

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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IN MEMORIAM

Japheth Jackson and Bess Lomax Hawes at the 1988 Dewey Williams Birthday Singing. (Photo by Joey Brackner, courtesy of the Alabama State Council on the Arts)

Editors' Note

Alabama's sacred music is the theme of *Tributaries*, Volume 12. This issue features articles by several former contributors to the journal including JOEY BRACKNER and STEVE GRAUBERGER of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, Florida State University's JERRILYN MCGREGORY, and independent scholars LYNN ABBOTT and DOUG SEROFF. We also welcome first time contributors RANDALL BRADLEY of Baylor University and JONATHON SMITH of Pellissippi State Community College.

Abbott and Seroff offer an examination of the role of public educators in a community's music traditions. Smith takes an in-depth look at Camp Fasola, an innovative grassroots approach to perpetuating Sacred Harp singing. Brackner's paean to Sacred Harper Japheth Jackson of Ozark profiles a mostly unsung hero of African American music. McGregory documents the importance of singing venues in the Wiregrass. Bradley offers us an overview of the sacred music landscape of a south Alabama county. Grauberger's article on Alabama's shape-note gospel contributions is drawn from his recent research which resulted in the documentary CD, *"New Book" Gospel Shape Note Singing*.

THE FOLKLIFE COMMUNITY of Alabama mourns the loss of Bess Lomax Hawes who died November 27, 2009. As a member of the famous Lomax family of folklorists, she was no stranger to Alabama. Bess's work positively affected Alabama. During her tenure at the National Endowment for the Arts, she strove to establish a network of "state folklorists." During the 1970s and 1980s, at the behest of Hank Willett, Alabama's first public folklorist, she visited the state frequently. Bess later lent her advice towards the establishment of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture—the folklife division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

During the past few years, we have mourned the passing of several significant Alabama folk artists. This year, we lost Henry Japheth Jackson, the last remain-

ing singing master of the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers. His death occurred as we were compiling this issue. Because the article in this issue honors his life and accomplishments, we omitted the obituary that we typically run when we have lost a past recipient of the Alabama Folk Heritage Award.

We also want to note the “retirement” of Joyce Cauthen, the longtime executive director of the Alabama Folklife Association. We expect Joyce to remain an active force in the Association and to become a contributor to this journal.

We appreciate the many suggestions by AFA members and others and wish to acknowledge the annual copyediting and design efforts of Randall Williams. Please send your suggestions, comments, and contributions for future issues.

ALABAMAFOLKLIFE.ORG OFFERS AN easy way to purchase AFA documentary products, join the AFA, and order current and past issues of *Tributaries*. The website also has updates on the AFA annual gathering, current projects and news about the biennial Alabama Community Scholars Institute. Data forms for fieldwork can be found under the “Resources” section of the website. For your convenience, we have also included information about the Alabama Folklife Association and its documentary products at the back of this issue. The AFA now has a page on Facebook as well, offering updates on folklife events around the state.

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Roots of Birmingham's Gospel Quartet Training Culture: Spiritual Singing at Industrial High School

Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff

Jefferson County, Alabama, incorporating the city of Birmingham and the neighboring towns of Bessemer and Fairfield, was a cradle of black gospel quartet singing. Grassroots music pedagogy, presided over by community-based trainers, was the critical factor behind the intense outbreak of religious quartet singing which took place there after World War I. This traditional quartet instruction was directly connected to modes of formal music education practiced in segregated Southern public schools.

Early in the twentieth century, voice culture was a routine part of primary and secondary school curricula in many parts of the South. African American teachers wedded lessons in the formalities of harmony singing to the Negro spirituals, and staged musicales and pageants in which spiritual singing was a feature. In Birmingham, Alabama, dynamic, enlivening music education took place at Industrial High School.

Industrial High was Birmingham's first African American four-year high school. It was founded in 1900 by an African American, Arthur Harold Parker, who served as its principal for the next forty years.¹ Principal Parker cultivated an educational environment conducive to the development of outstanding vocal and instrumental music, both among his students and in Birmingham's black community. Thousands of young people received foundational training in harmony singing at Industrial High School, and many more nonstudents were touched by "Community Sings" held in the school auditorium.

The daily *Birmingham News* took note of Parker's far-seeing attitudes re-

garding the value of racial folk music as early as 1903, when it reported that during a visit from the superintendent of public schools, “Principal Parker marshaled the entire school to the largest room” for an informal demonstration of unaccompanied vocal music.

It was natural music sung by note and thoroughly melodious. A number of old plantation songs were rendered to the delight of the visitors. It appears that the idea which has taken hold upon many latter day Negroes of eschewing the old time Negro songs has found no lodging place with the instructors of this school, who insist that the pupils, while they can also sing popular and up-to-date selections, shall not forget the old plantation songs.²

In 1914 Industrial High School hosted a “Summer School for Negro Teachers” that included a course titled “Music: Vocal, including Public School Methods of Teaching Plantation Melodies.”³ Parker had an expansive, even visionary concept of black musical traditions; “plantation melodies,” especially Negro spirituals, were central to his efforts to elevate the musical heritage through race pride and education. In later years he was able to claim:

The singing of the Negro spirituals by our pupils has brought national fame and the pupils have given coast-to-coast broadcasts of this typical American music . . . [M]usic has played a large part in building commencement programs. For June 1934, the theme was “Some Achievements of the ‘American Negro’”; a whole section of the program was devoted to Negro music. Various types of music, including the “St. Louis Blues,” were sung by the class, and a critical analysis was given of each type . . . In order to show the phases of dramatics taught in the school, the program for January 1932 was made up of a pageant, a one act play and, believe it or not, a miniature blackface minstrel show.⁴

Industrial High School’s commitment to perpetuating Negro spirituals was eloquently expressed in a paper read at commencement exercises in 1914 by R. Ernestine Diffay, one of the school’s locally celebrated student-singers:

When the High School began its work in music no Negro melodies were

sung in the churches of our city and some unfavorable comments were made upon the constant placing of [Negro] melodies on the school program, both at the musicales and at the commencement exercises. But these dear old songs have proven irresistible and every objection has hushed. In hours of trial and temptation what balm can heal so well as,

“Lord, I Want to be a Christian.”

When our daily burdens grow heavy and we begin to falter, how much strength we can gather from just a little measure of,

“Lord, Until I Reach My Home.”

These melodies will live as long as there is human experience; they were born out of the tragic period of our race's history and they are filled with inspiration . . .

Today, all the churches in the city use these songs and the choir of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which is directed by a High School graduate and has a number of high school graduates and pupils in it, has established in Birmingham an enviable record, singing the songs of our fathers. Hundreds of white and colored citizens gather to hear them whenever they announce a sacred concert.

Our school has made a constant fight against ragtime music and the suggestive and oftentimes openly coarse popular song. No such music is permitted at any time or on any program.

Some of the best soloists of the city were discovered while students of the High School. While we have no [official] teacher of voice culture, they have developed greatly under the limited work in music which we get . . .

Too, our school has been called upon from time to time, for solos and choruses at all kinds of gatherings, festivals, conventions, concerts, weddings, and funerals. There are today seventy-five High School boys and girls singing in the church choirs of Birmingham.

We have sung for some of the most prominent white people of our city. Some of the most distinguished visitors have been to our school to hear our melodies, Ex-President Roosevelt stopped one day at our school also Jacob Riis, the noted writer and reformer, A. E. Winship, Editor of the Journal of Education of Boston; Assistant Superintendent Shoup of the Chicago Public Schools, E. O. Excell, famous singer and writer of anthems, and many others.

Honored as we feel by the plaudits of these distinguished people, we prize our melodies for a deeper reason. They are part of our life and history as a race and our contribution to the world of music. They are evidences of our power to create a music of our own, based on our experience and reflecting our ideals.⁵

The story of Industrial High School's early contributions to Birmingham's black vocal harmony heritage can be partially reconstructed from period sources. The *Industrial High School Record* was a well-produced high school newspaper by any standard. Its columns harbor a wealth of information about the school's remarkable faculty of African American music educators, including Orlean Kennedy, Julia and Malachi Wilkerson, and Harold McCoo.⁶

Orlean D. Kennedy was born in Alabama in 1868. She was teaching in the public schools of Birmingham as early as 1887.⁷ She joined the staff of Industrial High in 1902, and, as Principal Parker recalled, "took over the girls and interested them in sewing, cooking and assembly singing."⁸ Miss Kennedy taught domestic arts and agriculture and staged ambitious musical-dramatic presentations. In 1922 she directed the "twenty-first annual musicale of the Industrial high school . . . held at the Jefferson theater."⁹ In 1923 the *Industrial High School Record* noted, "Miss Kennedy trains more than a hundred boys and girls for the Annual Musical and arranges choruses for all occasions."¹⁰ Another source informed that, "The funds realized from the musicales have been used to purchase much of the equipment of the school."¹¹

