

Tributaries

ON THE NAME OF THE JOURNAL:

Alabama's waterways intersect its folkways at every level. Early settlement and cultural diffusion conformed to drainage patterns. The Coastal Plain, the Black Belt, the Foothills, and the Tennessee Valley remain distinct traditional as well as economic regions today. The state's cultural landscape, like its physical one, features a network of "tributaries" rather than a single dominant mainstream.

—Jim Carnes, from the Premiere Issue

Tributaries

Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association

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EDITORS

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CONTENTS

Editors' Note.....	7
A Perpetual Stew: The Roots of Mobile's Culinary Heritage.....	SUSAN THOMAS 9
Bringing Alabama Home: An Ethnographer's Sense of Self.....	Dana Borrelli 23
Red Hot and Blue: Spotlight on Five Alabama Blues Women	KATHY BAILEY AND DEBBIE BOND 33
Maintaining Mexican Identity in Birmingham	CHARLES KELLEY 49
Book Review	HENRY WILLETT 65
<i>An Alabama Songbook: Ballads, Folksongs, and Spirituals Collected by Byron Arnold, edited with an introduction by Robert W. Halli, Jr.</i>	
Recording Review	Steve Grauberger 68
<i>Allison's Sacred Harp Singers: Heaven's my Home, 1927–1928. Religion is a Fortune Sacred Harp Singing: Various Groups— Early 1900s</i>	
Contributors' Notes	72
AFA Membership and Products.....	75

Editors' Note

Volume 8 of *Tributaries* presents a variety of recent research on Alabama culture. New Englander DANA BORRELLI presents a personal narrative of her experience among the Sacred Harp singers of northeast Alabama. Her account of her bond with Alabama singers and the special meaning of her participation in a folk tradition will strike a chord with many readers.

KATHY BAILEY and DEBBIE BOND contribute text from the new exhibition on Alabama blueswomen. In a genre associated with men, it is enlightening to know that women were the first recorded and are among the most influential of blues musicians.

Two articles come to us from participants in the Alabama Community Scholar's Institute—a biennial workshop sponsored by the Alabama Folklife Association and offering training to Alabamians who investigate culture in their own backyards. SUSAN THOMAS of Mobile outlines the culinary history of her community. CHARLES KELLEY gives us a glimpse into the lives of Alabama's fast-growing community of Spanish-speaking immigrants.

Our well-known reviewers, HANK WILLETT and STEVE GRAUBERGER, offer descriptions of new documentary products relating to Alabama folk music, including the much-awaited book by the University of Alabama's Robert Halli about the work of Byron Arnold.

The Alabama Folklife Association website—Alabamafolklife.org—is the source of current news and projects of the AFA. At this site you can order this and past issues of *Tributaries*, most of the documentary items that have been reviewed by us, and other products that will enhance your understanding of Alabama folk culture. For your convenience, we have also included information about the Alabama Folklife Association and its documentary products at the back of the issue.

We appreciate the many suggestions by AFA members and others. We also wish to acknowledge the annual copyediting efforts of Randall Williams. He provides the continuity for the journal. We welcome your suggestions, com-

ments and contributions for future issues.

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A Perpetual Stew: The Roots of Mobile's Culinary Heritage

Susan Thomas

In August 1704 the *Pelican*, a supply ship from France, landed at Massacre Island¹ and unloaded an unexpected cargo: twenty-three young French women sent by King Louis XIV to the new settlement of Mobile. Debilitated by a yellow fever epidemic en route and under the watchful eyes of two nuns, the women arrived for the purpose of marrying colonists and producing progeny for the crown of France.

Within a month all but one of the so-called Pelican girls had married. History does not indicate how these partnerships were arranged or whether the unions brought wedded bliss or misery to the frontier couples. It is known that within a relatively short time the women executed a vocal and unanimous protest against the foods they were expected to eat. Unhappy with their diet of game, fish, corn (traded from the native Indian tribes), and whatever could be foraged from fields and forests, the women demanded that their husbands clear ground and plant crops. Dubbed the Petticoat Rebellion, the women's efforts resulted in the first serious attempt at agriculture in colonial Mobile.

The colony of Mobile had been established two years earlier by French traders and explorers with little interest in tilling the soil. Prior to the arrival of the Pelican girls and their subsequent edict for home-grown foods, the settlers had supplemented their meager rations from France with wild game, fish and shellfish, and indigenous fruits, vegetables, and nuts.

Living in close proximity to the local tribes of the Mobilians, the Grand Tomeh, the Little Tomeh, and others of the "petites nations" natives, the settlers bartered with them for corn, and adopted their method of pounding kernels with a mortar to make meal and then forming the meal into flattened cakes

for frying.² From the Native Americans they also learned how to dry and grind persimmons into flour for making breads and puddings and to use sassafras leaves for thickening soups. The settlers adopted an early version of Brunswick stew from the local tribes, in which any manner of game and vegetables were thrown into a permanently bubbling pot. As portions of the mixture were eaten, more ingredients would be added, thus creating a perpetual stew.³

This early merging of two cultures established the roots of Mobile's distinctive culinary history. During the ensuing three hundred years Mobile came under the rule of three empires before becoming a U.S. territory. Immigrants from all over Europe settled in the city, as did thousands of slaves from Africa and the Caribbean. Each change in government and each influx of new inhabitants with their distinctive foodways added to what historian Daniel Usner calls a "cultural and culinary gumbo."⁴

Even with the advent of agriculture, the early colonists struggled to maintain adequate food resources. Supplies came sporadically from France and from a black-market trade network with the neighboring Spanish West Florida territory. Plunder was occasionally obtained from captured British ships that attempted to land in Mobile waters. Trade and barter with the local native tribes largely sustained the colonists.

Much to the disappointment of the Pelican girls, Mobile's climate was not suitable for growing wheat, so settlers were forced to cultivate corn, which they had originally viewed as animal fodder. From the native population the settlers learned to prepare corn pone, bleach hominy, and mix corn with beans for succotash.

The French lost the Mobile territory to England in 1763 at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War. England's early attempts to lure more colonists to the area were largely unsuccessful until the outbreak of the American Revolution. Mobile then became a haven for British loyalists from the eastern colonies. This influx of British settlers expanded the local cuisine to include more cheeses, cured meats, oatmeal, onions, and beer.

The British rule of Mobile was short-lived, though, with the Spanish taking possession of the colony in 1780. The infusion of Spanish cuisine brought tomatoes, sweet potatoes, capsicum peppers, cumin, and oregano, all of which, ironically, had been taken to Spain initially by Columbus from his voyages to



FIGURE 1

Behind the scenes at Constantine's, a popular downtown restaurant owned by a Greek family, circa 1950s. (University of South Alabama Archives)

the Caribbean. The Spanish are credited with bringing chickens, domestic hogs, and cattle to Mobile and introducing *chorizo*, a spicy sausage. Jambalaya, later to become a Gulf Coast signature dish, is thought to have originated from the traditional Spanish rice dish *paella*.⁵ The Spanish also brought olives, capers, red and black beans, and chocolate (obtained centuries earlier from the Aztecs) which were incorporated into local dishes.

An influx of refugees and slaves from the Caribbean island of Saint-Domingue (later Haiti) to the Gulf Coast in the late 1700s brought more culinary diversity. Saint-Domingue was known for its wild spices, including cinnamon, ginger, and a variety of peppers. When white and Creole landowners displaced by Saint-Domingue's civil war, revolution, and slave uprisings fled to the Gulf Coast, they brought with them many of their native foods, including hot peppers, lime juice, coconuts, pineapples, and sorghum.⁶

The arrival of African slaves from the early 1700s through the 1850s fur-

ther enhanced Mobile's culinary tradition. Slave traders had discovered that the Africans were healthier when allowed to eat their native foods; thus many slaves brought with them African vegetables such as black-eyed peas, okra, watermelons, and yams.⁷ In the 1700s female slaves often became the mistresses or wives of European colonists and thus infused their culinary skills with the French, Spanish, and Native American cooking styles.

In her book, *The Peppers, Cracklings, and Knots of Wool Cookbook: The Global Migration of African Cuisine*, cultural historian Diane M. Spivey discusses the central role slaves played in the development of colonial cuisine: "Without the African as slave, colonies in the so-called New World would not have survived. Neither would the colonists have dined so well. African cooks enhanced the culinary worlds of the French, British, Spanish, and Portuguese colonials."⁸

Spivey notes that slaves developed their cooking style out of necessity, having to survive on meager rations that "made ingenuity and skill responsible for making their rations edible."⁹ Typical weekly slave rations included a peck of corn, three pounds of bacon or salt pork, molasses, and small portions of seasonal fruits and vegetables. This was supplemented by game—raccoon, squirrel, rabbit, opossum, turkey, and duck.¹⁰ Slaves became adept at adding hot spices to scraps of discarded meats and vegetables to make the dishes more appealing. The cuisine of the slaves became fully assimilated into Mobile cooking traditions, evolving into a "soul food" food cooking tradition still alive today.

Mobile's cuisine continued to evolve as the colony became part of American territory in 1813 and settlers began arriving from the eastern states. By this time corn had become a significant food crop and, along with pork, was the mainstay of the Southern diet. As elsewhere in the South, Mobilians found hogs easy to raise, often allowing them to run wild in the forest and forage for acorns. Hog meat was preserved by salting or smoking and subsequently kept well in the hot climate.

Within twenty years of Mobile's 1819 incorporation as an Alabama city, waves of European immigrants began arriving in the port. By the late 1840s thousands of Irish immigrants had settled in Mobile and other Southern cities. Usually impoverished laborers, their eating habits emphasized basic and simplistic food preparation. During this time German immigrants also began to populate the city, with a group of Baltic Germans settling in the Bon Secour



FIGURE 2

Slow cooking a variety of meats for a picnic in rural Mobile County, circa 1950s.
(University of South Alabama Archives)



FIGURE 3
Eating oysters at a local oyster bar, circa 1940. (University of South Alabama Archives)



FIGURE 4

The Tiny Diny restaurant, a mainstay in Mobile for generations, shown here in the 1960s, across the street from its current location. (University of South Alabama Archives)

area southeast of Mobile in Baldwin County. The Germans introduced Mobile to sauerkraut and bratwurst, dumplings, and doughnuts. A wave of Greek immigrants came to the South in the latter 1800s, with many settling in Mobile. Several Greek families opened restaurants that stayed within their families for generations. These restaurants, however, tended to specialize in steaks, seafood, and Southern-style country cooking instead of traditional Greek fare.¹¹ Still, the liberal use of Greek herbs and spices in these Southern dishes made a lasting mark on Mobile cuisine.

Because of its proximity to New Orleans, Mobile's cuisine also absorbed the Creole cooking tradition. The word Creole originated from the Spanish word *criolla*, meaning "native to the place." In New Orleans, Creole cuisine evolved from the merging of Indian, Spanish, African, Haitian, French Acadian, and, later, Italian cooking styles, producing dishes that were typically highly flavored and dominated by green pepper, onions, and garlic.¹²

In 1878 the women of Mobile's St. Francis Street Methodist Episcopal



FIGURE 5

A big catch of fish, along Mobile's waterfront, circa 1910. (University of South Alabama Archives)

Church published the *Gulf City Cookbook*, which has recorded through its recipes much of the culinary diversity of the region. Providing an interesting glimpse into the post-Civil War culture and cuisine of the city, the book appeared to be written to teach professional-class women how to prepare basic recipes. George Daniels, a food historian from Silverhill, Alabama, writes in the introduction to a recent edition of *Gulf City Cookbook* that the recipes were like most Southern dishes of the time, relying “more upon the merging of a few natural flavors and plenty of condiments and sides than upon the complexity of the recipes themselves.”¹³

Emphasizing cooking with lard, bacon grease, butter, heavy cream, sugar, and eggs, many dishes called for frying meats or braising them in heavy sauces. Recipes often recommended long simmerings to merge flavors.¹⁴ Egg dishes are plentiful in the book, as are oysters. Vegetables frequently mentioned



FIGURE 6

Ducks taken in Mobile's river delta, circa 1930s. (University of South Alabama Archives)

include cabbage, celery, squash, potatoes, collards, turnips, okra, and carrots. One unique recipe tells how to prepare a stuffed calf's head; other unusual offerings are cod fish balls, fried eels, stewed brains, and baked tongue with tomato sauce.

