Higginson, Major Henry Lee (1834-1919) Encyclopedia Article

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Contents

Higginson, Major Henry Lee (1834-1919) Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Higginson, Major Henry Lee (1834-1919).....3

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A Boston Brahmin who had been a major in the Civil War, Higginson was the sole founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1881. He set the example for other businessmen to establish a tradition of noblesse oblige in the performing arts that in Europe had initially been the province of landed aristocracy.

Higginson approached the task with a unique blend of "boosterism," sound business principles, and overtones of evangelical Christianity and patriotism. He would not tolerate any deviance from the high musical and operational standards he set by the professionals he engaged. Higginson believed firmly that men who had survived the Civil War (he himself had been wounded) had a moral obligation to make America a better country, which meant creating better cultural institutions. It also meant a willingness for an aristocracy—in America it would be comprised of businessmen—to step forward and take responsibility for those developments.

Further Reading:

Goldin, Milton. *The Music Merchants.* New York, Macmillan, 1969.

Johnson, H. Earle. *Symphony Hall, Boston.* Boston, Little, Brown, 1950.