

# Fannie B. Woods Mansfield - Composer of Sweetness

©2005/2015 by Bill Edwards

It has long been thought, and put forward as a conclusion in *Rags and Ragtime* by the fine researchers and authors **Trebor Tichenor** and **Dave Jasen**, that **Fannie B. Woods** was a pseudonym for composer **Charles L. Johnson**; therefore he was the composer of the piano rag *Sweetness*. In 2004, information to the contrary was presented to the author and further research indicated that this long-standing contention is incorrect. Fannie B. Woods was indeed a real person, and she was the composer of *Sweetness*, not Charles L. Johnson.

**Current Background:** In 1978, and again in 1988, *Rags and Ragtime* by Tichenor and Jasen was published and revised, and in both editions, *Sweetness* is included in the timeline for Charles L. Johnson. It also appears in *That American Rag* (2000) by Jasen and Gene Jones, with Fannie B. Woods shown in the index of *Pseudonyms Used by Composers*, with Charles L. Johnson as the person behind that pseudonym. This has further been supported by author and Johnson authority **Phillip A. Stewart**. There are some good reasons to have made this assessment, which could be construed as a good guess by the collective respected authors.

When looking at the publisher timeline for Charles L. Johnson, he was published literally all over the map between 1899 and 1913, including at least two incarnations of his own company, Carl Hoffman, Jenkins Son's, Jerome H. Remick, Will Rossiter, Keithley, Vandersloot Music, and dozens of other vanity presses from Colorado to New York. This includes many songs, waltzes, intermezzos and marches in addition to his rags. There is little consistency to be shown over the period, as he would not only trade off publishers, but also sell catalogs published under his own label to other publishers, thus providing multiple editions of certain pieces. In 1913 this changed. Most of the rest of his non-vanity press pieces were released by Forster Music Publishers of Chicago, providing long-term consistency from this point forward.

*Sweetness* plays into this as it could have been, and likely was considered his debut with Forster by the authors mentioned. However, it was published in May of 1912, and subsequently copyrighted on June 12, 1912, just three months after Charlie had put out a piece with yet another publisher, and with a gap of several months following it. In any case, since all of the rags and most of the pieces following *Sweetness* are from Forster, a partial conclusion to authorship given to Johnson, who was also known to have used the pseudonym of Raymond Birch on multiple occasions, could be reached.

Add to this some of the stylistic facets of *Sweetness*. This includes the secondary rag figure (three sixteenths repeated over a duple meter eighth note left hand pattern) which Johnson used fairly consistently in rags starting with *Dill Pickles* in 1905, and his use of a two measure break in the middle of each section, another Johnson device. Even the chord progression in the A and B sections, VI ii V I or VI II V I, is found in some Johnson pieces. The well-developed trio of *Sweetness*, essentially descending the scale harmonically, also falls in line with some Johnson trios, and the return to the B section for the close is a Johnson device. There are variances, however, which will be discussed ahead. In essence, it could be a Johnson piece, just as much as some Shakespeare plays could just as well be Marlowe.

**The Contrary Information:** Ms. Rhonda Rucker of Louisville, Kentucky, A former student of Ms. Woods, whom she knew as Mrs. Mansfield, contacted the author in 2004 concerning a copy of *Sweetness*, and wanted to know what Charles L. Johnson had to do with the piece. Rhonda and her brothers received photocopies of *Sweetness*, which Fannie evidently was not only proud of, but also liked to teach to some of

her prodigies. After sending an explanation of the current known history, some refuting information was returned, along with leads for further research. This research led to the composition of a biography of Ms. Woods that indicates she was very real, and there is even some information that leads to the possibility that she at least knew of Johnson locally in Louisville, KY, where she spent most of her life, and may also have known **Al Marzian**, local musician, composer and publisher. There are many tidy tie-ins between these two figures as well.

Fannie Bell Woods was born May 23, 1892. Her father John was a Kentucky native who made a living as a carpenter, and her mother Cora came from Indiana. Fannie grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where she was educated in music, specifically piano and organ. By the age of 17 she was working in a music store as a clerk, and possibly as a song demonstrator, though that has not been confirmed. Her younger sister Edna, 15 at this time, is listed as a music teacher in the 1910 census. At the age of 19 she composed *Sweetness*, the publication of which may have been facilitated by Louisville publisher Al Marzian, whom recently had his own *Angel Food Rag* published with Forster Music Publishers in Chicago. Marzian has recently been discovered to be the identity of Mark Janza, further codified by the fact that Forster later published Janza/Marzian's *Aviation Rag*, initially published by Marzian himself. Woods further had the enthusiastic backing of the Herman Strauss Company department store, also based in Louisville. They featured her as a local celebrity, allowing her to play *Sweetness* and other pieces in their store on several occasions in 1912. Fannie evidently signed copies of the piece as well. She received a total of \$75 for the rag from Forster according to the original receipt. *Sweetness* is dedicated on the inside to W.J. Mansfield. Woods would marry William Johnston Mansfield the following year, and take that name for the rest of her life.

