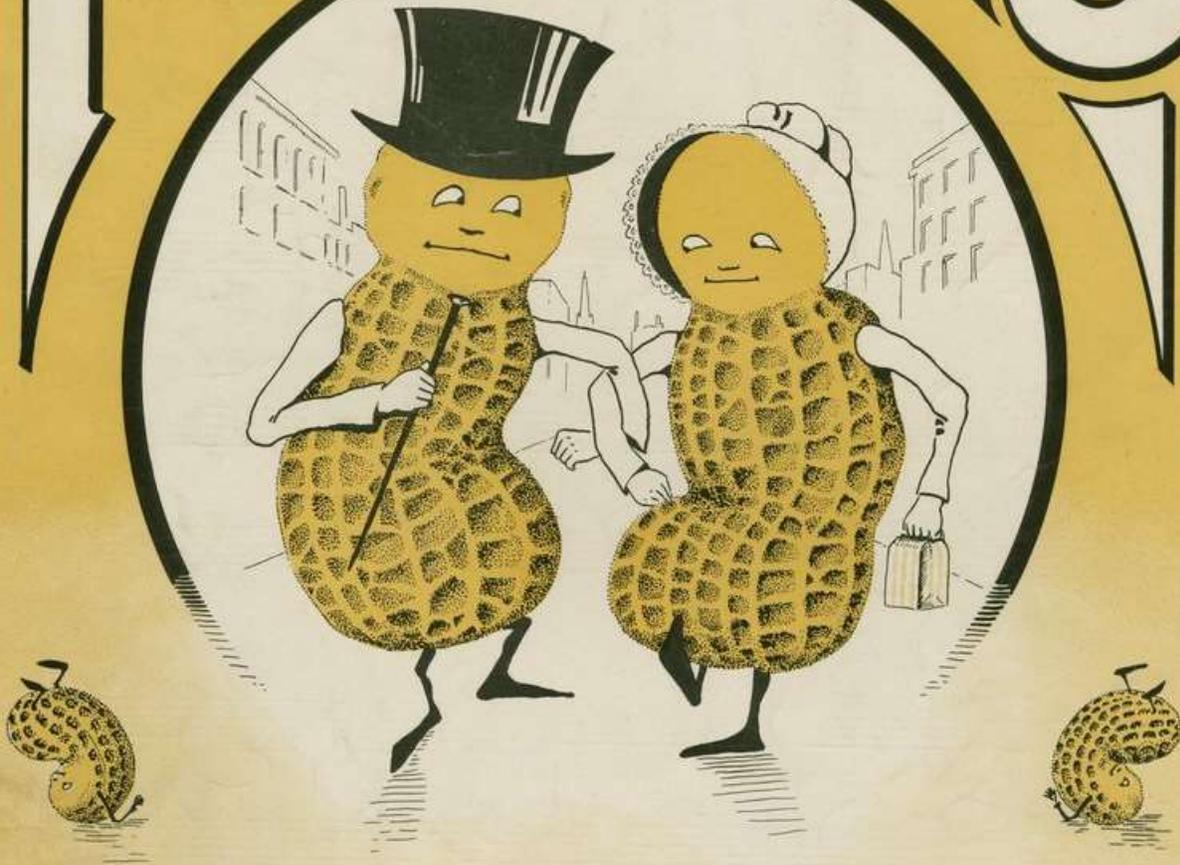
23a. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL (Specify) Burial 23b. DATE 12-11-1957 23c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY Memorial Park Cem. K.C., Missouri 23d. LOCATION (City, town, or county), (State)

24. FUNERAL DIRECTOR C.F. Blackman & Son Inc. ADDRESS K.C. Mo. 25. DATE RECD. BY LOCAL REG. 12-10-57 26. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE Neva Minshall

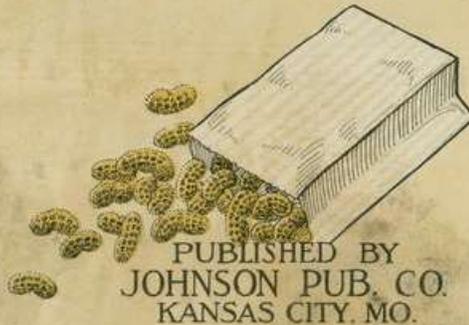
(Licensed Embalmer's Statement on Reverse Side)

B. I. BUTTIS
USE ONLY BLACK INK OR RIBBON TYPEWRITE IF POSSIBLE
MEDICAL CERTIFICATION
Doctor, coroner, etc. must use only standard nomenclature in item 18. No symptoms will be listed. All diseases in Part I must be causally related.