Food critic Raymond Sokolov writes in *Why We Eat What We Eat*, "Cuisines evolve almost instantly when two cultures and their ingredients meet in the kitchen, and old cuisines never die, they just add new dishes and slough off the losers."¹⁵

Jennifer Zoghby Ekman, a Mobile food writer whose grandfather immigrated to the city from Lebanon around the turn of the century, agrees. She explains the assimilation of ethnic foods into a culture. "Immigrant cooks in Mobile had to adapt, but they didn't lose their own identity," she said. Many were poor, looking for a better life, and brought with them food traditions

that they adapted to American routines. “Nothing with food happens in a vacuum,” Ekman stated.¹⁶

As an example, Ekman described how her grandmother, after immigrating to Mobile, had no access to the pita bread she was accustomed to serving with her native hummus. She therefore substituted Fritos corn chips.

The early Greek restaurants in Mobile emphasized American dishes but managed to “slide in” ethnic seasonings and spices, Ekman said. “A lot of those ethnic groups who were attracted to Mobile came and brought their spices and their recipes with them, and that contributed to Mobile cooking.”¹⁷

The desire for assimilation into American cooking is aptly illustrated in the title of a popular Mobile cookbook, Eckman said. Sophie Klikas, the late proprietor of a well-established Greek restaurant, Tommie’s Terminal, entitled her cookbook, *A Southern Lady Cooks with a Greek Accent*. It is significant that the book was not titled, *A Greek Lady Cooks with a Southern Accent*, Eckman said. “The title underscores the point.”¹⁸

Throughout its history Mobile evolved as a heterogeneous society, mixing language, culture, and cuisine from a melding of French, English, Spanish, Caribbean, African, Native American, Irish, German, Greek, and Mid-Eastern influences. This blending of foodways created what food historians Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont describe in their book *Eating in America* as “the cosmopolitan character” of Gulf Coast cuisine, which, they say, “no other part of the country can equal, with the exception of New York City.”¹⁹

After developing an eclectic food heritage three hundred years in the making, Mobile now faces the challenge of retaining its “cosmopolitan character” and culinary distinctiveness within the urban maze of fast-food franchises, national restaurant conglomerates, and prefabricated, overprocessed homogeneous foods. In this environment, food scholars debate whether Mobile can still claim a unique cuisine.

Michael Ivy, a professional chef and food historian, sees Mobile as continuing to have a distinctive culinary style. He refers to that style as “country-soul-Creole.”²⁰ Ivy stated in a food column in the *Mobile Register*, “The rural descendants of the Scotch-Irish, the sons and daughters of the Old South, and the blend of Spanish, African, and French people that came here have all been thrown into a pot of social interaction, and the resulting soup is distinctly

Creole.”²¹

Daniels, the food scholar and a retired history professor, disagrees. He sees Mobile cuisine as being “simple, basic country Southern foods” with the addition of local seafood.

“I think there is not a lot left that is distinctive to Mobile; we talk about the Spanish influence and the French, but by the latter part of the nineteenth century there was not much of that showing anywhere, certainly not in the food,” Daniels said.²²

Henry Douglas, a certified executive chef and instructor in culinary arts at Mobile’s Bishop State Community College, agrees with Daniels. Regarding the uniqueness of Mobile’s cuisine he states, “I don’t think it’s different from any other Southern city.” He sees Mobile as having similar food to New Orleans, but with more of a “Southern accent.”²³

Douglas equates Southern cooking with home-style cooking—“your greens, your potatoes, your yams, fried chicken,” adding, “I think that is mostly what Mobile food is.”²⁴

“If you can find anything that is distinctive here, it all has to do with the location, the coast,” Daniels said.²⁵ Mobile’s geographical location with its convergence of three major rivers, proximity to Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, and abundance of streams, creeks, and bayous has undoubtedly influenced its culinary heritage. Throughout its history Mobile’s inhabitants have dined on the bountiful seafood, fish, and the wild game of the region.

Daniels asserts that seafood, if anything, would define the region. He named two Mobile specialties, fried crab claws and West Indies salad, as characteristic of local cuisine, having originated at Bayley’s Restaurant on the western shore of Mobile Bay. He views the Tiny Diny, a family diner that has been a fixture on the Mobile restaurant scene for several decades and is known for its Southern-style meats, vegetables, and desserts, as a representative example of Mobile cuisine.²⁶

Douglas agrees that seafood dishes are the most representative of Mobile cuisine. Regarding seafood served in Mobile restaurants, he stated, “We do it a little differently from other people, because we have plenty of it. And we use more of it.” He explained that a seafood platter ordered in a typical Gulf Coast eatery will have enough seafood “for three people,” as compared to similar orders

in other regions, where “you have enough just for you! If enough for that!”²⁷

Douglas lists the Original Oyster House and Felix’s Fish Camp, both located on the Mobile Bay Causeway, as being good representatives of Mobile cuisine. Concerning both establishments he stated, “We’re talking about lots of food; they give you plenty!”²⁸

John T. Edge, food historian and director of the University of Mississippi’s Southern Foodways Alliance, says that Southern cuisine is always evolving. On the Gulf Coast, for example, the increasing Vietnamese population has had a recent influence on Mobile foodways. “Even though food customs are changing, it doesn’t mean it is no longer the South,” he said.²⁹

Today Mobile remains a multi-cultural city with a culinary history as diverse and as flavorful as the early settlers’ perpetually boiling pot of stew. Local restaurants serve up Italian, Bosnian, Thai, Mid-eastern, Indian, and Cajun cuisine, along with the more traditional Southern “meat and three,” Chinese buffets, and Mexican fast food. Seafood is featured on most menus and many establishments tout fresh vegetables and local produce. Mobile offers something delectable for every discerning palate; even a persnickety Pelican girl would find something to savor. ■

Notes

¹ Massacre Island was the early name given to Dauphin Island by French explorer Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville who named it after the large number of bones he found in the Indian burial mounds.

² Waverley Root and Richard de Rochemont, *Eating in America: A History* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1976), 38.

³ Root and de Rochemont, 39.

⁴ Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), as quoted in Richmond F. Brown, “Colonial Mobile, 1712-1813,” in *Mobile: The New History of Alabama’s First City*, ed. Michael V. R. Thomason (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), 41.

⁵ Root and de Rochemont, 282.

⁶ Diane Spivey, *The Peppers, Cracklings, and Knots of Wool Cookbook: The Global Migration of African Cuisine* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 234. For additional information on Haitian history and migration see Jan Rogozinski, *A Brief History of the Caribbean* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1999).

⁷ Although similar in taste and appearance, yams and sweet potatoes are “botanically

distinct,” according to John Egerton’s *Southern Food: At Home, On the Road, In History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p. 306, and each apparently took different routes in arriving in the Gulf Coast area. Reay Tannahill in *Food in History* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1973), pages 144, and 241—246, and Raymond Sokolov in *Why We Eat What We Eat* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), pages 21, 41, and 77, credit Columbus with finding sweet potatoes in the Caribbean islands and transporting them back to Europe, from where they later migrated to South America via Portuguese explorers and to coastal areas of North America with the Spanish. Yams, on the other hand, were originally grown in West Africa and made the voyage to North America with the early slave ships. Both Tannahill and Sokolov provide detailed accounts of the provenance of these two tubers. Also refer to Root and de Rochemont’s *Eating in America: A History*.

⁸ Spivey, 213.

⁹ Spivey, 240.

¹⁰ Sheila Ferguson, *Soul Food: Classic Cuisine from the Deep South* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), viii.

¹¹ Egerton, 33.

¹² Elaine N. McIntosh, *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995), 191.

¹³ George H. Daniels, introduction to *Gulf City Cook Book, Compiled by the Ladies of the St. Francis Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Mobile, Alabama, 1878* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990), xxvi.

¹⁴ Daniels, xxiii.

¹⁵ Sokolov, 15.

¹⁶ Jennifer Zoghby Ekman, interview by the author, Mobile, Alabama, 22 December 2004.

¹⁷ Zoghby.

¹⁸ Zoghby.

¹⁹ Root and de Rochemont, 48.

²⁰ Michael Ivy, e-mail correspondence with the author, 27 April 2003.

²¹ Michael Ivy, “The History of Creole Food and the Settlement of the Gulf Coast,” *Mobile Register*, 18 September 2002.

²² George H. Daniels, interview by the author, Daphne, Alabama, 5 May 2003.

²³ Henry Douglas, interview by the author, Mobile, Alabama, 18 January 2005.

²⁴ Douglas.

²⁵ Daniels, interview.

²⁶ Daniels, interview. For further discussion of Bayley’s Restaurant’s claim to crab claws and West Indies salad, see the following: David Holloway, “Bayley Leaves Culinary Staple,” *Mobile Register*, 11 August 1997; “Well Fed Reporter Solves his

Seafood-Loving Quandary on the Parkway,” *Mobile Register*, 9 June 2000; and Delores Ardoyno, “Seafood: The Next Generation Bayley,” *Mobile Register*, 13 September 2001.

²⁷ Douglas.

²⁸ Douglas.

²⁹ John T. Edge, telephone interview by the author, 29 April 2003.

Bringing Alabama Home: An Ethnographer's Sense of Self

Dana Borrelli

We drove up to the Smith-Appleby house on a slightly rainy Saturday morning. I was spending the weekend visiting my family in our native Rhode Island. Visiting my parents always has its perks—home cooked meals, free laundry, the works—but on that day, my mom was set on a mission: We were going to visit our town's historic homes for the first time. Always up for a hometown adventure, we navigated the familiar roads before turning right down an unpaved drive leading to the house from which our town, Smithfield, takes its name.

As I wandered through the colonial home, with its original wooden beams and much-too-short ceilings, I contemplated life in Smithfield, Rhode Island, as I knew it. Soccer fields and strip malls, through-traffic and apple trees—our northwest Rhode Island town had seen some changes since the Smith-Appleby house's birth. Then the town was known for its role in the American Revolution, a stomping ground for the Dorr Rebellion. Rhode Island was settled by those truly seeking religious freedom, as Roger Williams allowed anyone feeling persecuted in Massachusetts to take refuge in a tiny annex directly southeast from it.

Perusing the donated historic “props” set up throughout the house, I found myself directly in front of a small piano on which sat an oblong singing book. I scooped up the book and carefully turned its pages. “The Cythara, A Collection of Sacred Music, By Isaac B. Woodbury, Author of ‘The Dulcimer,’ ‘Lute of Zion,’ ‘Liber Musicus,’ ‘Cultivation of the Voice,’ ‘Cottage Glees,’ Etc., Etc.,” the cover page read. I gingerly flipped through, recognizing many songs by name, lyrics, or tune. From “Old Hundred” to “Sherburne,” songs that I

hold dear to my heart leapt from the pages of a book otherwise unknown to me. Excitedly, I turned back to the title page, scanning for a publishing year. There it was—1834. “Ten years before the first Sacred Harp was published,” I thought. I stopped myself and looked around, surprised by my first notions of this house and of this book. Two thoughts crossed my mind: Had the tunes in this book ever filled the rooms of this house in my hometown? And more importantly, when had I started thinking like a Sacred Harp singer?

A Resonating Frequency

It happened so suddenly. One day I was a first-year anthropology graduate student searching for my niche within linguistic anthropological performance analysis, and the next I was planning my summer fieldwork on Sand Mountain in northeast Alabama. Well-traveled, I had lived in a castle in the Italian Tirol, ridden a camel in the Sahara Desert, and slept on the banks of the Napo River in Ecuador. One never would have guessed that I would choose to conduct my research from a trailer parked in an Ider, Alabama, front yard.

My interest in Sacred Harp musical culture began on December 5, 2003. Tuning into National Public Radio’s “All Things Considered,” an eight-minute



FIGURE 1

Hand-painted sign on Liberty Road, pointing singers to Liberty Independent Baptist Church for the Henagar-Union Convention, Henagar, Alabama, 2004. (Photo by Dana Borrelli)

segment highlighting the contemporary yet traditional culture deeply resonated with my passion for present-day American musical subcultures. I scribbled furious notes during a segment which drew attention to Sacred Harp culture, its link with Sand Mountain, Alabama, and the national attention that both received as a result of the Hollywood blockbuster *Cold Mountain*.

