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"Way down upon de Swanee Ribber"

Hampton Dunn

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



"WAY DOWN UPON DE SWANEE RIBBER"

By HAMPTON DUNN

WHITE SPRINGS --- Florida loves Stephen Collins Foster. He wrote what has been adopted as our State Song and made the Suwannee River one of the best known attractions in the state. But Foster himself never saw the Suwannee, nor Florida for that matter.

There is a splendid Stephen Foster Memorial at this point on the scenic river. White Springs is situated on U.S. 41 and only three miles off Interstate 75. A 200-foot carillon tower, which also houses the world's largest set (97) of tubular bells, is a focal point of the 243 acre park which was dedicated in 1950.

Foster was a native of Pittsburgh. Although his compositions were popular during his lifetime, he didn't profit much from them. His life's income was about \$15,000. He died in a charity ward at New York's Bellevue at the age of 37 in 1864. In his purse after death were found three pennies, 35 cents in script and a piece of paper on which was written: "Dear Friends and Gentle Hearts." The title of another Foster hit? Probably.

There are several tales about how he selected the Suwannee River to immortalize in song. A kinsman claims he chose it from an atlas and changed the spelling from Suwanee to "Swanee." Another version is that he had picked "Way Down Upon the Pee Dee River" because it sounded musical, but the publisher changed it. At any rate his "Old Folks at Home", originally published under the name of famous minstrel Edwin P. Christy as composer (Foster sold his rights for \$15), became a hit tune and in 1935 was adopted as Florida's State Song by the Legislature.