In 1937 Kennedy marked her "golden anniversary . . . as a teacher in the city school system."¹² On December 4, 1945, the "retired and beloved" Miss Orlean D. Kennedy died in a fire at her Birmingham home.¹³

Jefferson County's community-based quartet master trainer Charles Bridges was a gospel music pioneer. Bridges organized the Birmingham Jubilee Singers around 1925, igniting a golden age of community quartet singing. In the 1920s and 1930s, he trained many singing groups in the African American neighborhoods of Jefferson County. Bridges acknowledged the musical influence of Industrial High School staff members Malachi Wilkerson and his wife Julia Mae Kennedy Wilkerson. In a 1978 interview, Bridges recalled: "Mrs. Julia Wilkerson, she taken an interest in my voice and instructed me . . . And Professor Wilkerson; he was Mrs. Wilkerson's husband."¹⁴

Born in Meridian, Mississippi, in 1887 or 1888, Julia Mae Kennedy was raised in Birmingham and educated at Industrial High.¹⁵ By 1918 she had married Malachi Wilkerson; and in that year, at Industrial High School's "first Sunday concert," she was the only vocal soloist on a program that included the school band, the glee club, and the chorus, which sang two different groups of "Plantation Melodies."¹⁶

Her marriage to Malachi Wilkerson seems to have dissolved around 1922, when she left Birmingham with the Williams Jubilee Singers.¹⁷ Reverting to her maiden name, Julia Mae Kennedy continued to travel with this famous professional troupe for three or four years before joining another celebrated company, Mason's Jubilee Singers.¹⁸ In 1931 she began a long and distinguished career as minister of music at the First Church of Deliverance in Chicago, a Spiritual Church of Christ, where the Reverend Clarence H. Cobbs was pastor.¹⁹ In that capacity, she "catapulted [the] radio choir to national and international fame" via Reverend Cobb's "fiery broadcasts . . . probably the most famous in gospel."²⁰ She was still directing the choir of the First Church of Deliverance in 1976, when a critic praised her for knowing "exactly where the points of release belong. The final 'amen' rattles the loudspeakers."²¹ Julia Mae Kennedy died in Chicago in 1981.²²

Julia Mae Kennedy and Charles Bridges were perhaps the most notable vocalists associated with Industrial High School. The school's greatest singing instructor was Malachi Wilkerson. Born in Birmingham on January 8, 1884, he was a member of the first graduating class of Industrial High School in 1904. At commencement exercises, Wilkerson read a paper titled "A Review of Our School"; and a chorus sang selections including Rossini's "Inflammatus," Sullivan's "The Lost Chord," and the spirituals "What Kind O' Shoes You Goin' To Wear" and "Lord I Want To Be A Christian."²³

Wilkerson took college courses at Alabama A. & M. College in Huntsville and at Tuskegee Institute.²⁴ Returning to Birmingham, he joined the faculty of Industrial High School by the fall of 1911, heading the manual training department and teaching music.²⁵ He also served as chorister at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Wilkerson was Industrial High School's most effective champion of spiritual singing: "The student body of the school is greatly indebted to Prof. Wilkerson, for it was he who gave the foundation in singing



FIGURE 1

Photo of Malachi Wilkerson, *Industrial High School Record*, April 30, 1935. (Courtesy of the Birmingham Board of Education)

Negro Spirituals.”²⁶

During his lengthy tenure at Industrial High, Wilkerson directed a succession of choral groups, supervised the school-sponsored “Community Sings,” and, perhaps most importantly, led the singing exercises at the morning assembly, or “auditorium period.” An article in the May 1923 *Industrial High School Record* said, “Prof. Wilkerson is getting results from the work he is doing at the auditorium period. The students sit according to the voice they sing, and each of the four parts may be clearly distinguished. All of the jubilee songs are taught and sung in perfect harmony.” In 1931 a student reporter assessed Wilkerson’s effect on morning assembly: “He conducts

our Auditorium singing and places special emphasis upon the Spirituals. The thing that mystifies me so, is how he can teach so many students within the short time that he does and teaching all the parts, singing each part accurately himself.”²⁷

After sitting in on a morning assembly in 1930, a columnist for the daily *Birmingham Age-Herald* filed this report:

They untwist them in chapel every morning at the Birmingham Industrial

High School when the 2,500 Negro boys and girls of this school sing their “spirituals” under W. [sic] L. Wilkerson’s lilting leadership. There is nothing hidden of the soul for harmony which lives in their race. It pours from their throats, floods their faces, swells the vast Chapel auditorium with a mighty volume and vitality of sound. If station WAPI doesn’t some day arrange a broadcast of this unique and inspiring feature of Alabama life it will be overlooking a wonderful part of the “Voice of Alabama.”²⁸

Wilkerson’s popular I.H.S. Male Glee Club performed at school concerts and other occasions, often in combination with Prof. John T. “Fess” Whately’s I.H.S. Band, which was a starting place for many jazz musicians.²⁹ At the Annual Band and Glee Club Concert given March 31, 1925, Wilkerson’s Male Glee Club performed a rendition of “Lullaby” in which Alex Baker “sang the ‘Yodel’ and was encored several times.”³⁰ This “Lullaby” was likely the popular yodeling song “Sleep, Baby, Sleep,” which has an especially rich history in Birmingham.³¹ Other titles sung by Wilkerson’s I.H.S. Male Glee Club of 1922–1930 included: “Yonder Comes My Lord,” “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” “Down By The Riverside,” “Every Time I Feel The Spirit,” “Seek and Ye Shall Find,” “There Was A Tack,” “Good Lord I Done Done,” “Who Built the Ark,” “Wade in the Water,” “Don’t You Let Nobody Turn You Round,” “Hallalu,” “Steal Away,” “What Kind of Shoes You Goin’ to Wear,” “It’s Me” [“Standing in the Need of Prayer”], “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” “Sweet Adeline,” “Angeline,” “When the Years Roll By” and “Wasn’t That a Wide River.”³²

By the spring of 1930 Wilkerson’s I.H.S. Male Glee Club had ventured out to perform at Birmingham’s Thomas Jefferson and Bankhead hotels.³³ That fall they sang at the white high school in nearby Ensley, and two of the singers filed reports in the *Record*. According to Richard Lumpkin, “The club consists of about twelve or fifteen boys, all of whom are singers in our school. Our master leader, as I might say, is none other than our well-known Mr. M. L. Wilkerson and through him we accomplish very much.”³⁴ Fellow singer Judge Taylor provided details of the visit:

The I.H.S. Glee Club had the pleasure of singing at the Ensley High School,

Thursday, Oct. 9. We left our school at 20 minutes to 9 o'clock and arrived in Ensley at 9:15, just in time for the assembly.

We were introduced to the student body by the Principal. Our first selection was "Wasn't That A Wide River." We received a hearty applause from the students. We sang ten selections and for encore we sang three other selections.

At second assembly we sang eleven selections and two encores. Some of the most outstanding songs were "Water Boy," "Little Boy Blue," "Hand Me Down the Silver Trumpet Gabriel," "Live a Humble," "De Bell Done Rung," and others.

We felt the spirit of I.H.S. was with us. We sang these songs without any mistakes.³⁵

At the end of 1930, a student reporter called attention to Wilkerson's new Girls' Glee Club: "The club consists of about twelve girls all of whom are seniors. To my mind the Girls' Glee Club is very important because it's the first Girls' Glee Club in I.H.S."³⁶

There is no evidence of an "official" quartet at Industrial High School during the Wilkerson years. Wilkerson mainly trained large choruses; but by his effective methods, he taught the basic principles of four-part harmony construction and vocal technique to two generations of Industrial High students. Wilkerson's tutelage also instilled a deeper appreciation of the Negro spiritual. The full extent of his influence on Charles Bridges is not known, but there are other indications of Wilkerson's stamp on future quartet singers in Jefferson County and beyond.

In the summer of 1933 the *Industrial High School Record* notified that: "James Lacey, the only boy in the school who can imitate Mr. Wilkerson in the leadership of spirituals is being sent out too, and we hope that someday, when he has prepared himself thoroughly, he will come back and assist Mr. Wilkerson in his great task. Lacey has also won fame as one of the members of the Pullman Quartet that sings over station WKBC."³⁷ Later that year there was news of three I.H.S. graduates who had joined the U.S. Navy and organized a "Navy Quartet," which appeared on a musical program at Municipal Auditorium in Boston, Massachusetts:

They were highly praised by the Commander, and many newspapers carried favorable reports on their ability to sing.