Taking its name from the 1844 publication compiled by B. F. White, Sacred Harp music features four-part *a cappella* harmony comprised of theological lyrics set to tunes popular in White's day. Also known as shape-note singing, the musical notation features four differently shaped notes, corresponding to their situated place along the scale. With *fa* (triangles), *sol* (circle), *la* (rectangle) and *mi* (diamond), the "fasola folk" uphold a tradition originally devised as a teaching aid, while continually updating the Sacred Harp repertoire. As recently as 1991, editors of *The Sacred Harp* published a new edition to retire songs that are rarely sung while adding new songs by living composers.

Sacred Harp singers perform for each other, arranging themselves in a "hollow square" with one of the four vocal parts on each side of the square so the participants sing towards one other. While the participatory nature of the activity reifies its connection to days prior to the choir-audience, performer-listener dichotomy now prevalent in musical performance, the music allows for growth and newness within its contextualized boundaries. This balancing act between old and new, tradition and convention, calls for further inquiry regarding the music's role, both personally and socially for the participants.

With only a tune's worth of information to build on, I started planning my upcoming summer's fieldwork. Thoroughly ignorant but extremely intrigued, I felt already the presence of a strong union between the music and myself. The link was distinctly non-academic, corresponding with some strong inner desire for musical fellowship and what I now identify as an intense nostalgia for a perceived unity through a socio-cultural, historical, American activity.

Still, I began my research on Sacred Harp music and its connection to identity and nostalgia as exactly that—a researcher. Rather than infiltrate a community as a supposed Northern singer, I positioned myself realistically, a newcomer with interest in the musical culture from an outsider's point of view. Upon my arrival, I drove along Alabama Highway 75 with my Rhode Island license plates, situating myself as a person with a distinctly different

embodiment of culture, ideas, and interests. I immersed myself in the daily happenings of the community, always open for inspiration, conversation, and activity, notebook and pen never far from hand.

From my project's onset, Sacred Harp singers aided in my endeavor. Advice was constant, stories flowed, and help was always a phone call or tractor ride away. In a musical culture that stresses friendly association beyond that of the singing "class," Sacred Harp singers *performed* their roles every day with me. As research on the singing culture progressed, the boundaries of performance extended beyond the singing events. Identities within Sacred Harp singing conventions mirrored expressions of societal roles within the larger Sacred Harp community. Participation in the singings signaled acceptance and identity within a larger framework. And in a subculture which relies on the participatory action of its members, my own role within the community necessitated reciprocation. Cooking gratitude into Italian dinners at my trailer was not going to cut it: membership even as a researcher within the community called for my role in the performance of Sacred Harp music.



FIGURE 2

Camp Fasola 2004 participants. Over one hundred singers old and new attended the week long camp held at Camp Lee near Anniston, Alabama. Camp Fasola is dedicated to the promotion and continuation of Sacred Harp culture through traditional singing school education. (Photo by Dana Borrelli)

“Researcher Turned Singer”

Over the summer, the lines between researcher and singer, outsider and insider blurred. While attending the second annual Camp Fasola, dedicated to the promotion and continuation of Sacred Harp music through traditional singing school education, I earnestly wore my many hats. Attending daily classes, I sat in the back of the room, watching the other campers as they practiced their scales, not realizing that I too was proudly singing my “fasolas” better with each attempt. As a young adult, I woke early each morning to catch conversation with the adults and retired to bed late at night, sure not to miss any teenage gossip in the girls’ dormitory. I was as often immersed in my notetaking and videotaping as I was caught slipping down Camp Lee’s famed rock slide. As the week progressed, so did my place among those I thought of as the true Sacred Harp singers. Others watched me standing in the corner holding a camcorder more infrequently while I eased myself onto the alto section bench. As proved by the “Researcher Turned Singer” caption put on a photograph of me leading my first song at Camp Fasola, my own identity was blossoming. Although the community in which I worked saw the change occur from one extreme (researcher) to the other (singer), I repositioned myself in the gray, never fully allowing admission to either side of the fieldwork sphere. As anthropologist Don Brenneis writes, “We must be willing to examine our own participation in such practice, whether it be eager or drudging. Only in doing so can we illuminate the complexity and moral ambiguity of those events through which reference of power is constituted” (Brenneis 1993: 300).

My journey, the music, and this personal essay all have their roots in New England. Singing schools emerged in New England as a progressive movement to teach the Puritans how to sing and read music as a congregation. After the Revolutionary War, “old country” songs were put aside for popular New England fusing songs, which featured *a cappella* harmony set as a round. The traveling singing school masters, with their newly published singing school books, also devised various systems to teach the masses congregational singing without formal musical training. Most importantly, singing school masters sought to help the new singers find *fa*, the tonic or lead tone in a tune, without extensive musical theory knowledge or the assistance of harmonic instruments. Publishing companies began to bank on the flourishing singing books, with

THE CYTHARA:

A

COLLECTION OF SACRED MUSIC

BY ISAAC B. WOODBURY,

AUTHOR OF "THE DULCIMER," "LUTE OF ZION," "LIBER MUSICUS," "CULTIVATION OF THE VOICE,"
"COTTAGE GLEES," ETC. ETC.

NEW YORK:

F. J. HUNTINGTON, 356 BROADWAY.

FIGURE 2

The Cythara cover page, 1834. (Photo by Dana Borrelli)

ROSETTA. L. M. somewhat in the chaunting style.

Morzestly.

1. Je - sus, my all to heav'n is gone, He whom I fix my hopes up - on; His track I see, and I'll pur - sue The narrow way till him I view.

2. The way the ho - ly prophets went, The way that leads from banishment; The King's highway of ho - li - ness, I'll go, for all his paths are peace.

3. This is the way I long have sought, And mourned because I found it not; My grief a burden long had been, Oppressed with unbelief and sin.

DEVOTION. L. M. Tune for the "old folks." D. READ.

Spirited.

Sweet is the day of sa - cred rest, No mortal care shall seize my breast; O may my heart in tune be found, Like David's harp, Like David's, &c.

Sweet is the day of sa - cred rest, No mortal care shall seize my breast; O may my heart in tune be found, Like David's harp of solemn sound.

Sweet is the day of sa - cred rest, No mortal care shall seize my breast! O may my heart in tune be found, Like David's harp of solemn sound.

PINE HILL. L. M. Great care should be taken not to hurry the last two lines. They should be somewhat *Ritardando*.

In chaunting style, but not dolesterous.

No. 1.

How sweet to leave the world a - while, And seek the presence of our Lord! Dear Saviour, on thy people smile, And come according to thy word.

FIGURE 3

Page 37 from the 1834 Cythara. Notice the note next to "Devotion," dedicating the song as a "tune for the 'old folks.'" (Photo by Dana Borrelli)

more than three hundred and fifty titles published in the next one hundred years (Lornell 2002: 101).

The Cythara, that dusty, yellowed oblong book used as a historic prop in the Smith-Appleby house, falls into this category, complete with a dozen or so pages of singing school instruction as its preface. Written in the European round note tradition, many of the songs that I immediately recognized as *The Sacred Harp* tunebook songs were dubbed “Tune for the ‘Old Folks’” (“Devotion”) or “Music for the ‘Old Folks’” (“Ninety-Fifth,” “Concord,” “Norwich,” “Montgomery,” “Northfield,” “New Jerusalem”). Such Billings-style fugue tunes were already falling victim to the growing critical standards regarding American music in New England at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

While *The Cythara* utilized a notation system still common today, many singing school books of the time employed variously shaped notes to teach harmonic difference. Using the popular musical syllables *fá*, *sol*, *la*, and *mi*, which date back to the British Isles, tunes could be learned with ease through solemnization, or singing the notes’ syllables before singing the words. To do so, starting around 1803, many teachers devised shape note systems in which the musical syllables corresponded with differently shaped notes. The teaching method spread, bringing congregational singing to the poor and rich, schooled and illiterate alike. But by 1820, the Better Music Movement began to shatter the uniquely austere New England singing style. Congregational singing was illegitimated by the Better Music Movement, which lobbied for choirs consisting of musically trained virtuosic singers. An audience-choir dichotomy formed and music became a type of entertainment, as participation was allocated to certain individuals. Instrumental accompaniment, imported compositions, and the singing elite “choirs” eventually replaced vocal polyphony and self-made singing school masters retreated to more rural settings.

The singing school masters, with their differently shaped notes, made their way south and eventually established a singing tradition that stood firmly within the confines of Christian community worship. Here *The Sacred Harp* was published in 1844 in Hamilton, Georgia. Compiling some of the most popular tunes of the period notated in a shape note fashion, the book was an instant success throughout Georgia and east Alabama. The book became the most popular shape note tune book of the time.

A Singing Home

It was to that community that I traveled last summer to learn Sacred Harp singing and culture, as a place where the tradition is more a “music of the present than a relic of the past” (Cobb 1978: 65). It was in the community on Sand Mountain that I felt a connection to my “Americanness” through music.

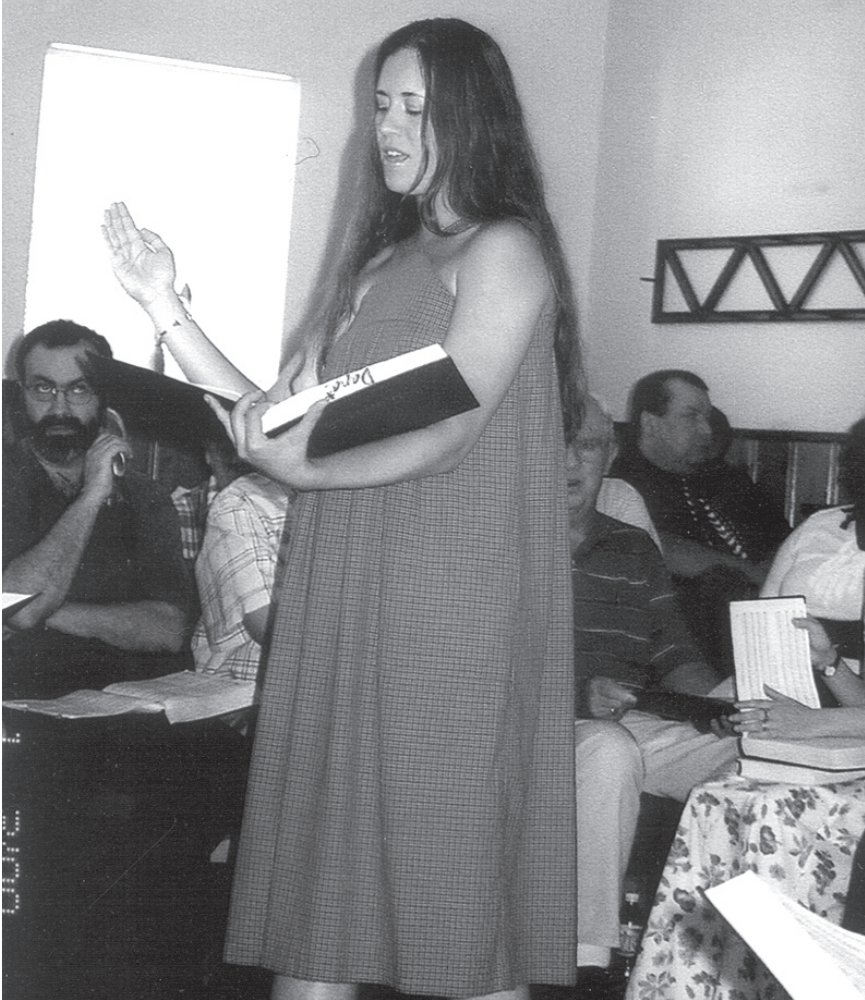


FIGURE 4

The author leading her first song at the Henagar-Union Convention, Henagar, Alabama, 2004. (Photo by Martha Beverly)

Without a historic familial connection to the South, my resonating nostalgia for an American past through a present-day activity continued to develop. I had not expected to complete the circle back in Rhode Island, imagining the music of my present being sung by my neighbors of the past. It was with this connection that I became a Sacred Harp singer, a member of a community that spans place and time, singing tunes for each other with passion and reverence.