Fannie was not only a fine pianist but also a well-regarded organist, spending over four decades playing for the Parkland Baptist Church, and three decades for Pearson's Funeral Home. She and her husband had three daughters, Mildred, Mary and Jean and a son as well, William Jr. Mr. Mansfield died suddenly at the age of 60 on November 10, 1947. Fannie retired from playing by the mid-1950s, but continued to teach piano and organ to younger students nearly to the end of her life. Fannie and Edna also enjoyed performing *Sweetness* and other pieces as a two piano duet from time to time. To that end, an extant tape recording of the sisters playing Maple Leaf Rag along with Fannie performing *Sweetness* in 1962 were posted to YouTube in 2013 at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpI\\_tPV9tH8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpI_tPV9tH8) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stQWyo2mBy4> respectively. Mrs. Mansfield died in Louisville December 28, 1974 at age 82. Any other compositions that may have been attributed to her were available locally in Louisville, and were likely church-related. A couple of mentions show up in various programs published in newspapers, but publication cannot be confirmed.

**Analysis of Differences:** While there are many similarities between *Sweetness* and some of Johnson's writing, there are a couple of differences that set it apart from the Johnson pattern. The introduction is based on VI, and Johnson tended to either resolve his introductions or at least end on a half-cadence V chord. The A and B sections follow a nearly identical circle of fifths chord pattern, with the only difference being a ii in the A section and a II in the B section. Johnson usually had more variety between his A and B sections. The trio would fit nicely in a Johnson piece, but he was migrating to 32 bar trios in some of his pieces at this time, trying to adapt to the one-step or Fox Trot style. There is more syncopation in this trio than found in some Johnson trios of the time as well. Finally, the return to the B section in the original key is less characteristic of Johnson, who more often returned to the B section in the same key as the trio.

**How Did It Happen:** New information came to light as of December 2007 which suggests how the misattribution was initially made. The backs of sheet music covers, and the inside of the cover in some instances when space allowed, usually advertised other compositions from the same company, often from the same composer. Since the inside plates and covers remain essentially the same for each printing, the back cover is one of the best indicators of when a particular printing run was made, since it is often created from a boilerplate template used on several different pieces, usually the most current or popular pieces in the catalog at the time of that run.

In this case, the inside of the cover of the piece *Dream Days*, a Johnson piece from 1913, clearly advertises Fannie B. Woods and *Sweetness* on the inside cover, making no connection between the two composers.

**A Good Rag Two-Step**

By the Popular Writer  
— of —  
Syncopated Melodies  
FANNIE WOODS

**SWEETNESS**  
RAG TWO-STEP  
FANNIE WOODS

Published by **FORSTER, MUSIC PUBLISHER, Chicago**  
For Sale Wherever Music is Sold      G      Send For Catalogue

However, a subsequent version of this advertisement used on the back page of a pressing of *Gold Dust Twins Rag* by Nat Johnson has the exact same text lauding Fannie B. Woods, obviously used on the same boilerplate template, but the piece *Tar Babies* by Charles Johnson, which also has Johnson's name on the sample, is inserted in the place of *Sweetness*. This shows a sloppy editing mistake since not all the elements were properly changed.

**A Good Rag Two-Step**

By the Popular Writer  
— of —  
Syncopated Melodies  
FANNIE WOODS

**TAR BABIES**  
(Rag)  
CHAS. L. JOHNSON  
Composer of "Gold Dust Twins"  
"The Rag"

Published by **FORSTER, MUSIC PUBLISHER, Chicago**  
For Sale Wherever Music is Sold      D      Send For Catalogue

To further prove this point, there is a back cover for *Tar Babies*, where Charles Johnson is clearly attributed as the composer on the front cover and the inside, which claims that his alias Raymond Birch is the composer of the very same piece on which it is advertised.