These boys got their experience in singing under the direction of Prof. Wilkerson at Industrial High School, while singing in the school glee club.”³⁸

Numerous black stage luminaries visited Industrial High School during A. H. Parker’s years as principal, Malachi Wilkerson’s tenure as choral music director, and “Fess” Whatley’s reign as band director. These included film and vaudeville celebrity Frederick “Sunshine Sammy” Morrison; *Green Pastures* stage stars Richard B. Harrison and Charles Winter Wood; and road show royalty Salem Tutt Whitney, Homer Tutt, and the Whitman Sisters.³⁹ On April 17, 1931, W. C. Handy addressed the Industrial High School student body “as the guest of our band instructor and conductor, Prof. J. T. Whatley. He attended our assembly period [and] made a brief address . . . [The] Industrial High School Band was seated on the stage and played ‘St. Louis Blues’ and ‘Memphis Blues’ as a tribute to Prof. Handy.”⁴⁰

The Industrial High School auditorium also attracted members of the famous Tuskegee Institute Quartet, who were present for the morning exercises on February 29, 1923.⁴¹ On January 20, 1927, the Rust College Quartet of Holly Springs, Mississippi, paid a visit and sang two selections: “The first was a spiritual, the second a parody on ‘Rigoletto.’ This was especially enjoyed. The words were humorous but in the singing of them, they showed they had mastered the musical score of that pleasing and difficult opera.”⁴² Celebrated African American baritone Lawrence Tibbett attended exercises in the Industrial High School Auditorium in February 1933, and was moved by the singing Wilkerson obtained from his students. Tibbett was quoted in the *Birmingham Age-Herald*:

“The greatest experience I have ever had.” That is what Lawrence Tibbett, the singer, said after a visit Friday to the Negro Industrial High School where he had heard a chorus of 1,800 Negro youths and their teachers sing a number of spirituals.

“I have never,” Tibbett insisted, his blue eyes, usually so friendly, intense in their earnestness, “heard music that thrilled me more. Why, when they asked

me to sing something for them, I could hardly respond for the emotions that choked in my throat.

“You may talk of voice training, of purity of tone, of technique all you will, but none of it can equal the fervor and enthusiasm of those Negro boys and girls. To listen to them sing the old Negro spirituals was the outstanding emotional experience of my life, and because of it I shall never forget Birmingham . . .”

The Negroes, led by M. L. Wilkerson, director of auditorium singing at the school, opened up with “Ain’t That Good News” and continued with “What Kind of Shoes You Gonna Wear?,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Hallelujah,” and the spiritual which is the basis of the great scene in “Emperor Jones,” “Standing in the Need of Prayer.”

Mr. Tibbett sang “On the Road to Mandalay” for the Negroes, but he remarked that nothing he could do would repay them for the experience that had been his.⁴³

When Tibbett repeated his praises several months later, the *Industrial High School Record* took note: “Our Negro Spirituals are getting popular. Did you read that article that Lawrence Tibbett wrote about our school in the ‘American Magazine?’ The article stated that it was the best singing that he had ever heard, of that type . . . Mr. Wilkerson is getting us in trim for more visitors.”⁴⁴

Malachi Wilkerson played a significant role in the high school’s musical outreach into the Birmingham community as song director of the school’s regularly held “Community Sings.” The *Industrial High School Record* of November 1924 reported:

The Community Sing held at the Industrial High School on the first and third Sundays in each month have proven to be very popular. The first Sing was held October 19 and there were more than eight hundred in attendance. Each of the succeeding Sings have shown increase. It is a delight to know that so many men, young and old, are finding pleasure in attending. Mr. [M.] L. Wilkerson, the Song Director, is planning special features for the men.

The programs have been well selected. Vocal and instrumental numbers have been given by the best local talent . . .

A special invitation is extended to all to attend the Community Sing . . . The

program begins promptly at 3:30 and lasts one hour.”⁴⁵

In November 1925, the *Industrial High School Record* provided a detailed description of the first Community Sing of the new school year:

More than a thousand attended. This attendance is . . . proof conclusive that the people of our city want the Sing. It affords the people of Birmingham an enjoyable entertainment, and a pleasant way to spend the Sunday afternoons.

In the words of one of our instructors the Sing was simply “perfect.” Helping to make the Sing perfect was the lovely, rich-toned Conover Baby Grand Piano that has been purchased by our school and graced our stage and was used for the first time at Sunday’s gathering. The following excellent program was rendered:

Community Song led by Mr. M. L. Wilkerson; Invocation; “The National Emblem” by I.H.S. Band, Mr. J. T. Whatley Director; Selection, I.H.S. Choir; Vocal Solo, Mr. Edward Castleberry; Piano Solo, “Imaginary Ballet No. 2” (S. Coleridge Taylor) by Miss Carmelita Weaver; Community Song led by Mr. M. L. Wilkerson.

Vocal Solo “Sorter Miss You” (Clay Smith) by Miss Maggie Smart; Selection from “Prince Charming,” I.H.S. Band; Selection, I.H.S. Choir; Piano Solo, “Moonlight Sonata” (Mendelssohn) by Mr. R. A. Walls; Community Song, led by Mr. M. L. Wilkerson; Vocal Solo, “Gypsy Love Song,” Miss Vernon Newsome; Selection, Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Quartette; Vocal Solo, “Carissima,” Miss Eloise Pulliam; “The Elks March,” I.H.S. Band.

Principal Parker stated to the audience that the Community Sing belongs to the people of Birmingham and that they will continue as long as the people show their appreciation by such large attendance . . . He also asked those present to hand to members of the Committee the names and addresses of any persons they may know who are singers or who play any instrument.⁴⁶

Malachi Wilkerson’s productive work was cut short in the early part of 1934, when illness forced him to leave his post. He died March 28, 1935. Funeral services were held in the Industrial High School Auditorium, where he had done so much good work:

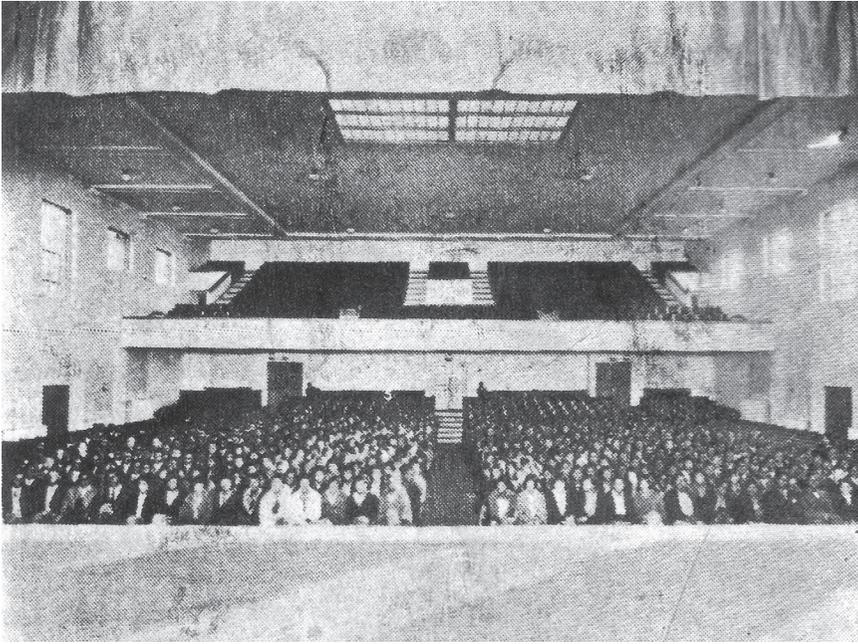


FIGURE 2

I.H.S. Auditorium, "The Industrial High School A Brief History," p. 10. (Courtesy of the Birmingham Board of Education)

An impressive funeral service was rendered. High points in the life of Mr. Wilkerson were given by Dr. C. B. Glenn, Superintendent of Birmingham Public Schools, Dr. C. A. Brown, Associate Superintendent of Schools, and Dr. A. H. Parker, Principal of Industrial High School. All regarded Prof. Wilkerson as one of the most helpful and practical men on the Industrial High School faculty . . . Music was rendered by the Industrial High School a Capella Choir under the direction of Mr. McCoo, and by Sixteenth Street Bapt. Church Choir . . . Interment was at Mason City Cemetery..