Dell Hymes states that there is as much culture and performance in the everyday conversation as in the biggest ceremonies (Titon 1988: 193). One can interpret this statement as a model for extending Sacred Harp performance beyond the “hollow square.” My scholarly fieldwork indicates that what could be labeled as “fellowship” within singing communities before and after the Sacred Harp “class” is actually the extension of Sacred Harp culture found during a singing event. The Sacred Harp cultural framework reaches into non-singing experience as an unbounded performance that reifies singers’ broad communal connections by establishing and reiterating social roles.

But it was not until that moment back in Rhode Island at the Smith-Appleby house that I realized the full implications of fieldwork and research on the researcher. I had carried my “Sacred Harp’ness” in my pocket every day since my journey began, allowing it to shape and reshape my everyday situations. I played for a team which situated itself in a hollow square, singing songs of worship, temperance, and morality for each other. I pored over an fugue-filled oblong singing book thousands of miles from my Southern singing home to feel that connection. I had allowed the Sacred Harp culture to grab hold without the realization that it had. ■

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Red Hot and Blue: Spotlight on Five Alabama Blues Women

Kathy Bailey and Debbie Bond

This article is based on the text panels written and designed for the exhibition: “Red Hot and Blue: Spotlight on Five Alabama Blues Women.”* The exhibition provides an introduction to the blues in Alabama through the lives of five of this state’s best known blueswomen—Coot Grant, Lucille Bogan, Vera Hall, Big Mama Thornton, and Odetta.

The blues is America’s pure and original musical art form. Created by African Americans, it emerged in communities throughout the rural South at the end of the nineteenth century, when slavery was being replaced by sharecropping and Jim Crow laws. While there has been a lot of national and international interest in Mississippi blues, the rich heritage of the blues in Alabama has received little popular or academic attention. Through the lives and music of these five women, we only begin to uncover the important contribution Alabama’s musicians have made to the evolution of the blues in America.

Starting as local folk music, the blues became increasingly popular at the beginning of the new century. This new music was first spread across the country through the performances of traveling musicians and later through the sale of sheet music. Then, with the growing sales of Victrolas and 78 recordings, the blues became a commercial success.

The first recorded blues artists were women. In 1920, Mamie Smith’s hit

*The exhibition is available for loan from the Alabama Blues Project. For more information call 205 554 1795. This exhibition was made possible by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Alabama Consortium on Higher Education. Exhibition sponsors include the Alabama Blues Project, The Tuscaloosa Public Library, and the University of Alabama Department of Women Studies.

“Crazy Blues” became the first commercially successful blues recording, selling more than three million copies and launching the era of the classic blueswomen of the Roaring Twenties. Less well known is that this recording resulted from the efforts of two Alabamian music entrepreneurs, W. C. Handy and Perry Bradford. Smith’s hit record was the culmination of their long struggle to get white-owned record companies to invest in the potential blues market Handy and Bradford knew existed in the African American community.

The blues divas of this period were the superstars of their day. Their lyrics included both the heartbreak of desertion as well as the rewards of sexual independence. In fact, as female musicians, they struggled against the restrictions of race and gender stereotypes and pushed the boundaries of women’s traditional roles. Artists such as Ida Cox, Bessie Smith, Sippie Wallace, and Victoria Spivey defied the odds as they earned enormous incomes, dressed lavishly, and toured nationally and internationally. Their wardrobes, relationships, and personal lives were widely covered by the media of the day.

The five Alabamians featured here offer a glimpse into women’s contributions to the story of the blues. Behind these recording and performing stars there is a rich tradition of Alabama women in the blues. From performing the blues and preserving musical traditions to writing new lyrics and running juke joints, Alabama women have helped create and sustain America’s original art form—the blues.



*If you don't know what it's all about,
 Don't stand around my house and pout,
 Or you'll catch your mama skippin' out,
 Do Your Duty*

From "Do Your Duty" by Kid Wilson and Coot Grant

Leola B. "Coot" Grant

Born Leola Pettigrew in 1893 in Birmingham, Grant was called "Cutie" by her mother. When a neighbor mispronounced that as "Coot," it immediately became Leola's nickname. Coot Grant learned cakewalk dances as a child from her father, the proprietor of a local honky-tonk, and was performing in Birmingham by age five. By 1900, the eight-year-old Coot had joined the vaudeville group Mayme Remington's Pickaninnies. She toured with them until she was seventeen, working theaters across the United States, Europe, and South Africa.

In 1914 Coot met and married fellow performer Isiah Grant, and they toured as "Grant and Grant" until Isiah's death in May 1920. Six months later, Coot made a new partnership when she married piano player Wesley "Kid" (or sometimes "Socks") Wilson, whom she had met years earlier. She kept her first husband's name, and in 1925 Coot Grant and Kid Wilson made their recording debut. For the next thirteen years, they recorded and toured widely, working with such jazz greats as Fletcher Henderson, Sidney Bechet, and Louis Armstrong. In 1933 the duo appeared in many musical revues on and off Broadway and were also in the movie *Emperor Jones* with Paul Robeson.

In addition to their considerable performing and recording talents, Grant and Wilson were prolific songwriters, eventually composing more than four hundred songs. Sometimes recording under the names Hunter and Jenkin, their songs were recorded by the major companies of the day, including the Paramount, Columbia, and Okeh labels. Grant and Wilson were especially well known for continuing the rich tradition of sexually suggestive lyrics for which black vaudeville was notorious. Their most famous compositions include "Keep Your Hands Off My Mojo," "Gimme a Pigfoot" (one of Bessie Smith's best selling numbers), "Do your Duty," and "I'm Down in the Dumps."



FIGURE 1
Coot Grant.

Like so many blues artists from this period, the duo's recording career suffered during the Great Depression. Wilson retired in 1948, but Coot Grant continued to perform solo until 1955, when she was reported to be working outside of the music business in Los Angeles. There is little information available about her life after the mid-1950s; Leola "Coot" Grant died in obscurity, and no record of her death or burial has been found.

Coot Grant is widely recognized as a remarkable blues singer, and her 1920s recordings with the great blues guitarist Blind Blake have received particular

critical acclaim. It was, however, as a lyricist and composer that Grant is now best remembered.



*I love my black angel and I want him by myself,
I don't want him spreadin' his
wings over nobody else*

From "Black Angel Blues" by Lucille Bogan

Lucille Bogan

Lucille Bogan was the epitome of the classic blueswoman of the Roaring Twenties. Born Lucille Anderson in 1897 in Amory, Mississippi, her family soon moved to Birmingham. By 1916 she had married Nazareth Bogan and given birth to a son, Nazareth Bogan, Jr.

Lucille's music came out of the active Birmingham blues scene in the 1920s. Throughout her career, she performed and recorded with many of the greatest blues and boogie pianists of her time, including Alabama's Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport. She made her recording debut in New York in 1923 for the Okeh label. Later that same year in Atlanta she recorded "Pawn Shop Blues" for Okeh. "Pawn Shop Blues" was the first commercial recording by a black blues singer made outside of New York or Chicago.

From 1928 to 1930, Bogan recorded for Paramount Records, and then, until 1933, for the Brunswick label. Brunswick released two of her most famous songs, which were later covered by many others: "Tricks Ain't Walkin' No More" and "Black Angel Blues." The latter became the inspiration for B. B. King's classic hit, "Sweet Little Angel."

In the early 1930s, Bogan moved to New York and recorded for the American Recording Company label under the name Bessie Jackson with the great Alabama pianist Walter Roland. They began a creative musical partnership, making more than one hundred records together before Bogan stopped recording in 1935.

Lucille Bogan was willing to tackle socially taboo subjects. She sang about



FIGURE 2
Lucille Bogan. (Courtesy of Larry Cohn)

Dyke”). She also recorded several sexually explicit songs, the most infamous of which is “Shave ’Em Dry.” These songs were released privately and have been described by Dick Spottswood as “uncensored bordello entertainment,” comparable to Jelly Roll Morton’s explicit blues ballads that were recorded by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress.

The Great Depression badly affected both the blues recording industry and the performance venues that supported the careers of women like Lucille Bogan. The American Recording Company did not renew Bogan’s contract, and by 1934, she was back in Birmingham writing songs and managing her son’s band, “Bogan’s Birmingham Busters.” In 1948 she moved to California where she composed her last song, prophetically titled, “Gonna Leave Town.”

Lucille Bogan died of coronary sclerosis soon after she arrived in California and lies buried in an unmarked grave in Carson, California. She was a great blueswoman in the vanguard of blues recording history, and in her day she was a tremendously popular performer and recording artist. She wrote the music and lyrics for more than one hundred songs, many of which have been played and recorded by classic and contemporary blues greats such as Tampa Red, Memphis Minnie, Sonny Boy Williamson, Robert Nighthawk, Earl Hooker, and B. B. King.



*Blues puts your mind all in a wonder.
You gets to studying over different
things, wonderin' how they come out to
be so sad and so funny like.*

From *The Rainbow Sign* by Alan Lomax

Vera Hall

Vera Hall was born in 1902 in rural Sumter County, Alabama, into a family of sharecroppers. Immersed in the rich musical culture of the west Alabama Black Belt, she began singing gospel songs she learned from her mother and at her local Baptist church. Rich Amerson, a family friend, harmonica player, and singer, taught Vera to sing the blues. Although many African Americans regarded the blues as “the devil’s music,” Hall always rejected this notion and sang both blues and spirituals her entire life: “My mother always told me that ’ligion never was desire to make your pleasure less.”

Hall was first recorded in 1937 by John and Ruby Lomax, who were then working with the Works Progress Administration of Roosevelt’s New Deal administration, recording American folk music at its source. The Lomaxes were invited to Alabama by Sumter County folklorist Ruby Pickens Tartt. A long-time admirer of Hall’s extraordinary talent and impressive repertoire, Tartt invited Vera and her cousin Dock Reed to play and record for the Lomaxes. Hall’s style was considered old-fashioned even then—in fact, her music was considered a direct link to the earliest African-American traditions. Her beautiful voice and remarkable memory for secular and spiritual songs made her one of John Lomax’s favorite singers. He is often quoted as having said that Hall had the “loveliest untrained voice” he had ever heard.

The resulting recordings included Hall’s versions of spirituals, children’s songs, and blues songs. These recordings are now part of a national collection stored in the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress.

The only time Vera Hall left the state of Alabama was in 1948, when she was invited by the folklorist Alan Lomax, John Lomax’s son, to sing in a folk music concert at New York’s Columbia University. During Hall’s stay in New York, Lomax spent several days recording interviews with her, and this oral

history became the basis of his book *The Rainbow Sign*.

Sometime in the mid 1950s, Vera Ward Hall moved to Tuscaloosa, where she supported herself as a domestic worker until becoming blind in later life. Vera Hall died January 29, 1964, at Tuscaloosa's Druid City Hospital and is buried in an unmarked grave in the Morning Star Cemetery in Livingston, Alabama.

In his 1964 eulogy for Vera Hall, Alan Lomax described the unique and compelling quality of her voice: "Her performances were all graced with dignity and with love. Her sense of timing and beat were perfection itself. . . . It is a liquid, full contralto, rich in low overtones; but it can leap directly into falsetto and play there as effortlessly as a bird in the wind."

Vera Hall's voice has gained critical acclaim and reached a small audience through numerous recordings by Harold Courlander and Byron Arnold over fifty years ago. Most recently, the recording artist Moby had a commercial success with his single "Trouble So Hard," which featured a heavily sampled mix of Vera Hall's voice singing her original version of "The Natural Blues."

Through the recordings of the Lomaxes and other folklorists, Moby and the rest of the world discovered Vera Hall's voice. Though she was largely unrecognized in her lifetime, her talent and artistry continue to touch and speak to millions of people around the world.



FIGURE 3

Vera Hall. (Photo by Ruby Pickens Tartt, courtesy of *Sing Out!* Resource Center)



“I never had nobody teach me nothin’. I taught myself to sing and to blow the harmonica and even to play drums by watching other people.”

Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton

Willie Mae Thornton was born into a family of seven children, December 11, 1926, in Ariton, Alabama. In this small town seventy miles south of Montgomery her father, George Thornton, served as a minister, and her mother, Mattie, sang in the church choir.