PEANUTS



A NUTTY RAG BY ETHEL EARNIST



PUBLISHED BY
JOHNSON PUB. CO.
KANSAS CITY, MO.

2

“PEANUTS”

(A NUTTY RAG)

ETHEL EARNIST.

INTRO.

The musical score is written for piano in 2/4 time. It begins with an introduction marked 'p' (piano) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The first system contains five measures. The second system, marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte), contains four measures. The third system contains four measures. The fourth system contains four measures. The score uses a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The piece features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

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The first system of musical notation consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part begins with a melodic line of eighth notes, marked with a *cresc.* (crescendo) hairpin. The bass clef part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

The second system continues the piano introduction. The treble clef part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs. The bass clef part continues with a steady accompaniment. A *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic marking is present at the beginning of the system.

The third system shows the continuation of the piano introduction. The treble clef part has a more active melodic line with slurs. The bass clef part maintains the accompaniment.

The fourth system continues the piano introduction. The treble clef part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs. The bass clef part continues with a steady accompaniment.

The fifth system concludes the piano introduction. It features a first ending (marked '1.') and a second ending (marked '2.'). The first ending leads back to the beginning of the piano introduction, while the second ending provides a final cadence. The treble clef part has a melodic line with slurs, and the bass clef part has a steady accompaniment.

4

mf

cresc.

TRIO.

mf

f

5

mf *f* *ff*

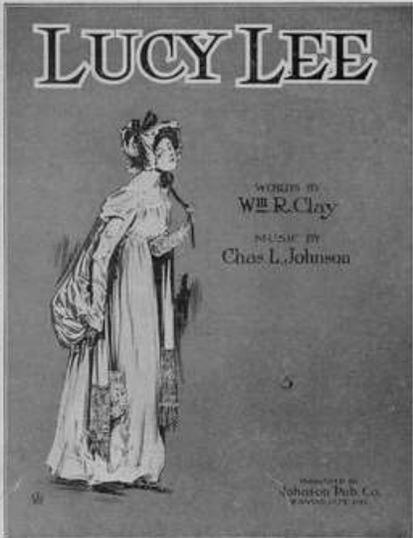
1. 2.

mf

cresc.

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By William R. Clay, Raymond Birch and Chas. L. Johnson, Writers Who Have Made Reputations for Producing Big Sellers



VOCAL

Words by Wm. R. Clay
Music by
Chas. L. Johnson

Lucy Lee
The Girl for Me
Sly Old Moon
I'll Meet You
on the
Golden Shore

"LUCY LEE"

Music by
CHAS. L. JOHNSON.

CHORUS.

Boys have you seen my lit - tle Lu - cy Lu - cy Lee

She's just as sweet as taf - fy can - dy just suits me, My Lu - cy,

some day we'll make it to the par - sons don't you see She's the fair - y.

I in - tend to mar - ry Lu - cy Lee. Lee. Lee.

MELODY RAG

RAYMOND BIRCH.

Instrumental

Cloud Kisser

(Rag Two-Step)
By Raymond Birch

Queen of Fashion

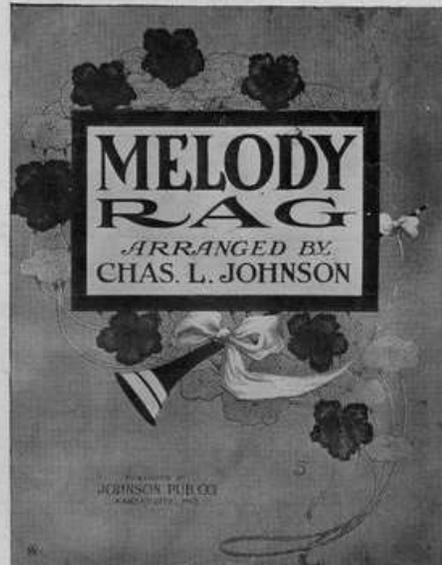
Waltzes
(By Chas. L. Johnson)

Tar Babies Rag

By Raymond Birch

Melody Rag

By Raymond Birch



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