Prof. Wilkerson was a favorite throughout Birmingham and Alabama. He was a singer of rare quality, directed choruses in Birmingham, and was chorister of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.⁴⁷

In 1939 a memorial service was held at Mixon Temple in Birmingham,

conducted by “the Wilkerson Choral singers . . . in honor of the late Malachi Wilkerson, former instructor at Parker high school [i.e., I.H.S.] who trained them, and brought them national recognition . . . These singers heard on the WSGN radio programs for a number of weeks, sang for the opening of the Community Chest drive over this station.”⁴⁸

Harold W. McCoo arrived at Industrial High at the start of the 1934–1935 school year and took up the musical mission Wilkerson had ably established. McCoo immediately organized an octet of senior boys and presented them in the school auditorium: “Mr. McCoo has done wonders the few weeks that school has been in session. The boys sang, ‘You Better Mind’ and ‘Little Liza, I Love You,’ and how we enjoyed their singing. The pupils who compose the Octet are first tenors, Joe Washington, Eugene Routen; second tenors, Sylvester Purifoy; baritones, Sam Lowe, Leo Jackson; basses, B. J. Anderson, William Bethune.”⁴⁹ Over the course of the school year, the Senior Octet made several local radio broadcasts.⁵⁰

McCoo also assumed direction of the school’s Community Sings. In December 1934 it was reported: “Attendance at the two Community Sings this year has been very good, the auditorium being seated to capacity both times . . . Special emphasis is being placed on real community singing this year; Mr. McCoo is teaching the audience part-singing at each program.”⁵¹

After McCoo came to Industrial High, a popular new music course was added to the curriculum, which resulted in the organization of an A Cappella Choir of 120 boys and girls. This choir performed at school assemblies and Community Sings. Their repertoire favored spirituals and gospel songs; it included “New Born Baby,” “Oh! Mary,” “Mount Zion,” “Wade in the Water,” “Go Down Moses,” “Workin’ So Hard,” “Stand the Storm,” “Sinner Please Don’t Let This Harvest Pass,” “Lord, Help the Poor and Needy,” and “Danse Africaine.”⁵²

McCoo had come to Industrial High following two years teaching at Dunbar High School in Bessemer. He was an Illinois native and a 1931 graduate of Fisk University, where he sang second tenor with the University Male Glee Club under John Work III. In 1929–1930 he made a singing tour with a male octet of Fisk Singers under Work.⁵³

Work visited Industrial High School in May 1935 as McCoo’s guest “on the

occasion of the Music Festival which was given by the students of the Industrial High School” at Legion Field in Birmingham. An advance notice predicted: “When Harold White McCoo raises his baton, the afternoon of Sunday, May 19 over 3,000 voices in Mass Chorus, from Industrial High School . . . this young artist will have the honor of directing the largest and most stupendous music feature that Birmingham has ever seen . . . In accuracy of attack and release, shading, precision, sweetness, softly and in full tone, they are distinguished by their artistic interpretation of Negro Folk Music.”⁵⁴

A black press reviewer confirmed that:

All Birmingham was agog over hearing the 3,000 high school trained singers under the direction of Prof. Harold McCoo . . . Over 10,000 persons were thrilled by the execution of the high school singers whom he has only had under his training for six months...

Prof. John W. Work, director and composer of Fisk University, was the honored guest of the occasion . . . Several of Mr. Work’s compositions were sung. Several numbers, results of collaboration between Mr. Work and Mr. McCoo, and some of Mr. McCoo’s own compositions were programmed.⁵⁵

Work also addressed the Industrial High School student body during their assembly period. He spoke “on the universality of the Spiritual, and paid a compliment to Mr. McCoo by saying that he was one of the finest young men that he has ever known at Fisk University in addition to being a fine musician.”⁵⁶

McCoo left Industrial High School after the 1934–1935 school year, to head the Music Department and direct the A Capella Choir at Alabama State Teachers College.⁵⁷ In 1937 he brought the choir to Birmingham: “The A Capella Choir of State Teachers College at Montgomery scored a complete success in its recital at Industrial High School . . . Harold McCoo, director, with his ‘personality plus’ was most graciously received. Outstanding among the many excellent numbers were: ‘Danse Africaine’ by the choir, ‘Last Night’ by the women’s sextet, ‘Po Ol Lazrus’ by the male glee club and ‘City Called Heaven’ by Mabel Clark, soprano.”⁵⁸ McCoo went on to a lengthy career in music education.⁵⁹ He died in Philadelphia in 1995, at age 86.⁶⁰

In 1937, three thousand students were enrolled at Industrial High, making it “the largest high school for Negroes in the world.”⁶¹ When Arthur H. Parker retired that year, the school was renamed Parker High. It is still in operation at 500 Eighth Avenue North, in Birmingham. ■

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Parker High School Librarian Rosemary Thomas for her time and assistance. Thanks to Emanuel Ford for bringing our attention to the existence of the *Industrial High School Record*. Thanks to Ray Funk for research assistance and to Joey Brackner for practical aid and encouragement.

Notes

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- 6 Other useful references appeared in correspondent Katherine Lambert’s 1920s–1930s “Birmingham News” column in the *Chicago Defender*; and Principal A. H. Parker’s 1933 autobiography, *A Dream That Came True*, which was originally serialized in late-1920s editions of the *Industrial High School Record*.
- 7 Birmingham City Directories 1888–1890; United States Federal Census Records, 1900, 1910, and 1920 (Ancestry.com); “Birmingham Woman Completes 50 Years Of Teaching Three ‘R’s,”” *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 27, 1937; Parker, *A Dream That Came True*, p. 11.
- 8 Parker, *A Dream That Came True*, p. 36.
- 9 Katherine K. Lambert, “Birmingham, Ala.,” *Chicago Defender*, June 3, 1922.
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- 12 “Birmingham Woman Completes 50 Years Of Teaching Three ‘R’s,”” *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 27, 1937; “Teacher Honored By Birmingham Schools,” *Chicago Defender*, November 27, 1937; “School Honors Miss Kennedy,” *Industrial High School Record*, vol. 18, no. 2 (December 17, 1937).

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- 19 "Card of Thanks," *Chicago Defender*, December 1971 (ProQuest Black Studies Center).
- 20 "1st Deliverance Musical salutes Julia M. Kennedy's service years," *Chicago Defender*, August 21, 1971 (ProQuest, Black Studies Center); Tony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound*, 1971 (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985), p. 11.
- 21 Thomas Willis, "Chicago: Gospel is the kingdom and the glory," *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1976 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers).
- 22 "Mrs. Julia Mae Kennedy," *Chicago Tribune*, May 8, 1981 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers).
- 23 Parker, *A Dream That Came True*, pp. 42–43.
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- 43 "Tibbett Says Songs By Negroes Here His Greatest Experience," *Industrial High School Record*, vol. 13, no. 3 (March 1933), reprinted from *Birmingham Age-Herald*, Feb. 25, 1933.
- 44 Alma Stitt, "Auditorium Review," *Industrial High School Record*, vol. 14, no. 1 (October 1933).

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- 46 "Thirteenth Community Sing Draws Large Crowd," *Industrial High School Record*, vol. 6, no. 1 (November 1925).
- 47 Maddox, "Birmingham Public Schools Mourn Loss of Mr. Wilkerson."
- 48 "Birmingham News," *Chicago Defender*, November 18, 1939.
- 49 "Auditorium Review," *Industrial High School Record*, vol. 15, no. 1 (October 1934). One name is missing from the octet, presumably a second tenor. Baritone singer Sam Lowe is probably the same Sammy Lowe who played trumpet in the band under "Fess" Whatley, graduated I.H.S. in 1935 ("Around The World With Our Alumni," *Industrial High School Record*, vol. 18, no. 2 [December 17, 1937]), and went on to a highly successful career as a player, composer, and arranger.
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- 56 "Fisk University Professor at Assembly Period," *Industrial High School Record*, vol. 15, no. 6 (May 30, 1935).
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- 59 A note in the August 20, 1938, edition of the *Chicago Defender* advised that McCoo had taken charge of the music department at Bethune-Cookman College in Florida. The February 1943 edition of *Fisk News* informed that he was currently

serving as Director of Music and Audio-Visual Education for the City Missionary Society of Hartford, Connecticut, and was State Field Worker for the Connecticut Conference of Congregational and Christian Churches.

60 Social Security Death Index (Ancestry.com).

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As late as 1958, the school had the largest enrollment and faculty of the high schools for Negroes, listed in the report of Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Thus, on the basis of the foregoing fact, it would appear that this school had maintained its status as the largest Negro high school in the world . . .

From 1904, when the first class of 15 students graduated, down through May 1959, a total of 18,599 students had been awarded the high school diploma from Parker High School.

See also A. H. Parker, "Negro Pupils Plan Programs," *Nation's Schools*, vol. 23, no. 4 (April 1939).

Camp Fasola: Teaching “Tradition”

Jonathon M. Smith

Each summer since 2003, people from across the country and as far away as Europe have convened near Anniston, Alabama, for a unique musical and cultural event called Camp Fasola. Sacred Harp singers of all ages and backgrounds come to learn more about the traditional music form, which has filled churches and halls throughout the Southeast with its strident, open harmonies, and bold, unaccompanied, full-voiced sound. This indigenous musical style dates back to the Colonial era and is preserved most famously in *The Sacred Harp*, a songbook that has been in print continuously since its first compilation in 1844 by Georgians B. F. White and E. J. King. The book maintains an antiquated but ingenious style of musical notation that allows singers to sight-read their parts with remarkable facility. Sacred Harp singing uses four shaped note-heads that correspond to the notes of the scale. Unlike the later and more familiar seven-shape notation, Sacred Harp notes repeat themselves as they ascend the staff. Before singing the words, the singers always sound out the sight-read syllables, or solfege, to their respective parts. A major scale in any key is “fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi, fa.” Writers in the early twentieth century sometimes referred to Sacred Harp music as “fasola singing,” hence the name of the camp.