Her love of the blues began early. Willie Mae taught herself to play the harmonica, and at age twelve, she won an amateur singing contest. J. W. Warren, a local blues guitarist, was impressed by the teenage Willie Mae, who often showed up to jam with him and other area bluesmen. The great Alabama blues harmonica player Wild Child Butler remembers sharing licks with the young Willie Mae in Montgomery. Both Butler and Thornton supplemented their incomes by shining shoes, usually a males-only job; throughout her life Willie Mae rebelled against traditional female roles, and even as a young woman was described as independent, tough and outspoken.

In 1940, aged fourteen, Thornton left home to join Sammy Green’s Hot Harlem Revue in Atlanta. It was not easy for the young Willie Mae to leave home. As her step-sister, Mattie Fields, noted, “During them days you had to actually run away, so to speak. Parents wanted you to work at home, in the fields and stuff. But [Willie Mae] didn’t—she left.”

Willie Mae toured through Alabama and Georgia with the Hot Harlem Revue, in which she danced, sang, played harmonica and drums, and also performed comedy routines. There was a new show every week, and there were no repeat acts.

Willie Mae stayed with the Hot Harlem Revue for eight years before moving step-sister Mattie to Houston. Here Willie Mae played the club scene with several local bands until Don Robey, impressed by her raw and powerful vocals, signed her to his Peacock Records label. Robey teamed her with the Johnny Otis Blues Caravan, a successful traveling musical revue. When the Caravan performed at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, Willie Mae stole the show from



FIGURE 4
"Big Mama" Thornton.

headliner “Little Esther” and became known as “Big Mama” Thornton.

In 1953, with Johnny Otis’s considerable production skills, Thornton recorded “Hound Dog,” a song penned by the famous songwriting duo of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. “Hound Dog” became an enormous hit for Thornton on black urban radio stations three years before Elvis Presley’s rock and roll classic was released. In the same year she toured coast-to-coast with the Blues Consolidated Package Show, featuring Johnny Ace, Junior Parker, and Bobby “Blue” Bland.

Big Mama Thornton moved to Los Angeles in the early 1960s. Despite alcohol-related health problems, her career flourished in the 1960s, and in 1963 she toured Europe with the American Folk Music Festival, sharing the stage with blues greats including John Lee Hooker, Junior Wells, and Howlin’ Wolf. She was a rough, brassy, blues shouter who continued to tour widely and recorded albums for the Arhoolie, Vanguard, and Mercury labels.

Toward the end of her life, Big Mama Thornton faded from public view. She died penniless in a rooming house in Los Angeles on July 25, 1984. A great blues artist, Willie Mae played a fundamental role in both the history of the blues and in the history of Rock and Roll. An inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, her influence on such singers as Janice Joplin, Aretha Franklin, Stevie Nicks, Grace Slick, and Koko Taylor cannot be overestimated, and her musical legacy continues to inspire.

“People talk about the blues comin’ back. The blues never left.”



“It’s understood universally . . . a hard time is a hard time, no matter how you get to the hard time. . . . Society’s foot was on our throat and we found a way to make up a song or make up a sermon or make up a poem, or sing a lullaby, and it didn’t change the situation, it helped you get through to the next day. I call this area of music . . . the history of us everyday people in this country.”

From an interview with Odetta by Michael Bourne

Odetta

Odetta was born December 31, 1930, in Birmingham. Her earliest exposure to music was at her family’s Baptist church. At six, she moved with her mother and younger sister to Los Angeles, where as a young teenager she began to pursue her dream of becoming a classical opera singer. Her budding operatic aspiration was replaced later in her teens by a love for the folk and blues music which she discovered in San Francisco Bay area coffee houses—a musical style that touched her deeply. She taught herself to play the guitar and sing and soon became a regular in West Coast clubs with an impressively large repertoire of folk and blues standards. Her earliest influences included blues musicians Alberta Hunter, Sonny Terry, and Leadbelly.

Pete Seeger and Harry Belafonte both took an interest in her career, and her debut album, *The Tin Angel*, was released in 1954. She had her most musically productive decade in the 1960s when she released sixteen albums, many of which were devoted to the blues. In 1999, she released her first studio album in fourteen years. Titled *Blues Everywhere I Go*, it was a tribute to the great women blues singers of the 1920s and 30s.

Odetta continues to be a prolific and dynamic performer, having acted in films and theater, sung with symphony and pops orchestras, performed on the world’s greatest concert stages, and even hosted the Montreux Jazz Festival.

Her involvement in the social movements sweeping America toward the end of the twentieth century cannot be overstated. She marched with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in Washington in 1963, and again from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. She played for President Kennedy and his cabinet and



FIGURE 5
Odetta.

was appointed an “Elder” to the 1994 International Women’s Conference in Beijing. In 1999, President and Mrs. Clinton awarded Odetta the National Medal of the Arts and Humanities.

Odetta was the artist chosen for the first episode of David Letterman’s “Late Show” to air following the tragedy of September 11, 2001. In those challenging times, she expressed an incredible grace, dignity, and compassion as she sang an inspirational medley of “We Shall Overcome” and “This Little Light of Mine.” She later closed the show by performing a rousing and spirited rendition of the gospel classic “Amazing Grace.”

Odetta is one of the most influential artists of the modern era. Her recordings of “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands,” “Kumbaya,” “Goodnight Irene,” “Amazing Grace,” and “This Little Light of Mine” made these songs into folk and spiritual classics throughout the world. She was a major influence on musicians such as Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Carly Simon, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Tracy Chapman, Joan Armatrading, Cassandra Wilson, and Jewel. As well as her worldwide fame as a musician, Odetta has been an inspiration to singers, artists, and social activists for half a century and continues to make her mark in word and deed as a passionate advocate and activist.

“Music is my school and it’s my healer . . .” ■

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Maintaining Mexican Identity in Birmingham

Charles Kelley

Temporary Mexican immigration to the United States for supplementary income can be traced as far back as the 1880s and has occurred at fluctuating rates up to the present day. The 1920s and 1930s brought the first signs of discord over Mexican immigration as the American economy started to stall. After the Great Depression and continuing to the present, “Mexico’s emigration policy traditionally has been predicated on attempting to protect the rights of its citizens abroad . . .; maintaining a sense of patriotism among expatriates by sponsoring observances of national holidays in ethnic Mexican communities in the United States; and encouraging, and at times actively fostering, the eventual repatriation of Mexican nationals abroad” (Gutierrez xii). After the Great Depression, Mexico began to stabilize both socially and politically causing the flow of Mexican immigrants into the United States to decline sharply.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the traditional trickle of Mexican immigration began to rapidly accelerate. According to U.S. Census reports, the population of foreign-born Mexicans residing in Alabama rose from 1,155 in 1990 to 27,103 in 2000, with the only other significant Hispanic population in the state in 2000 being 3,163 foreign-born Guatemalans. The current Mexican population in Alabama is estimated at around 50,000.

Two Groups

I was first introduced to the Mexican immigrant population in Birmingham in 1999 by Fernando, who had recently arrived in Birmingham from Pechuca, Hidalgo; his first job was at the restaurant where I was working. I was attempting to learn Spanish and he had a desire to learn English so we

began to talk in broken English and Spanish. I spent most weekends at his apartment talking to him and his roommates, eight other men of similar age, about their life in America and of things they missed about Mexico. I found out that all of the roommates were from Hidalgo and that they all had relatives or friends in common.

Their favorite topic was to tell how they immigrated. They all shared the common experience of traveling to a border town and crossing the border by foot in the desert. Once across the border, they had contact information for people that gave them work identification numbers and they all had the locations of their relatives or friends who would help them get set up in their new life in the United States.

Four and a half years later, none of that original group that I met is still in the United States and there is a new group of seven guys that live in the same apartment. All are either younger or older brothers of the original group of guys and have come to Birmingham in the last one to two years. As I began to talk with this new group, I learned that the original group had either given

AUTHOR'S NOTE: These are descriptions of the art styles, regional make-up, average economic status and method of immigration particular to the Hispanic residents of the Birmingham-Hoover metro area which I have the most access. I have been able to create a more complete analysis through intimate knowledge of intra-group dynamics and through the acceptance by this group as a participant observer. The occupations within this group include a busperson, cooks, servers, industrial workers, and construction workers. The country of origin for the entire group is Mexico, more specifically the central Mexican states of Hidalgo, Puebla, and Distrito Federal, and they all come from large cities, one million or more in population. I acknowledge that this particular group makes up a narrow cross section of Hispanic life in the United states or even in Alabama, but it also illustrates the unique characteristics of a group which are influenced by their socio-economic, regional (in Mexico and the United States) and linguistic backgrounds. Even though all of the informants in this article were close friends of mine, they were suspicious of the intentions of any state-funded agency. The use of only first names was a request by one of the artists because of his fear of imprisonment or deportation, and I felt that it was proper to hide the identities even of those who did not make this request as a show of cooperation.

their siblings money for a car or a car itself to help them get a job and to start earning money right away. This arrangement was completely different from what had met Fernando when he first arrived. He had an apartment arranged for him but he didn't have a car. All the original guys in the apartment shared one car, which caused two problems: first Fernando was limited to having one job because there wasn't any transportation available to him in the mornings, and second it took him five months before he could send any money back home because he was saving up to buy a second car for the guys in the apartment.

I also discovered that two of the eight new guys had immigrated via a different method. Juan told me about how his brother, the secretary for the local municipal president, had arranged for Juan to receive a 120-day tourist visa which allowed him to enter the country comfortably on a plane with two suitcases full of his belongings and his favorite guitar. The fact that he had a guitar before the others in the apartment made Juan the unofficial house musician and he spent most nights after work playing and singing. On many occasions he has talked about forming a group with the other roommates but no one has taken him seriously or is interested. Another of the new guys had immigrated in a similar fashion with a family member securing some kind of official documentation that allowed him to fly here for an extended period of time.

The easier immigration and better starting economic basis brought about by the prearrangement of an apartment and the car allowed the second group of guys to find higher-paying jobs because their lack of urgency caused them to be more selective in their job search. The higher-paying jobs enabled the second group to work fewer hours and still meet their weekly financial quota that kept their goal of returning to Mexico after two to three years. In practical terms this meant that while the first group worked morning and night Monday through Saturday, the second group rarely worked more than nine shifts a week with two, Luis and Eduardo, only working six shifts a week.

Luis, age seventeen, and Eduardo, eighteen, had different goals for their stay in Birmingham because they were younger than the others and did not have spouses or children in Mexico that they were providing for. Eduardo told me several times that the purpose for him immigrating was mainly to experience new things and to learn English. Luis has not given me any clear reason for

immigrating preferring to say “just because” each time that I ask him.

Immigration

As I began interviewing the group of immigrants I most closely work with, I learned that five were from the town of Pechuca, Hidalgo, which is about two hours north of Mexico City. One of the Pechuca men, Eric, told me that most of his townsmen who came to the United States come to Atlanta or Birmingham with the majority coming to Birmingham. Eric told me how his family began coming to Birmingham, “My oldest brother was working in Mexico City and he met a man at his job that had just come back from Birmingham . . . He told him he wanted to go to the United States. The man told him Birmingham had plenty of jobs and his cousin was still there. My brother left two months later and stayed for two years. That was twelve years ago.”

The numerous Pechucans living in Birmingham have influenced how the local residents perceive Hispanic culture. Central-Mexican customs are overwhelmingly more common in the Birmingham area than the customs of other parts of the Hispanic world. In Pechuca, customs are being changed to accommodate the large portion of their population that now lives some part of their life in Birmingham. Local customs such as neighborhood fiestas are being modified to include the members of the neighborhood that are in the United States.

The central part of the celebration is the lighting of a *castillo*, a large wooden tower with fireworks attached. Usually one *castillo* per neighborhood is funded and sometimes built by the residents in that neighborhood. During the past three years, many neighborhoods in Pechuca have made two *castillos*, one funded by and for their neighborhood and one funded by and for the residents of that neighborhood that are in Birmingham. As a show of financial power, the Pechucans in Birmingham send enough money to build a *castillo* twice the size of the regular neighborhood *castillo*.