Since Johnson and Forster went to some trouble to keep the identities separate, but since they typically did not work in the layout rooms which made the plates, this shows once again sloppy editing on the part of a blue-collar worker who was not the artist or composer, and perhaps not even a direct employee of Forster. These mistakes happened commonly on covers of other publishers, and in one case even on a Stark publication a mistake attributed a rag title to Scott Joplin that he did not write – another composer had this particular piece published by Stark.

So given all of this plus the newspaper reports, a receipt with a name, testimony from surviving family, and clear demographics, more than reasonable doubt can be cast on Johnson as the composer of *Sweetness*, giving the real Fannie B. Woods her proper place in ragtime history.

(All three of the pieces mentioned above can be viewed at the Indiana Harmony sheet music archive found at <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/welcome.do>)

**Conclusion:** While there are hardly vast differences in the styles, it does suggest just enough, tied in with the demographics on Woods, that the accumulative evidence further codifies her authorship of *Sweetness* over Johnson's. It is likely that Woods knew of Johnson. Keithley Publications of Louisville published one of his rags, and *Dill Pickles* had certainly been distributed there by this time. While Johnson was based in Kansas City, there is certainly the possibility that he traveled from time to time, given that his pieces also show up in New York, Chicago, and even in Williamsport, PA. He could very well have played in Louisville as well, which was not a hotbed of piano ragtime per se, but certainly one of the places where guitar-picked ragtime took hold in the 1910s.

The impact of this discovery is hardly earthshaking, but it does add one more female composer to the compendium, and removes one pseudonym from the Johnson repertoire, giving more consistency to what he was known for. It also changes the texts of at least a few books, some of which are overdue for updates in any case.

Information derived from Ancestry.com, Mormon genealogy database, Louisville and Federal census records, Louisville city directories, documents provided by the Mansfield family, and an interview with Dr. William J. Mansfield, Fannie's son. Information on the cover misattributions noted by Canadian rag fan/researcher R.S. Bob Heuman.

**Addendum:** Included here is the official obituary, followed by information pulled from Ancestry.com.

**Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY December 29, 1974**

Mrs. William J. Mansfield, 82, of 150 Wiltshire Ave., died at 1:50 P.M. Saturday, December 28, 1974, at Kentucky Baptist Hospital.

She was the former Fannie Bell Woods, a private music teacher and an organist for Pearson's Funeral Home for more than 30 years. She was organist for more than 40 years at Parkland Baptist Church.

She is survived by three daughters, Mrs. Horace G. Skaggs of Ashland, KY, Mrs. Stephen P. Smith, Jr., and Mrs. Jean Cassidy; a son, Dr. William J. Mansfield, Jr., eight grandchildren, and a sister, Mrs. A. C. Baker of Seymour, IN.

The funeral will be at 2 P.M. Tuesday at Broadway Baptist Church, 4000 Brownsboro Road, with burial in Cave Hill Cemetery. The body will be at Pearson's, 149 Breckinridge Lane, after 2 P.M. Sunday.

---

**Father** John L. Woods born. Aug. 1862 in Kentucky

**Mother** Cora L. Woods born. 1868 in Indiana

1887 Louisville City Directory: John L. Woods, Carpenter, 2509 W. Jefferson

**1900 Federal census listing:**

Head: John L. Woods, age 37, Carpenter

Address: 2308 Standard Avenue, Louisville. Owned home

Wife: Cora L., age 31

Children: James D., age 13, born 1886 (possibly from an earlier marriage for John)

Fannie B., age 8, born 1892

Edna G., age 5, born 1894

**1910 Federal census listing:**

Head: John L. Woods, age 50 (should be 47), Carpenter, married 18 years

1372 Hancock Street, Louisville. Renting home.

Wife: Cora L., Age 40, Widowed (first marriage), married 18 years

Children: Fannie B., age 17, Occupation: Clerk - Music store

Edna G., age 15, Occupation: Teacher – Music

(James may have moved out by this time)

**1917 (June 5) Draft Record:**

William Johnston Mansfield, April 23, 1887.

1233 Cypress, Louisville, Kentucky

Bookkeeper, Laib Co., Inc.

Wife and Child

Non-Commissioned Officer Kentucky National Guard 1.5 years.

**1920 Federal census listing:**

Head: William Mansfield, age 32, Bookkeeper.

Address: 1233 Cypress, Louisville, Kentucky. Owned home (not rented)

Wife: Fannie, age 26, No occupation.

Daughter: Mildred, age 5.

**1930 Federal census listing:**

Head: William Mansfield, age 42, Credit manager, plumbing.