It has been said that in parts of Georgia and Alabama *The Sacred Harp* was once rivaled only by the Bible in popularity (Miller, 2008). Though the numbers are not nearly what they were a century ago, singers still meet nearly every weekend of the year somewhere in the region for all-day singings. In the past several decades, their ranks have been swelled by singers throughout the United States who have discovered Sacred Harp music and who hold their own singing conventions in nearly every state. Though Camp Fasola was initially

conceived as a way of training younger singers in the South, it has become a national phenomenon, promoting a particular interpretation of the Sacred Harp tradition. A unique musical institution, Camp Fasola allows long-time singers with a great investment in Sacred Harp singing to represent their own understanding of the traditions, practices, and styles associated with the music.

Sacred Harp Singing Schools

Although singing schools are commonly associated with *The Sacred Harp* and other shape-note hymnals of the early to mid nineteenth century, the singing school as a musical institution actually predates this era by more than half a century. In mid-eighteenth century New England, singing masters traveled between towns, holding singing schools and selling their tunebooks. Around 1800 William Smith and William Little invented shaped notes to simplify note reading (Cobb, 1978). These shapes corresponded to the four-syllable solfege system that singing school teachers were already using, but they worked as a mnemonic device to help singers recognize intervals between pitches with ease. As the popularity of shape-note hymnals grew in the Southern United States, changing trends in hymnody and church music in New England led to the disappearance of shape-note books, the musical styles associated with them, and the itinerant singing masters who promoted them by the mid nineteenth century (Jackson, 1965).

In the Southeast, however, shape-note singing school teachers continued their work throughout that era and right up to the present. By around 1860, nearly all of the shape-note hymnals published in the South had switched to the new seven-shape system (Jackson, 1965). Seven-shape notation was adopted by numerous gospel composers in the early twentieth century and remains very popular throughout the South; countless paperback gospel books, as well as a number of hymnals used by major denominations, are still printed in seven shapes. Most shape-note singing schools now use the seven-shape books and focus on gospel music, usually with piano accompaniment (Montell, 1991).

From the mid nineteenth century on, however, a conservative group of singers continued to use the four-shape system, favoring the older styles of music associated with it. In particular, they resisted the use of musical instruments and continued to sing unaccompanied long after pianos and organs

had become widespread in Southern churches. These singers use any of several editions of *The Sacred Harp*, which was originally published in 1844, but has been revised several times subsequently. The version stylistically closest to the original, the Denson edition, is still published by the Sacred Harp Publishing Company of Bremen, Georgia.¹ The latest version includes numerous songs from the original, along with newer compositions written in nearly every subsequent decade, right up to the date of its publication in 1991. *The Sacred Harp* remains in widespread use throughout the South; since around 1970, it has spread throughout the United States and even in the United Kingdom as new singers have discovered its unique music and traditions.

Sacred Harp singing schools were based on their New England predecessors. A group of singers would ask a respected singer to teach for as long as twenty days; sometimes they would draw from their own community, but often, they would invite a well-known teacher from outside their area. Locals would provide his room and board, as well as a monetary fee (Cobb, 1978). Among Sacred Harp singing school teachers, brothers Thomas J. and Seaborn M. Denson, both of whom were instrumental in producing the edition of the hymnal that bears their name, were among the most famous. During the early twentieth century, they traveled extensively, teaching singing schools throughout the South. Seaborn Denson taught for as many as eighty days a year, with classes of twenty-five to one hundred students. George Pullen Jackson estimated that Denson taught between eight thousand and twelve thousand singers over the course of his life (Jackson, 1965). Singing schools were important community events, and such prolific teachers as the Densons became celebrities in the rural South. Singing school protocol left a lasting mark on the practice of Sacred Harp singing, especially in the singers' parlance. At current Sacred Harp conventions, the assembled singers are still referred to as a "class." Each member of the class is called, one at a time, to stand in the center of the square and conduct one or more songs, called a "lesson."

During the twentieth century, the popularity of Southern singing schools gradually waned. Despite the renewed nationwide interest in shape-note singing since the 1960s, regular singing schools, which once convened for weeks at a time, now seldom meet more than one or two evenings a few times a year (Cobb, 1978). Perhaps the explanation is that American culture has shifted to a

much busier lifestyle and commitments to lengthy singing schools are difficult, especially for youth involved in any number of extracurricular activities. As David Ivey, director of Camp Fasola, noted, "The old way of having one- or two-week singing schools is just not practical in today's world." Although extended singing schools are now uncommon, abbreviated versions are frequently offered before annual singings. In regions outside the South, where many of the participants have relatively little experience singing shape-note music, organizers often hold a singing school prior to a major convention. Sometimes, they invite traditional singers from the South to conduct the school. From the 1970s to the 1990s, Hugh McGraw, then general secretary of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, traveled around the nation helping to establish singings by teaching singing schools. Beginning in 2007, longtime singers in the New York City area began bringing respected Southern singers to lead a singing school on the night before their annual singing. In the past three years, they have sponsored schools by three different teachers from Georgia and Alabama.

Singing schools are also conducted throughout the South, even where the preponderance of attendees might be lifelong singers. David Ivey has established a singing school at Liberty Baptist Church in Henagar, Alabama, on the first Sunday in January, just before a relatively informal night singing. Even though many of the singers at Liberty Baptist, one of the few churches that still use *The Sacred Harp* hymnal for services, have sung this music all their lives, Ivey felt that a singing school would strengthen the singing and help younger people, as well as those who are less conversant with the music. And, as he said, enjoining even those who have much of the book memorized, "a little extra learning never hurts."

At most singing schools, students learn the basics of reading shape notes, deciphering rhythms and time signatures, and the practice of conducting or "leading a lesson." Although these short singing schools have had an important impact on Sacred Harp singing, they have significant limitations. The time constraints usually give sufficient space for only a brief overview of the rudiments. In addition, the format provides little opportunity for individual coaching from the singing school teacher. The lack of more in-depth instruction troubled some singers, who wondered how new generations of singers

would be able to master Sacred Harp music with a complete knowledge of the rudiments if they never had the opportunity to attend the lengthy singing schools they remembered from their youth.

A Sacred Harp Singing Camp

Two founding members of the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association, lifelong Alabama singers David Ivey, of Huntsville, and Jeff Sheppard, of Anniston, took the initiative to create a new version of the traditional singing school that would appeal to contemporary youth. They decided that a summer camp would be ideal, as it could include fun, recreation, and fellowship alongside the singing instruction. Ivey became the director of the first camp, a position he has held each subsequent year. Sheppard found an ideal location for Camp Fasola at Camp Lee, in Anniston. One of the most appealing aspects of the camp was the old wooden church on the grounds, a perfect space for singing from *The Sacred Harp*. Ivey and Sheppard were unsure about how much interest might really exist, but they decided that as long as they could find twenty participants, they would go ahead with the camp. At the first session, in 2003, they were pleased to have about seventy-five campers sign up. The two of them taught nearly all the classes and were satisfied enough with the results to plan the camp again the following year. Since then, interest has grown dramatically, mostly by word of mouth from enthusiastic participants. In 2008, the camp was divided into two sessions, one for youth and one for adults, to accommodate everyone who registered. By 2009, both sessions were full, with about two hundred and fifty participants between the two camps.

Camp Fasola meets from a Monday afternoon to Friday morning, at the end of June or beginning of July. Since 2007, the Independence Day Singing that once was held at Muscadine Methodist Church in Cleburne County has been moved to Camp Lee, allowing the campers to stay all day Friday and sing with local singers. In addition, many participants arrange their travel to include the weekends before and after camp, so they can attend one or more of the all-day singings and conventions that meet throughout the region. The adult camp convenes from Sunday afternoon to Thursday morning on the week before the second Sunday in June, giving singers time to travel to the National Sacred Harp Convention in Birmingham, which begins that Thursday.

Every year since the camp's inception, a number of new classes have been added, but a core set of courses is always taught: lessons on rudiments, leading, history and tradition, along with classes on lemonade making and dinner on the grounds. The lessons learned during the day are reinforced at nightly singings, during which all the campers gather and lead songs of their own choice. As the camp has grown in participants, the number of teachers and classes has increased, as well. Several age-appropriate classes are taught concurrently in different locations, and during some time slots, campers must choose between elective classes.

Daily routines at Camp Fasola reflect many typical summer camps—classes throughout the day interspersed with recreational activities including hiking, swimming, and canoeing. Every morning campers must attend daily lessons on general rudiments. The rudiments, a section printed at the beginning of *The Sacred Harp* ever since its first publication in 1844, explain many aspects of music contained within the songbook. They encompass several chapters, including “Rhythmics,” “Melodics,” “Keys,” and “Meter,” focusing on the basic



FIGURE 1.

Young campers attend daily rudiments classes. (Photo by Jonathon Smith)

aspects of music and singing. Teachers use exercises from the rudiments as well as examples from songs in *The Sacred Harp* as they discuss these subjects.