The people in Pechuca recognize that there are established friends and family constantly available to them in Birmingham. Since the first Pechucan began arriving in Birmingham, each following wave has relied on the previous one to find them employment, make living accommodations, and teach them the small details of life in Birmingham. Because of this gradual buildup of knowl-



FIGURE 1

A guitarron player. (Photo by Steve Graubeger)

edge, each successive group has become more successful and the transition to a new life has been less severe.

Eric told me, “Now that I don’t have to worry about where I can go to find a job or where I’m going to make the money that I need, I can start worrying about other things like when my favorite soccer team will be playing and when I can find a guitar so that I can play.” With this extra free time, the immigrants are allowed to practice and display their culture, bringing unique culinary, musical, and artistic traditions to Birmingham. Slowly these traditions



FIGURE 2

An Alabama Mariachi band. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

are becoming assimilated into the local cultural repertoire.

Each time I go with Hispanic acquaintances to a *tienda* or *taqueria* I see more and more locals participating in activities solely associated with Hispanic immigrants just a few years prior. When I see an American enjoying *tacos al pastor* or buying dessicate fish in a *tienda*, I become increasingly aware of the impact of Hispanic culture, its assimilation into American culture, and the willingness of Americans to become a little Hispanic. Americans have redefined their self-image as a result of the importation and assimilation of a foreign culture, a process that has been repeating itself with each new wave of immigration since the founding of America and the conception of a national identity.

Often the first aspect of a foreign culture to be accepted in America is its culinary styles. Hispanic food has received assistance from the predominance of the hybrid food style of Tex-Mex. Tacos, enchiladas, and tamales have been common in the United States for decades, while other traditional foods such as sopas, tortas, and moles have only recently become known to Americans. More traditional Mexican restaurants have opened to cater to the growing Hispanic population and those restaurants are being visited increasingly by Alabamians.

The exposure has brought about a certain level of acceptance and even incorporation of Hispanic cuisine into what is seen as “normal” in Alabama.

The latest advances of Hispanic culture have been the appearance of large *tiendas* and local flea markets that are supplying the Hispanic population with the products needed to construct home altars and to decorate their houses in a style similar to what they would have in their hometowns. The *tiendas* had been small tucked-away shops with little signs written exclusively in Spanish that catered to the small population of Hispanics in the immediate area. Now, the *tiendas* are large businesses in highly visible strip malls on the main highways. The signs are now usually in Spanish and English in an attempt to bring in more businesses. These places are exposing Alabamians to traditional products and are giving them a higher understanding of traditional Hispanic culture.

Murals

Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros are considered “Los Tres Grandes” of Mexican mural painting. All three were born in the 1880s and began prolific mural painting in the early 1900s, a time of great social change and unrest in Mexico. “Mural paintings operated as sign vehicles articulating ideas generated by the social context of the post-Revolution. As they were mostly found on the walls of official buildings and were accessible and very large, they operated within the semiotic social system of the day as symptomatic of the paternalizing generosity of the patron: the government” (Folgarait pg. 12). Though the early principles that guided the genesis of Mexican murals are not the sole influence on Mexican muralists of today, there is still strong pressure on the artist to reproduce the social impact of “Los Tres Grandes.” “The Mexican muralists have been turned into saints . . . The walls are not painted surfaces but fetishes that we must venerate. The Mexican government has made muralism a national cult and of course in all cults criticism is outlawed” (Weinstein pg. 75-6).

The muralists feel that if they want to follow in the footsteps of these “saints” they must copy them stylistically. The muralist in the group I studied, Luis, echoed the concern of many: “In Mexico I felt like everything I painted had to be a statement of protest about what was wrong with my life or I could paint something religious like The Virgin of Guadalupe. All of the murals

that I saw around my neighborhood all had to deal with the problems in our neighborhood or were of the Virgin. Both were examples of national pride and were accepted themes. [My mural] wasn't always a political statement but I always wanted to show my problems to everyone else. [Here] the problems of my neighborhood are completely out of my mind. I want to paint things that honor my heritage. I want to paint things that honor the past of my people. I am doing well here. I do not have those problems anymore."

While in Birmingham, Luis finally felt free to paint on topics that were close to his heart. After being in Birmingham for about a month, Luis began to search for opportunities that would allow him both to proceed with his passion to paint and also to make money. About this time I had heard that two brothers who were about to open up a restaurant and wanted a mural done, and I immediately told Luis about the job.

He got in contact with the owner of the restaurant and the owner said that he wanted a mural that was at least nine feet wide and six feet high and that the subject could be whatever Luis wanted as long as it was obviously Mexican. The owner gave Luis \$200 and said he would get another \$200 when the mural was completed. Luis asked me if I knew of an art supply store so that he could get some equipment. I took him to a supply store on Birmingham's Southside where he spent \$53 dollars of his first payment. He and I went to the restaurant to check the space and to come up with an idea. Within a minute he told me his vision for the barren wall. He wanted to draw two Aztec warriors, a male and a female, encircled by an Aztec calendar, and after thirty minutes he had sketched a study of the mural on a piece of paper.

The Aztec calendar was standard to the many small copies that I had seen before, but when I saw the Aztec warriors I was completely astonished by his romanticized vision. The man was ripped with muscles with only a small loin-cloth obscuring the view of his body, and he had a large obsidian sword in his hand raised high and ready for action. The woman was slender yet muscular and had long flowing hair. She was as scantily clad as the man but had an air of innocence. The reason for my shock was that I had seen pictures of several of his murals from Mexico and was rather unimpressed by the rigid lack of creativity and style shown in his works.

I went to the restaurant periodically over the next three weeks to see the

progress of the mural and found him either staring blankly at the wall or intensely painting. He finished the mural in twenty-two days and received his other \$200. The mural ended up an exact match of the earlier study plus he had added some pyramids in the background at the urging of the owner. We calculated that he had put in fifty-four hours of work and received \$347 after expenses, for a total of \$6.52 an hour. He seemed quite disappointed when I told him his hourly wage but that quickly faded as he began to take several pictures of his mural.

Home Altars

During his free time, Eduardo worked on several paintings, the first of which was a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe to be put in the apartment's altar. Eduardo explained to me one day, "If you understand the Virgin you understand why I do anything . . . When I was young, the Virgin of Guadalupe was everywhere. There were pictures of Her everywhere in the house and in the streets. It was the first image I could close my eyes and see every detail and it was the first image that I drew over and over again. My mother said that She protected me and I wanted to honor Her by drawing Her everywhere. I drew the Virgin on our door when I was young, maybe ten, and I thought it was really good but my mom didn't. The Virgin is the reason why I create anything; even if it is a picture of a dog, She's still why. This is the way it is for most Mexicans." Eduardo took few stylistic liberties and produced a painting very similar to every image of the Virgin of Guadalupe that I have seen before.

The making and maintaining of home altars have long been considered the work of women. Homes with only male residents are common in the Mexican immigrant community and in these homes there either is no home altar or they are made by the men. The men in the group explained to me that their altar and most of the altars made by men are extremely less ornate than those made by the women. Eric told me that they used the altars only on rare occasions and that the women that he knew used them almost daily for up to an hour.

The men's altar consisted of a small table in the corner of the living room. The table has four votive candles on the right side and four more on the left side of the table. The votive candles are about seven inches high and are glass cylinders with depictions of the Virgin Mary on them. There is a small box

with a slit cut into the top and behind the box are four or five plastic flowers in a short vase. Behind the table on the wall was originally a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe that hung about a foot higher than the top of the table. That picture was replaced by the painting done by Eduardo, and the painting was edged by white Christmas lights that encircled it and went down along the edge of the table. They had placed a pillow next to the altar to cushion the knees while kneeling.

Eric guided me through the differences between their altar and those that would be more commonly constructed by a woman (“*altarista*” was the exact word Eric used). He said that in more ornate altars there are pictures of the Virgin as well as other saints and even pictures of relatives on the wall behind the table, and the picture of the Virgin is often framed. The flowers on the table are real and are replaced every other day with fresh flowers. The votive candles are usually more ornate and are in greater numbers.

Eric told in great detail about altars one night as we consumed a great number of beverages and talked for hours on varying subjects. From the great insight he gave me I knew that he had put a lot of thought into the uses of the altar. “In Mexico there are altars everywhere. They’re near bridges, roads, parks, bus stops, buildings, everywhere. I never thought much about them until I came here and I didn’t see any altars anywhere. I am not religious at all but I felt like there was something missing; there was something not right without the altars around.”

I then asked him what he thought about the altar in his own home.

“Like I said before, I’m not that religious and I don’t use it at all but it felt really empty and odd without one in the house. So, all the guys in the apartment got together one day and listed the items that we needed to make an altar. They weren’t that happy about making one but I told them that it was worth our time. When Eduardo came, I think he’s more religious than we are, he wanted to do something special for our altar and he made us a *Virgin*.”

Eduardo’s dedication to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe caused me to seek more information on a common inspiration for Mexican artists and the focal point of every altar in Mexican dwellings. To me, Eduardo’s finished painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe was just another copy of the original image, but for the occupants of the apartment Eduardo’s work was a moving

display of faith and a generous gift to the entire household. I wanted to know how this symbol had been incorporated into the lives of most Mexicans and how it was such an inspiration to Mexican artists.

The Virgin

The origins of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe start in December 1531 in Mexico City when the Virgin Mary appeared four times to a Christianized indigenous boy named Juan Diego. On his way to mass, the poor boy was greeted by the Virgin Mary enveloped in a body halo. Juan heard the music of many songbirds as the Virgin remained still and in the air.

The songbirds quieted and the Virgin spoke to Juan. She said, "I am the Entirely and Ever Virgin, Saint Mary," and she assured Juan that she was his "Compassionate Mother" and that she had come to protect and love "all folk of every kind." She requested that a temple in her honor be erected at that spot, Tepeyac Hill, on the eastern edge of Mexico City, a site previously occupied by the temple of the Aztecan goddess Tonantzin.

Juan Diego went to the bishop of Mexico, Zumarraga, and told him of this glorious event. He was skeptical of the story and dismissed Juan Diego. Juan then returned to the hill and begged Mary to find a more important person who could request the erection of the temple. The Virgin Mary urged him to return to Zumarraga and "indeed say to him once more how it is I Myself, the Ever Virgin Saint Mary, Mother of God, who am commissioning you." Juan returned to the bishop and made the request again. The bishop demanded that there be a sign from the "Heavenly Woman" to confirm her true identity.

The next day Juan was attending to his gravely ill uncle Juan Bernadino who asked Juan Diego to fetch a priest so that the last rites might be performed before his death. Juan Diego hurried along trying to avoid the Virgin Mary so that he could grant his uncle's wish expediently. Despite his efforts the Virgin intercepted Juan who told her of his ill uncle. She assured him that his uncle had been healed and that she had visited his uncle separately.

On December 12, 1531, Juan Diego had his last contact with the Virgin Mary in which she told him to go to the top of Tepeyac Hill and to pick "Castilian garden flowers" from the barren hillside. Once Juan was at the hilltop, the Virgin helped him gather up the flowers by folding them into his Maguey

fiber cloak, the now famous Tilma. Juan Diego set off to show Zumarraga the sign. Upon arrival, Juan unfolded his Tilma and the flowers spilled at the feet of the Bishop and the bishop noticed that on the Tilma was the image of the Virgin Mary. Today, the “Miraculous Portrait” hangs in the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City (Dunnington 1996).

The Virgin of Guadalupe was an image of the Virgin located in the town of Tepeyac in sixteenth century Mexico. It was said by Miguel Sanchez in the early seventeenth century that the Virgin of Guadalupe was a miraculous copy of the image of Mary seen by St. John the Evangelist. Its symbolism of the mixture of humanity and nature was used as a tool to help the transition from local polytheistic beliefs to the monotheistic import of Europe and to teach the indigenous peoples about the principles of Christianity in a way that was most familiar to them. Tepeyac was also the home of the native god Tonantzin, the mother of the gods. Also, the native name of the Virgin Mary was Tonantzin.

This helped smooth the conversion of native peoples to Christianity which enabled Spain to control and pacify the indigenous population. A large cathedral was erected to hold the image in 1709. By the early eighteenth century the cult of the Virgin of Tepeyac or Guadalupe was so influential and widespread that when in 1737 Mexico City and the surrounding area was devastated by an epidemic, the city council convened, and it was suggested that the Virgin of Guadalupe be named the Patron of the entire Kingdom of New Spain in order to end the epidemic.