Address: 1233 Cypress, Louisville, Kentucky. Owned home, valued at \$5,000.

Wife: Fannie, age 37

Children: Mildred, age 15

Mary E., age 7

William Jr., age 4 yrs 8 mos.

Jean, age 2 yrs 5 mos.

**1940 Federal census listing:**

Head: William J. Mansfield, age 52, Credit manager, plumbing manufacturing.

Address: 1233 Cypress, Louisville, Kentucky. Owned home

Wife: Fannie, age 26, No occupation.

Children: Mary Edna, age 17

William J. Jr., age 14

Jean, age 12

Cora Woods [mother-in-law – widowed] 72

**1947 Kentucky Death Record**

William J. Mansfield, November 10, 1947.

Address: 1233 Cypress Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

Wife: Fannie Wood Mansfield

Birth Date of Deceased: 4/23/1887

Volume: 50

Certificate: 24556

**1974 Kentucky Death Record**

Name: Fannie B Mansfield

Death Date: 28 Dec 1974

Death Place: Jefferson County

Age: 082

Residence: Jefferson County

Volume: 65

Certificate: 32158



# SWEETNESS

©CLE285992

Roj

(RAG-TWO-STEP)

By  
Fannie B. Woods



M31  
W

(F.J.A.)  
**FORSTER MUSIC PUBLISHER**  
529 S. WABASH AVE.  
CHICAGO



2

Respectfully dedicated to Mr.W.J.Mansfield

# SWEETNESS

RAG TWO-STEP

FANNIE WOODS

Moderato

The musical score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. Each system has a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The first system begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and includes a fermata over the final measure of the treble staff. The second system starts with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte). The third system features a melodic line in the treble staff with a slur and a fermata over the final measure. The fourth system continues the piece with similar rhythmic patterns. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4.

Copyright MCMXII by Forster Music Publisher Chicago  
International copyright secured

First system of musical notation, consisting of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music features a series of eighth notes in the treble and a bass line with chords and eighth notes. A fermata is placed over a measure in the treble staff.

Second system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble staff contains a complex texture of chords and sixteenth notes, marked with a dynamic of *p-ff*. The bass staff continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Third system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble staff has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords and eighth notes.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble staff is filled with dense chordal textures and sixteenth-note patterns. The bass staff maintains the eighth-note accompaniment.

Fifth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. The treble staff has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The bass staff concludes with a final chord and eighth notes.

4.

TRIO

*p* - *ff*

Sweetness 4

The musical score for 'Sweetness' is presented on page 5. It consists of six systems of piano accompaniment, each with a treble and bass staff. The music is in 2/4 time and features a variety of chords and melodic lines. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score includes dynamic markings such as 'v' (vibrato) and 'f' (forte). There are also first and second endings indicated by '1' and '2' above the notes. The piece concludes with a final cadence and a fermata over the final chord.

# TWO BIG HITS!

## Garland Of Old Fashioned Roses

Words by  
C. H. MUSGROVE

Music by  
E. CLINTON KEITHLEY

### REFRAIN

*p dolce*

A garland of old-fashioned ro ses Sweet-heart I bring to you —

Ro-ses I gathered in Love - land Dream-ing sweet dreams of you — Each

rose dear a message is breath ing Tender and fond and true: — This

gar-land of 'old-fashioned ro ses. Sweet-heart I bring to you —

Copyright MCMXI, by Keithley & Marsian Co.  
Copyright transferred to Forster, Music Publisher, Chicago, Ill.

**FOR SALE  
BY ALL MUSIC DEALERS**

**F. J. A.**

**FORSTER, Music Publisher**

**Hoops Building, 529 South Wabash Avenue, CHICAGO**

## VOCAL

- At the Ragtime Ball
- I'll Meet You on the Golden Shore
- Some Day You'll Love Me
- The Girl for Me
- Sly Old Moon
- Linger Longer, Lovey
- Lucy Lee
- Mademoiselle O'Toolay
- The Song of the Mission Chimes

## INSTRUMENTAL

- Melody Rag
- Dixie Kisses—Two-step
- Aviation Rag
- Cloud Kisser—Two-step
- Peanuts Rag
- Dream of Fairies Waltzes
- Queen of Fashion Waltzes
- Jay Roberts Rag
- Joy Rag

## TAR BABIES

(RAG)

RAYMOND BIRCH,  
Composer of "Tender Rag"  
"Cloud Kisser"

Copyright MCMXI by Johnson Pub. Co., Kansas City, Mo.  
International Copyright Secured.