The rudiments classes are divided into several levels appropriate for different age groups, including beginning and advanced classes for youth and adults. Children attend daily rudiments together and have the same teachers for each lesson. Students learn to respect the authority of their teachers and form close relationships. Judy Caudle of Eva, Alabama, teaches beginner rudiments to children. The aptitude for music instruction runs in her family, as her father has taught numerous singing schools. Judy pays close attention to each of the children, showing them how to properly lead a song and sing the shapes. By the end of camp, Judy's young class can easily hold a song together both in time and pitch and blend well with a larger singing class of more experienced singers.

There are numerous opportunities throughout the day to practice the morning's rudiments lessons. Classes on specific aspects of singing sharpen students' technique in singing and leading difficult songs. These sessions let students lead songs under the careful supervision of the teacher with constant coaching and advice. One of the most celebrated, and sometimes feared, is Shelbie Sheppard's class on leading, affectionately dubbed the "Leading Boot Camp." Mrs. Shelbie, as most students know her, is Jeff Sheppard's wife, and a respected song leader and teacher. Every year I've attended camp I have heard my peers ask one another if they are going to "lead for Mrs. Shelbie." Campers are nervous about being critiqued and they know that she will carefully watch their movements and offer constructive criticism, a slightly daunting prospect, especially for a new singer. Shelbie loves working with the youth, and frequently comments that leaders consistently improve from year to year at Camp Fasola.

A significant number of classes are also devoted to Sacred Harp tradition and history. These include general historical overviews, life histories of specific composers, and aspects of cultural practices surrounding Sacred Harp singing. With such a wide variety of historical and cultural subjects to draw from, these classes change significantly from year to year, while rudiments classes remain largely the same. In recent years, experts on Sacred Harp history have presented classes about the life and work of individual composers. These include sessions



FIGURE 2.

Judy Caudle teaches daily rudiments to young singers. Here, Judy is leading the class in singing the scale using shape notes. (Photo by Jonathon Smith)

on early contributors, including E. J. King and William Walker, as well as classes on more recent composers. At Camp Fasola in 2009, Tom Malone, a teacher and researcher from Brooklyn, New York, led a class about J. Elmer Kitchens of Jasper, Alabama, who died in 1979. The class was especially meaningful, as a number of those present had known Kitchens personally, and Malone had invited several singers and members of the family to speak about their experiences with him. Malone also brought several unpublished songs by Kitchens for the group to sing. David Ivey notes that this type of class, which would not be possible at a traditional singing school, makes Camp Fasola a unique experience. In addition to teaching the history and traditions of Sacred Harp singing, classes like these also convey the importance of community that ties together singers from different regions and diverse backgrounds.

Camp Fasola also gives students the opportunity to learn about the workings of a traditional singing. Every evening, the entire camp meets for about an hour to hold a brief singing and devotional. Individuals or small groups are called to lead a song of their choice, letting them put the skills they learned during the day into practice. The nightly singings operate like miniature all-day singings, allowing the participants to learn firsthand about the mechanics of holding a singing. The boys' and girls' counselors are responsible for the first two nights, but on the third night, the youth themselves take charge. They select officers, including a chairperson, vice chair, and chaplain, who then appoint and select a secretary to record the proceedings, as well as an arranging committee, who determine the order of singers and call the leaders. The singings at Camp Fasola provide an opportunity for young singers to fill these jobs in a setting that is not as daunting as a large singing, with plenty of support from more experienced singers if they have any questions or problems.

The format of Camp Fasola also allows for other types of classes that teach about aspects of Sacred Harp singing that are not typically the subject of for-



FIGURE 3

All campers attend the evening singing. (Photo by Jonathon Smith)

mal learning. One of the most important parts of a singing, and the one that often requires the most physical preparation, is the customary dinner on the grounds. At all-day singings, the class breaks after several hours of singing in the morning to share a pot-luck meal. Visitors from afar are not expected to bring food, so the local singers provide plenty to feed the crowds at large singings. At Camp Fasola, Shelbie Sheppard and her daughter, Pam Nunn, teach classes on preparing food for the singings, sharing recipes and tips. Another fixture of the camp is Bud and Sammy Oliver's lesson on preparing lemonade. Their famous recipe has been a highlight of the Lookout Mountain Convention for decades, and the lesson involves the youth squeezing dozens of lemons into pails of spring water, then mixing in sacks of sugar.

Although lemonade-making with the Olivers is a favorite event, many campers, especially the younger ones, look forward every year to recreational activities at Camp Lee. Each morning before classes and breakfast, a volunteer leads hikes. In mid-afternoon, the recreational opportunities include swimming, canoeing, crafts, and a stream-fed rock slide. Daring campers ride the zip line, which extends from a hill above the lake to the opposite shore, where onlookers wait their turn. Although these activities are not directly related to Sacred Harp singing, they have played an important role in the success of Camp Fasola. A primary goal that Ivey and Sheppard set for the camp was that participants would enjoy the experience and want to return. They realized that in addition to getting quality instruction, the younger students would need to have fun if they were to come on their own volition rather than at the insistence of their parents. But, as Ivey notes, even for the adults, "the informal social time at camp has been important in pulling the community together." The recreation and fellowship provided at Camp Fasola help ensure that campers leave feeling excited to return the next year.

Changing Dynamics

Camp Fasola began in 2003 with fewer than one hundred participants, most of whom were from the Southeast. Since that time, the number of campers has more than tripled, with participants from more than twenty states and several foreign countries at each session. The camp's organizers have met the challenges posed by the changing dynamics, expanding the size and scope of



FIGURE 4

Bud Oliver detailing his special lemonade recipe. (Photo by Jonathon Smith)

the camp, and offering classes on diverse topics, oriented toward different skill levels. In addition, as Ivey notes, the teachers and leaders have learned a great deal as they have taught over the years. Despite significant changes, however, the camp has remained conservative in its instruction, holding to its original goal of training new singers to follow the traditional paths.

The most significant change in the camp has been the dramatic increase in participation. In 2007, David Ivey was forced to turn down numerous prospective attendees, as the camp had already reached its maximum capacity. In 2008, he elected to organize two separate sessions of Camp Fasola, one aimed at youth, and the other geared primarily toward adults. While Camp Lee was available for both sessions in 2008, the 2009 adult camp had to be held at another site. Ivey selected Camp McDowell, in Winston County, which offers more luxurious accommodations for the older participants.

The increase in attendance and addition of a second session of camp has required the introduction of more teachers, while placing greater demands

on those who were already teaching. Instructors who taught at the first camp, including David Ivey, Jeff and Shelbie Sheppard, and Judy Caudle, all continue to teach, but they have invited other singers with expertise in particular areas to teach classes. Some of the teachers are long-time Southern singers with no formal music education; Ivey asked Cassie Allen, of Dallas, Texas, a lifelong singer originally from Alabama, to teach youth rudiments, as well as a class about the alto part. The teaching roster has also featured professional educators and academic historians of shape-note singing, including Dr. Warren Steele, professor of music at the University of Mississippi, and Dr. Harry Eskew, professor emeritus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Other teachers have included experienced singers from other parts of the country, who bring their own unique perspectives.

Though the camp has changed in some respects, its organizers have ensured that its core purpose of teaching Sacred Harp singing according to longstanding traditions has remained the same. One constant, despite the changing demographics of the participants, is the emphasis on the religious nature of the music. As nearly all of the songs in *The Sacred Harp* are Christian hymns, the singing has always been treated with reverence and respect. Teachers at Camp Fasola emphasize this aspect of the tradition by beginning and ending sessions and singings with prayer, and holding nightly devotionals after the evening singings. While levity has its place during the camp and in many of the classes, singers are expected to treat the songs and lyrics seriously, and to comport themselves with respect while singing. Jeff Sheppard notes that Sacred Harp singing is not simply a form of “folk music” that can be disassociated from its cultural context: “I think it is more religious music to the people in the South than folk music because we still have a few churches who use this music in their church services ... you might say it’s a form of religious folk music. But the only reason you would say that is because some of this music came from folk songs.” Despite the influx of new participants from regions where Sacred Harp singing is not as closely associated with religious services, Sheppard and his associates at Camp Fasola have ensured the continued observance of the religious traditions associated with the singing.

Although religion is central to Sacred Harp singing, one of its great strengths has always been its ecumenism. From the very beginning, the Sacred Harp was

intended as a hymnal for use by multiple denominations, and singing conventions have never been exclusive to any particular sect. As B. F. White wrote in the preface to the 1844 *The Sacred Harp*, “The compiler . . . being necessarily thrown among churches of various denominations, and all the time observing their wants in that of a variety of church music, has in this work endeavored to supply that deficiency which heretofore existed . . .” (Jackson, 1968). Camp Fasola is open to everyone regardless of his or her religious affiliation, and the prayers and devotionals are offered by individuals from all backgrounds. While participants are expected to respect the religious character of the singing, they are free to interpret its religious significance as they please. The organizers of Camp Fasola have succeeded in avoiding contention by holding to the long-established tradition of interdenominationalism in Sacred Harp singing.