In the early nineteenth century, spurred by the parish priest of Dolores, Miguel Hidalgo, the rural masses started a rebellion against Spanish rule and the Virgin of Guadalupe transformed into the symbol of Mexican nationality. Mexican insurgents marched to the cry of “Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe” and their flag had the image of the Virgin. Once Mexico earned its independence from Spain the leadership of Mexico was split between those who wanted a strong church presence in the government and those who supported a system resembling the separation of church and state of the United States. These differing ideologies led to a civil war, and the leaders of the church sought refuge in Rome.

A middle ground was accomplished and the civil war ended several years

later. The leaders of the church returned and, with the help of the papacy, fully recognizing the miracle of the Virgin of Guadalupe, established a strong church presence in the new Mexican government. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the subsequent Civil War (1926-29) the church lost its power in the government as socialist ideals were spreading throughout the Americas.

Even though the institutional church lost power, Catholicism greatly strengthened among masses of mestizo commoners and the story of the Virgin received a new focal point, Juan Diego. Juan Diego served as an icon to the common Mexican and when the importance of Mexican Catholicism became apparent in Rome he was Beatified in 1990 (Brading 2001).

The Image of the Virgin of Guadalupe helped convert the peoples of the new world. The Virgin being linked to roses and other flowers connected the Virgin to the land just as native gods shared strong ties with features of the earth. Also, Catholicism's many saints helped as well by making easy parallels with native gods, for example, the Maritime patron saint St. Elmo matched up to the local god of the sea. The indigenous peoples were accustomed to incorporating ruling peoples major gods into their belief system, just as the Tlaxcalans accepted major Aztec gods. The Virgin of Guadalupe also helped give Catholicism a legitimate claim in the new world by having a miracle happen there. Similar images of the Virgin were seen in Europe in the cathedrals of Montserrat, Loreto and Seville. It helped entice European Catholics to relocate or make a pilgrimage to the new world and gave a manifest destiny-like right for the Catholicism-bearing Spaniards to occupy and rule over the peoples of the New World. It later served as a icon that promoted identity and civic pride for the people of Mexico.

Conclusion

For the past ten to fifteen years Alabama has been undergoing cultural changes brought about by a large, unprecedented wave of Hispanic immigration. Alabamians are confronted with the new cultural phenomena brought with the new immigrants on an increasingly more common basis. In Birmingham, changes are easy to spot throughout the city and outlying suburbs. More stores that cater specifically to Hispanic clientele such as apparel stores, supermarkets, and restaurants have opened recently all over the metro area.

There are Spanish-language newspapers, radio stations and television shows that rely on the increasing Hispanic population of the area. Most car dealerships, insurance agencies and banks offer someone who speaks Spanish and target the Hispanic population.

Churches have begun to offer Spanish-language services and have created outreach programs that are helping the Hispanic community both financially and logistically. Schools have created ESOL classes and are giving assistance to Spanish-speaking students for them to succeed in their classes. Learning Spanish is becoming a more essential part of the typical education of an Alabama student and Spanish is being taught at younger ages than in the past. Also, speaking Spanish is now a huge advantage in acquiring jobs and increasing the earning potential of a person entering the workforce.

Alabama is at a point other states that have had earlier influxes of Hispanics have previously experienced. Most states in the Southwest, the West, the Midwest, and the Northeast have already experienced a sudden, sizeable increase in their Hispanic population and a subsequent alteration in the cultural identity of the area. The immigration in these areas has been followed by changes in the operation of businesses, churches, and government. State and local governments have had to adjust to the change in demographics by adding programs to schools and by creating agencies that deal with the unique concerns of the immigrant population.

Alabama has the great advantage to be one of the last places in America that has experienced a large Hispanic immigration and is able to learn from the successes and failures of the programs initiated by other states in response to the change in population. The previous attempts to cope with the population change by other states can serve as a model for Alabama to preemptively create the necessary infrastructure to effectively handle its new citizens.

A significant step to reach the majority of the new Hispanic population would be the creation of a group or organization capable of identifying and giving support to practitioners of Hispanic arts. The arts touch the majority of the Hispanic community and are an essential component of the culture. Being able to recognize and assist the artist in the community is a great first step in understanding and incorporating the many aspects of Hispanic culture.

The establishment of an infrastructure to assist Hispanic artists is important

to recently arrived immigrants but is more important for those who stay in America and have children. The second generation of Hispanic artists is presently and will be in the future creating a hybrid art form from the mixtures of cultures they have experienced. The opportunity to record and study this new art phenomenon is a huge benefit from the establishment of a supporting infrastructure and will allow future generations of art lovers the complete history of this exciting time.

Immigrant artists such as Luis, the muralist, have the potential to significantly affect the regional or U.S. art community if he is given the support, both logistical and financial, to thrive. Luis has found a limited range of job opportunities. These jobs have been limited to restaurants or *supermercados* who have Hispanic owners and Hispanic clientele. Luis has expressed on several occasions that he wants to broaden his range of jobs to include non-Hispanic themes in areas where he has a larger appreciation for his work. The barriers from advancing his career that Luis faces mainly deal with language and cultural difficulties.

Luis, like many immigrants, has acquired a limited vocabulary in English in a very short time. His vocabulary allows him to buy items at convenience stores, eat at restaurants, and communicate with his boss or co-workers but fails him in other unfamiliar situations. He is too intimidated by the language barrier to go to English-speaking restaurant or bar owners to see if they are interested in his artwork. Even if Luis can navigate the language barriers, he still has to name a price for his work. He has told me that he does not know what value non-Hispanic employers would place on his artwork and, hence, he has doubts on whether he can successfully negotiate a deal.

Other than going door to door to ask owners for work, Luis knows of no other way to secure employment as an artist. He is not aware of organizations either governmental or private that he can utilize to further his artistic career in America. Luis would never think of asking a private organization for funding of his work nor does he have the understanding of the lengthy application process required for access to those funds. Luis also has an inherent fear of governmental agencies regardless of the stated purpose of that agency. The Hispanic arts community residing in Alabama urgently needs an organization that can foster the aspiring artist and also have the outreach capabilities

needed to reach that artist.

Overall, this is an exciting period of American cultural evolution, a period of great metamorphosis and reinvention similar to past waves of immigration. We have the great advantage of learning from the successes and mistakes previously committed by the people in our position during past eras. We also have decades of good ethnographies previously unavailable to our predecessors to help understand and incorporate foreign cultures. We now have the opportunity to ease the transition of the Hispanic community from an outsider minority group to a mainstreamed part of American society. The best first step for incorporation in the state of Alabama and the Birmingham area is the understanding and acceptance of Hispanic art. ■

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Book Review

An Alabama Songbook: Ballads, Folksongs, and Spirituals Collected by Byron Arnold, edited with an introduction by Robert W. Halli, Jr. (University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa. 2004. \$49.95).

HENRY WILLETT

In 1938, Bryon Arnold traveled from Oregon to Tuscaloosa to join the music faculty at the University of Alabama. In the preface to his 1950 publication, *Folksongs of Alabama*, Arnold wrote, “Folk singing in Alabama commanded my attention very shortly after my arrival in the state in 1938. On the second Sunday I was here, I was taken to a Negro ‘foot washing’ in Northport. I had never heard such singing nor witnessed such religious fervor . . . It was emotional and deeply stirring . . .”

During the summers of 1945, '46, and '47, Arnold traveled the state collecting folksongs, first with pencil and notebook and later with a disc recording machine. His collection ultimately numbered more than a thousand, some hundred and fifty of which he included in his 1950 publication. *Folksongs of Alabama*, long out-of-print, was the first comprehensive collection of Alabama folksongs. Several years after his 1971 death, Arnold's Alabama folksong collection, including notes, texts, music transcriptions and recordings, was acquired by the University of Alabama. English professor Robert W. Halli, Jr., first with co-editor Robert Nicolosi, and since 1982 as sole editor, spent two decades cataloguing, analyzing, reorganizing and editing the Arnold collection. This work has resulted in *An Alabama Songbook*, a comprehensive and welcome new incarnation of Arnold's work from a half century ago.

An Alabama Songbook is not a simple revision and enlargement of Arnold's 1950 book. Though Halli returned to Arnold's original mother lode of material, his excavation has resulted in an entirely new volume. Halli's comprehensive introduction includes a detailed history of the Arnold collection, from the time of Arnold's arrival in Tuscaloosa in 1938, along with an explanation of Halli's editorial philosophy and processes. Appendices include biographies of a dozen singer/informants (from Arnold's original publication) along with song references, Index of Song Titles and First Lines, Works Cited, and Index of Names.

The heart of the publication is the 275 pages devoted to the musical transcriptions and lyrics of the songs, more than two hundred in all. It is here Halli has departed most significantly from the organizational format of Arnold's 1950 publication. Arnold organized his publication by each individual signer's repertoire. This was a departure from the typical organization of published folksong collections of the time, when scholarly interest focused on text study and geographical distribution, and only minimally on the singers of the songs. Arnold's organizational format was soundly criticized in a 1951 review of his book in *Southern Folklore Quarterly*.

Halli has chosen to organize the folksong collection by song genre, with the three primary genres of Ballads, Folk Songs, and Spirituals further divided into twenty-eight sub-genres. This format is particularly useful to the folksong researcher.

For those fortunate enough to have a copy of Byron Arnold's original *Folksongs of Alabama* on their library shelf, Robert W. Halli's *An Alabama Songbook* is an essential companion publication, bringing new life and fresh perspective to Arnold's original collection. (Another fine companion piece is *Cornbread Crumbled in Gravy: Historical Alabama Field Recordings from the Byron Arnold Collection of Traditional Tunes*, a cassette recording of fourteen songs with accompanying seventy-page booklet by Joy Baklanoff and John Bealle, Alabama Traditions 104).

In Arnold's 1950 publication he included black and white photographs of singers with their biographies. I wish these photos had been included in the Biography Appendix to *An Alabama Songbook*. Similarly, I would have enjoyed an additional appendix including Arnold's four-page Introduction

to his 1950 publication, simply because this interesting, brief narrative is no longer available in print.

An Alabama Songbook is a valuable reference tool, a delightful read and welcome addition to my library shelf. I found myself humming along as I turned the pages, wishing I could hear those singers Arnold recorded on disc. Perhaps the University of Alabama could help facilitate a project which would make those recordings available to the general public. That would be a welcome addition to Halli's fine treatment of Byron Arnold's durable collection of Alabama folksong. ■

Recording Review

Allison's Sacred Harp Singers: Heaven's my Home, 1927–1928 (County Records CO-CD-3531. Liner Notes by John Bealle and Joyce Cauthen). *Religion is a Fortune Sacred Harp Singing: Various Groups—Early 1900s* (County Records CO-CD-3532. Liner notes by David Warren Steel).

STEVE GRAUBERGER

Two new County Records releases, *Allison's Sacred Harp Singers: Heaven's My Home* (ASHS) and *Religion Is a Fortune Sacred Harp Singing* (RF-SHS) would make valuable additions to any Sacred Harp aficionado's or folk enthusiast's collection. Since most performances on both CDs feature quartets singing each vocal part individually, they may as well as be helpful as a learning tool for those who are beginning to sing Sacred Harp, as one could follow along with the written music as they listened. Over the years examples of Allison's Sacred Harp Singers have been included in compilations like Yazoo's *Times Ain't What They Used To Be, Vol. 3* (Yazoo 2047), *How Can I Keep From Singing?: Early American Rural Religious Music, Vol. 1*. (Yazoo 2020), and more recently, Dust to Digital's *Goodbye, Babylon*. With the release of *Heaven's My Home* this is the first time that a homogeneous compilation has been issued of Allison's Sacred Harp Singers' 78rpm sides, featuring twenty-one of the thirty-two songs recorded for Gennett Records in 1927–28. Four different Allison examples are included on the *Religion Is a Fortune* CD, as well. Individually, these rare 78rpm discs could cost a record collector dearly. For example, one title on eBay went for \$2,800.