The Self-Representation of a Tradition

In many respects, Camp Fasola fills the void left by the diminution of the traditional Southern singing school. By giving students extensive instruction in the rudiments of singing, with individual attention from highly skilled teachers, the camp provides a unique learning experience. But Camp Fasola is more than just an updated singing school targeted to contemporary youth. As teachers discuss topics including the history and traditions associated with singing, they define an “authentic” version of Sacred Harp singing to participants from around the nation. Camp Fasola is a unique opportunity for those who are most invested in Sacred Harp music to elaborate to others what that tradition constitutes. Instead of allowing outside observers or academics to dominate this discourse, Sacred Harp singers actively promote the self-representation of their tradition through their participation in Camp Fasola.

Faced with the prospect of teaching Sacred Harp singing to people from a wide range of singing communities and backgrounds, Ivey and Sheppard realized from the beginning that they would have to teach a version of the tradition that nearly all the different regional singers could agree on as an acceptable representation. Even in the South, Sacred Harp is far from monolithic—singers from Georgia to Texas recognize specific practices and stylistic aspects as being unique to their region. Some of these characteristics are considered nonstandard by singers from other locations.

One notable example is the practice of beating a song in quadruple time by moving the hand down for two beats and then up for two, versus leading down, to the left, back to the right, and up, with one motion for each beat. Singers from various regions, including south Alabama, Texas, and, to some extent, Sand Mountain, sometimes use the latter method, which they refer to as “beating in four.” Others, notably those from west Georgia, central-eastern Alabama, and west Alabama, almost never lead this way, and some even consider it an objectionable influence from later gospel singing styles. At singing schools that he conducts at Liberty Baptist, in the Sand Mountain town of Henagar, David Ivey instructs the pupils that when they are going to sing a song in quadruple time, they should first decide if they want to lead it “in two,” or “in four.” At Camp Fasola, however, he and the other teachers avoid this issue altogether, teaching only to lead with the two-beat pattern as specified in the rudiments of the 1991 edition of *The Sacred Harp*.

As a way of clarifying what constitutes the “core” tradition, Ivey and other teachers rely on the rudiments in *The Sacred Harp*. While different, regional variations of Sacred Harp singing are sometimes acknowledged, they are generally not explicitly taught at the camp. And, as Ivey points out, even the extended time available at camp is scarcely enough to cover the rudiments in depth, let alone all the different localized singing practices. To maintain clarity, only the 1991 revision of the Denson edition is used at Camp Fasola. While some of the participants sing from the Cooper and/or J. L. White editions at their home conventions, they are able to find enough in common between the different books to make the camp a worthwhile learning experience. As Jeff Sheppard explained, he and Ivey chose to use the Denson edition because it was “much more conservative than the Cooper book. We have nothing against the Cooper book—I enjoy singing out of it. But we have to decide which way we are going to teach, which way we are going to encourage, and we have to go with that.”

As Sacred Harp singing has grown rapidly throughout the United States, Canada, and even a few European countries, Camp Fasola has become the single most important institution for teaching what are deemed “traditional” Sacred Harp practices. Kiri Miller (2008) describes singers in areas across the country as belonging to a “Sacred Harp diaspora” connected by physical as

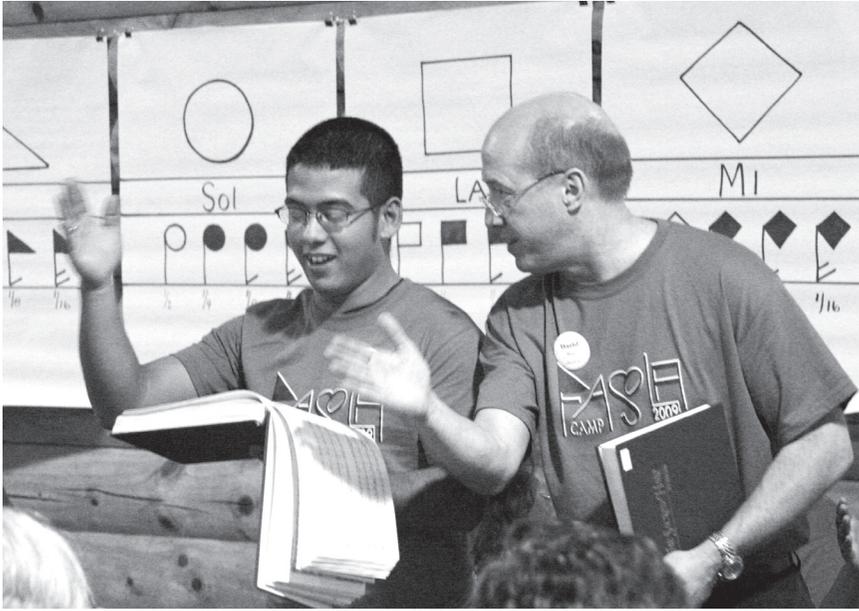


FIGURE 5

David Ivey (right) showing Brian Tanedo of Florida proper song leading technique. (Photo by Jonathon Smith)

well as emotional ties to the geographical homeland of the music (p. 28). She discusses the sense of importance that many singers place on conforming their singing practices to those of a perceived “authentic” tradition of Southern singing (Miller, 2008). Many singers, especially those from far-off regions with a less-clear sense of a distinct tradition, have come to see attending Camp Fasola as a rite of passage, essential for becoming a true Sacred Harp singer. This conception is tacitly endorsed by teachers at camp, who encourage their students to take what they have learned and teach it to others at their home singings. I have observed numerous singers from various regions using their experience at Camp Fasola to justify a particular practice or interpretation of a song. Comments like “Shelbie Sheppard leads it that way,” or “this is the way David Ivey taught us” carry a weight of authority that other singers cannot easily dismiss.

Even individuals who are unable to attend Camp Fasola have access to

relatively detailed descriptions of the classes, which are printed each year in the *Directory and Minutes of Sacred Harp Singings*, a publication that is also sponsored by the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association. The “minutes book,” as it is popularly known, is distributed at all-day singings, and most singers around the country get a new copy each year. The minutes from Camp Fasola are given more space than any other entry, testifying to the importance that singers place on the camp as a teaching institution. The minutes are now also available online, through the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association’s website, www.fasola.org. Through these avenues, Camp Fasola has expanded the purview of its influence, making its teachers and organizers among the most recognized authorities on “authentic” Sacred Harp tradition.

New Prospects for Shape-Note Singing Instruction

Spurred by the success of Camp Fasola, shape-note singers who use other nineteenth-century tunebooks have begun conducting their own camps, giving them an opportunity to teach aspects of singing that are unique to their traditions. In 2007, Jane Spencer of Bishop, Georgia, founded Camp Doremi, a three-day singing school held in Little Switzerland, North Carolina, which teaches from the *New Harp of Columbia*, as well as the Walker (North Carolina) and Deason-Parris (Alabama) editions of the *Christian Harmony*. Spencer realized the need for more singing schools in these dwindling seven-shape traditions, and saw the potential that an institution similar to Camp Fasola could improve and promote singing from these books.

David Ivey is enthusiastic about the future of Camp Fasola, although the camp faces some significant challenges. In April 2009, the historic church at Camp Lee burned to the ground in an accidental fire. Camp Fasola went forward as scheduled, however, and though the church and its acoustics were missed, other spaces served adequately. A more pressing problem is the continued increase in attendance at camp; even with the second session for adults, the youth camp was filled to capacity in 2009. Ivey and the other organizers recognize that they may be forced to turn away would-be campers again, and have considered several options to enlarge the camp in the future. Approximately half the attendants in 2009 had participated in a previous year—many returning campers have attended every session since the beginning. The dramatic

popularity of the camp testifies to the success of its founders' primary goal: to provide in-depth instruction in the music and traditions of Sacred Harp singing in an environment that would appeal to young singers and leave them excited to come back the next year. In this respect, Camp Fasola serves as an updated version of the traditional Southern signing school. In other aspects, however, the camp extends the scope of learning that used to be possible at a singing school, bringing together a wide range of teachers and experts in multiple fields who offer classes on diverse subjects. As they teach about the history, practices, and stylistic nuances of Sacred Harp singing, the leaders of Camp Fasola instill in newer singers a sense of the bounds of "traditional" singing, a uniquely effective instance of the self-representation of an American musical tradition. ■

Notes

- 1 See Cobb (1978), 84-127 for a detailed explanation of the different revisions of the Sacred Harp still in use.

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Singing Buildings in Wiregrass Alabama*

Jerrilyn McGregor

African Americans within Wiregrass Alabama have constructed special spaces primarily for the performance of two distinct sacred music traditions: the older shape-note music, using the seven-shape system of notation; and contemporary gospel. Area residents refer to these edifices as “singing buildings.” These buildings represent autonomous spaces that ensure a place to sing to the glory of God. One example is the South Alabama Seven Shape Singing Convention Center on Alabama Highway 10, between Luverne and Greenville, and the other site is the Southeast District Singing Convention Building outside of Elba. Each locale has a specialized history, which speaks to a musical view of the universe. These buildings serve as kinds of tabernacles, sanctuaries erected to enshrine the singers’ sacred interaction with God.