The liner notes for ASHS written by Sacred Harp scholar John Bealle and

Alabama Folklife Association Executive Director Joyce Cauthen are interesting and easily readable in both format and content. The notes give an excellent history and perspective of Sacred Harp commercial recordings in the 1920s and delve into the personal histories of the performers: J. T. Vaughn, Tom Bradshaw, George T. Allison, and James T. Allison of the 1928 Richmond Indiana session and, probably, the same men plus G. T. Allison's wife Liddie singing alto during the 1927 Birmingham session. All of these folks were from either Moody or Birmingham, Alabama.

Bealle and Cauthen initially give a basic history of Sacred Harp and the four-shape solemnization method. They mention the popularity of Sacred Harp in Alabama and thus, the appeal for record companies to take advantage of the market. For instance, the annual Jefferson County convention in 1927 had to be moved to the municipal auditorium from the courthouse due to more than one thousand people in attendance. In addition to the potential customer base, Gennett Record parent company, Starr Piano, had a showroom in Birmingham and set up a third-floor recording studio where the Allison Singers recorded their first two tracks in 1927. Points of purchase for 78rpm discs were often piano and sheet music stores. John Bealle and Joyce Cauthen state:

These recordings are rare instances of the convergence of two important cultural movements of the southeastern U.S. [in 1927-28]—the emerging country music recording industry and the impressive tradition of singing religious folk music from shape-note tunebooks.

All 78rpm discs for both ASHS and RFSHS CDs were remastered by Christopher C. King from the collections of Robert Nobley, Rich Nevins, Dave Freeman, Frank Mare, Christopher King, and John Coffey. Nearly pristine copies must have been used in the digital conversions based on the quality of the sound. While one hears the inherent ambient sound of the needle touching the record, the overall fidelity of the music is crisp and clear. It appears little or no noise reduction was necessary in the County CDs as the voices are not muffled and the bass response is good. There are slight variations of quality in some of the transfers probably due to manufacture, period recording technology, and record condition.

Musically, compared to the stylistic variety in the wide range of groups represented on RFSHS the ASHS CD, to me, tends to be more subdued because, for the most part, songs are sung by males in a three-part (treble, tenor, bass) rendering. No women were present at the 1928 Richmond, Indiana session. Warren Steel points out in his RFSHS liner notes that one of the only alto parts sung by one of the five men present in the 1928 Richmond session was the song "Not Made with Hands" available on the RFSHS CD (Cooper ed., p. 571) It is interesting to note that music composed for the early B. F. White *The Sacred Harp* had very few alto parts. The 1927 Birmingham session recordings, "I'm A Long Time Traveling Away from Home," and "I Belong to this Band" (actual *Sacred Harp* titles are "White" and "Ragan" respectively) most probably included G. T. Allison's wife Liddie singing alto.

The overall manner of performance in the Allison CD, for me, is a more sedate and archaic approach to singing Sacred Harp. However, in a modern twist, harmonic elements of the music changed slightly due to the added keyboard accompaniment contributing extra notes not specifically written in the actual music. As speculated in the notes, the use of non-traditional keyboard accompaniment by either reed organ or piano may well have been because Starr Piano Company of Richmond Indiana owned Gennett Records. Only three of the songs, tracks 3, 9, and 13, are *a cappella*.

Liner notes for *Religion Is a Fortune* CO-CD-3532 are written by David Warren Steele, another Sacred Harp scholar. His is another excellent and interesting resource giving a brief look into each performance group as well a some history of nearly every song. The format of Steel's notes differs from Bealle and Cauthen in that more singular descriptions were needed to introduce each various group to the reader. Thus each song track was awarded its own treatment. In addition, each song had page references to either a contemporary *Sacred Harp* edition or to publications out of print. The ASHS did not.

The RFSHS CD is different musically from ASHS in the variety of singing groups, singing styles and rhythmic tempos. Eleven groups are represented, spanning the period 1928 to 1950; they include Daniels-Deason Sacred Harp Singers, Allison's Sacred Harp Singers, Lee Well's Sacred Harp Singers, Alabama Sacred Harp Singers, Dye's Sacred Harp Singers, Denson's Sacred Harp Singers, Fa-So-La Singers, Okeh Atlanta Sacred Harp Singers, Roswell Sacred Harp

Singers, Denson-Parris Sacred Harp Singers, and Pioneer Sacred Harp Singers. Eleven of the nineteen tracks are *a cappella*. Since the Allison recordings included no fusing tunes it was nice to hear a couple on the *Religion is a Fortune* CD, particularly “Odem” on track 16 by the Roswell Sacred Harp Singers. Overall, the quality of sound and performance on each track is very good.

One example, however, strays from the Sacred Harp repertory. This in no way detracted from my overall enjoyment of the CD and it added an interesting contrast. It might be a minor sticking point for a purist. Inasmuch as the Fa-So-La Sacred Harp Singers name fits the specific focus, the song performed by this African-American vocal group did not. “Happy On the Way” (track 9) is what I consider to be a seven shape-note type convention song. Steele mentions this exclusion and noted that he could not find a specific published reference for the music. One can easily tell by listening that it is in the “new book,” “southern gospel” realm of four-part gospel harmony.

One other interesting variant from contemporary Sacred Harp repertory was the Dye’s Sacred Harp Singers performing “Land of Beulah” (track 10) from the 1911 J. L. White edition of *The Sacred Harp*. This song is better known as “Angel Band.” The only discrepancy I found was track 17, defined correctly by Steel in the notes as “Raymond” but mislabeled on penultimate page song list and on the back jewel case panel as “Ragan.”

I personally enjoyed both CDs. The homogeneity of the Allison recordings and the variety in *Religion is a Fortune* make both unique and desirable, especially combined with the informative liner notes. ■

Contributors' Notes

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DEBBIE BOND is the founder and director of the Alabama Blues Project, an educational and cultural organization which promotes the blues as a traditional and contemporary art form. She has an undergraduate degree in cultural studies from Sussex University in England and a Masters in American Studies from the University of Alabama. Bond is a professional musician and her research interests include the history of blues music and musicians in Alabama.

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CHARLES KELLEY is a teacher and anthropologist with close ties to the Hispanic community of Birmingham. A graduate of the University of Alabama-Birmingham, he studied abroad in the Mexican states of Guerrero and Michoacan. He is a filmmaker whose current projects including a film on ghost hunters and one on blues musicians. His interests include volunteering in community outreach programs and video art.

SUSAN THOMAS is a freelance writer, researcher, archivist, and social worker who is currently completing a graduate degree in communication at the University of South Alabama. Her thesis looks at Southern food writing and Southern cuisine. Her interests include historic preservation, foodways, and Southern culture and folklife.

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STEVE GRAUBERGER is a folklife specialist working for the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. He graduated from the University of Hawaii at Manoa with a Masters degree in ethnomusicology. He did thesis research on a student Fulbright Scholarship in the Philippines concerning the organology of Filipino diatonic harp. He currently produces the Traditional Musics of Alabama Millenium CD Series and edits the weekly Alabama Arts Radio Series programs for local public radio WTSU.

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- Sweet is the Day: A Sacred Harp Family Portrait* (\$20 DVD or VHS, please specify) produced by Erin Kellen and directed by Jim Carnes: In this hour-long video members of Wootten family of Sand Mountain speak of their long and deep involvement with shape-note singing and sing more

than a dozen hymns from *The Sacred Harp*. An accompanying booklet provides historical information and further explanation of shape-note traditions.

- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 1 (\$8). Contains essays on the great shoal fish trap, Mobile Bay jubilees, quilting, occupational folklore, more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 2 (\$8). Contains essays on Hank Williams, revival of interest in Indian tribal ancestry, Alabama's outlaws, cultural roles of African-American women in the Wiregrass, and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 3 (\$8). Contains essays on graveshelters, the Skyline Farms, the Piney Woods Regional Folklife Project, geophagy, and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 4 (\$8). Contains essays on contemporary Christmas curb lights in Birmingham, Creek Indian migration narratives, the Ballad of John Catchings and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 5 (\$10). This special thematic issue contains essays on Alabama's blues topics such as Butler "String Beans" May, Ed Bell, "Jaybird" Coleman, Willie King, Vera Ward Hall, and "John Henry."
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 6 (\$8). Contains essays on Alabama's first folklife celebration, "FolkCenter South"; family reunions; pre-Columbian highways; and more.
- Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 7 (\$8). Contains essays on mayhaw gathering, Ruby Pickens Tartt, Black Mardi Gras in Mobile, and more.
- The Traditional Musics of Alabama: A Compilation, Volume 1* (\$12.50). This CD is the first in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. It presents a delightful and well-recorded variety of children's games, work songs, sacred music, fiddle tunes, blues and other forms of music traditional to Alabama collected by musicologists and folklorists over the last 50 years.
- The Traditional Musics of Alabama: A Compilation, Volume 2, African American Seven Shapenote Singing* (\$12.50). This CD is the second in the

Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. It features African American singing conventions in Alabama that practice a unique form of gospel singing using the repertory of southern gospel music known as "seven shape," "new book," or "little book" singing. Many familiar songs are featured, most sung a cappella.

- Traditional Musics of Alabama: Volume 3, 2002 National Sacred Harp Singing Convention* (\$12.50) This CD is the third in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. Recorded June 14th 2002 at the National Sacred Harp Convention at Trinity United Methodist Church, Birmingham, Alabama. Program notes were written by John Bealle.
- Traditional Musics of Alabama: Volume 4, Wiregrass Notes* (\$12.50) This CD is the fourth in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. Recorded in 1980 in Ozark Alabama, by Brenda and Steve McCallum, this is a newly digitized and revised release originally produced by Hank Willett and Doris Dyen as the LP *Wiregrass Notes: Black Sacred Harp Singing From Southeast Alabama*. Included are the songs in the original release plus 13 additional songs taken from original event recordings.
- John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Singers of Bessemer, Alabama*, (\$10). This cassette recording features Jefferson County's oldest African American a cappella gospel group.
- Jesus Hits like an Atom Bomb*, (\$15). CD version of the Sterling Jubilee cassette described above.
- Cornbread Crumbled in Gravy: Historical Alabama Field Recordings from the Byron Arnold Collection of Traditional Tunes* (\$12.50). This box set includes a 64-page booklet and a cassette featuring field recordings of folk, gospel, and parlor tunes recorded in 1947.
- Traditional Music from Alabama's Wiregrass* (\$10). A CD capturing bluegrass, gospel, blues, and Sacred Harp singing as done in Southeast Alabama.
- The Alabama Sampler* (\$12). A CD featuring live performances at City Stages of Alabama blues, bluegrass, Sacred Harp, Gospel, railroad calls,

etc.

- *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition* (\$18 softcover, \$25 hardcover). A book of essays exploring Alabama's oldest hymnal, published in 1841, and enclosed CD with twenty examples of ways in which congregations sing from it.
- *Judge Jackson and the Colored Sacred Harp* (Book/CD, \$25) This 160-page hardbound book and CD by Joe Dan Boyd with an introduction by John Bealle tells the story of Judge Jackson of Ozark, Alabama, who in 1934 published *The Colored Sacred Harp*. It also describes the formation and rise to prominence of the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers, led by Dewey Williams and Japheth Jackson. The enclosed CD contains 2 historic recordings in which Judge Jackson participated and 23 others from *The Colored Sacred Harp* as well as the Cooper version of *The Sacred Harp*.

NON-AFA PRODUCTS OF RELATED INTEREST:

- *Rich Amerson* (\$7 for cassette, \$10 for CD). Folk tales and songs recorded in Livingston, Alabama, in 1961.
- *Possum Up a Gum Stump: Home, Field and Commercial Recordings of Alabama Fiddlers* (\$9 for cassette, \$15 for CD). Contains rare recordings of nineteenth century fiddlers and field recordings of twentieth century fiddlers who played in older styles. Twenty-four-page liner notes.
- *White Spirituals from the Sacred Harp: The Alabama Sacred Harp Convention* (\$10 for cassette, \$15 for CD). Alan Lomax recorded these shape-note songs from the Sacred Harp in 1959 in Fyffe, Alabama.
- *The Colored Sacred Harp* (CD, \$15). The Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers of Ozark, Alabama, sing from Judge Jackson's 1934 compilation of shape-note songs.
- *Desire for Piety* (CD, \$15). Rare example of black Sacred Harp singing from rural southeast Alabama as sung by the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers.