Wiregrass Alabama is the locale for some wondrous religious music from Sacred Harp to contemporary gospel. Such cultural performances constitute the “everyday” for many African Americans who have ritualized social relationships into a repetitious cycle of calendared events. I happened upon the existence of these buildings as I was documenting sacred music forms within the Wiregrass region, including southeast Alabama, southwest Georgia, and adjoining parts of the Florida panhandle. While attending a gospel anniversary program in Madrid, Alabama, the emcee mentioned that her family would be performing Fifth Sunday at the singing building. I already was researching a

*This article is excerpted from my forthcoming book, *Downhome Gospel: African American Spiritual Activism in Wiregrass Country*, courtesy of the University Press of Mississippi. Essentially, I write a tale of two buildings.

cornucopia of sacred music cultural events occurring on Fifth Sundays, but I had no idea that such buildings existed.

It turns out that in these rural communities, singing buildings and Fifth Sundays go hand in hand. Fifth Sundays, then, function as the *raison d'être* for the formation and perpetuation of these singing buildings. Most calendar years boast four Fifth Sundays—participants consider five in one year a bonanza. Fifth Sundays serve as a kind of wildcard for churchgoers who assemble to worship on a circuit on alternate weeks. Historically, circuit-riding ministers often pastor two or more churches, usually worshipping on the first and third or second and fourth Sundays. Fifth Sundays became a time to unite various disparate religious communities. On Fifth Sundays, African American residents are mobilized, participating in denominational events such as Baptist district union meetings and nondenominational events such as gospel extravaganzas. The late Doris Lewis, past district president of the laity for her African Methodist Episcopal Church, spoke for most, saying: “I enjoy every Fifth Sunday.”¹

Despite the longevity and prevalence of Fifth Sunday events, there has been virtually no documentation of this phenomenon along with the musicality that it spawns. Each of the following sacred performance communities manifests its own shared canon of taste. Their preferred sacred musical traditions provide the common thread that binds individual performers, communally, one to another.

AFRICAN AMERICANS ENGAGING in the seven-shape system are far more prevalent throughout the South. Although raised in Mississippi, a former student, Wendy Coleman, recalled: “The fifth Sunday was, and still is, the day of the Singing Convention. When I was a child, it was the day when we visited other churches, sometimes with few young people like us. But what was there was a spirit of praise and vocal thanksgiving that charged the air and excited even we children who had little if any idea of what real experienced-berthed praise was about.”² Such singing conventions represent a holistic, recreational device.

I also have now attended a number of seven-shape singings: the South Alabama Seven Shape Singing Convention in Greenville; Fifth Sunday Seven Shape Singing Convention in Brundidge, Alabama; as well as other singings in the Troy area and in Wiregrass Georgia from Bainbridge to Damascus. Of

these, I consider the one in Greenville the most engrossing. Conventioneers trek to a special place, the South Alabama Seven Shape Singing Convention Center, every Fifth Sunday. Although founded in the 1920s, the South Alabama Seven Shape Singing Convention did not acquire its own edifice until 1973. “Mother” Elizabeth (Lizzie) Bedgood donated two acres of land specifically to build a site to ensure the longevity of their convention.

The cavernous building’s interior is spartan in comparison with the ornate and plush interiors found inside many rural churches today. Imitation wood paneling, instead of the common knotty pine, graces its walls. The wall behind the pulpit showcases a photo gallery of esteemed past officials. The building features handhewn pews, and its concrete floor indicates the stark functionality of this space—it is bare bones, without ornamentation and air conditioning. Possessing such an autonomous site brings order into contemporary lives, offering a designated site without the need of moving from place to place. Prior to the Center’s construction, the convention rotated in a formally set pattern from church to church. The Center thus stabilized a constituency that might



FIGURE 1

The Seven Shape Singing Convention Center



FIGURE 2

Interior of the Seven Shape Singing Convention Center

have fragmented had its members lost their compulsion to journey to each remote venue. With the creation of this one space, this sacred performance community guaranteed its survival. As Roger Abrahams stipulated about rituals, they provide “traditional ways of momentarily binding the opposing forces within the community and tying together the past with the present.”³ Outside of Fifth Sundays, gospel singers and their entourages also gather in this singing building on a regular basis to host anniversary programs.

Lizzie Bedgood’s family continues to play pivotal and enduring roles. Her grandchildren are the elders now and orchestrate each session. When I first located this convention, twin brothers Esau and Jacob Bedgood brought a special verve and vivacity to the music. One could only speculate how things were during their youth. In 1997, members honored Esau’s thirty-six years as vice president and nine as president. They presented an award in his absence since illness prevented him from attending. When in good health, he had acted as emcee, announcing who would sing next, pitching songs, and, relying on a microphone, amplifying his own robust voice for more tenuous singers to follow. Brother Jacob frequently led requests and raised hymns while stylistically walking the hollow square. Despite his age, Jacob is accomplished at leading any selection. For instance, singing “Turn Around and Go Back to the Lord,” he dramatized the lyrics, whirling around while making wide, sweeping ges-

tures with his outstretched arms before an appreciative convention. The level of approval of his expressive performances is immense. Jacob's competence in performance garnered much admiration. Rosebud Bedgood Hamilton is another of the grandchildren who, as an embodiment of this family's history, receives much deference.

Although four-shape-note singing waned considerably among African American Southerners, the more modern seven-shape continues to enjoy the widest following. This form of shape-note music allows for greater innovations. As folklorist George Pullen Jackson observed generally regarding this form of singing: "They use the seven-shape notation and have their own little thirty-five cent manila-bound song books, their own singing schools, conventions, teachers, composers, and, to some extent, publishers."⁴ Presently, the number of songbooks used is astronomical. In Wiregrass Alabama, singing conventions continue to conform in structure to a Sacred Harp convention with individual songsters conducting hymns. However, the choice of songbooks requires participants to tote an array of satchels from flight bags to briefcases. In Greenville, *Heavenly Highway Hymns* predominates, but everyone arrives loaded down with a cargo of books just in case. Other popular songbooks include: *Matchless Love*, *Notes of Praise*, *Ceaseless Praise*, *Heavenly Sound*, *Divine Joy*, *Matchless Grace*, *Convention Classics*, *Getting Ready*, *Springs of Glory*, and *Holy Praise*. The titles mainly signify the state of grace, love, and praise these Christians struggle a lifetime to achieve. These well-worn texts are heirlooms passed down among generations of singers.

Many familiar elements traditionally associated with singing conventions remain intact. They continue to sing strictly *a cappella*. Badges, now costing fifty cents, continue to be a mainstay of this tradition. The badges are usually strips of ribbon cut in small swatches and affixed with a straight pin and, emblematically, worn as a sign of belonging and contributing. You purchase them at the door as if paying a price of admission. In 2003, two years after 9/11, a patriotic badge emerged with a small icon of the Statue of Liberty and the words: "In God We Trust." Along with the singing, the collection of enrollment fees and a monetary offering before the midday luncheon break are all accomplished with clocklike precision. It remains customary not to deviate from the written program. Although conventioners no longer circulate to lo-



FIGURE 3

Bennie McDonald leads song at a South Alabama Seven Shape Singing Convention.

cal church venues, a system of rotating hosting responsibilities is still in effect. Customarily, four churches get to host a convention annually. These churches have lyrical names such as Star Hope, Spring Hill, Indian Hill, Sweetwater, and Goshen. The proceeds go toward the maintenance of the singing building (bank loans, electric service, gas, insurance, fire service) given in the name of church scheduled to host the convention. The host church also is responsible for catering and serving the midday meal.

The last Fifth Sunday of the year (usually November or December) results in a two-day Annual Session. As in the past and in keeping with Sacred Harp tradition, the Saturday session is relatively mundane. It is devoted to organizational business: the collection of enrollment fees; reports from all officers, missionaries and trustees; election of officers; and a memorial service. There is a singing workshop, not to be confused with a singing school, since no rudiments are taught. As a testament to the commitment of this sacred performance community, Saturday's session begins at 10:30 a.m. with an intermission for lunch. Participants reassemble at 1:30 p.m., hold another brief recess, and

resume again at 6:30 p.m. With several perfunctory monetary offerings, this day's session is usually the most lucrative and pays most of the bills. For this event, I noted that the badges issued are more elaborate. They were two-inch wide red ribbon, and embossed with: "Welcome to the 77th Annual Session of the South Alabama Seven Shape Singing Convention," listing the date, president, and secretary.

Singing, eating, and fellowshipping are the three powerfully reinforced ingredients of the gathering. Furthermore, to situate this more business-oriented frame as outside of the singing convention proper, intermittent congregational style singing reigns, without making use of the hollow square. Saturday evening appropriates elements from a regular church function: someone states the occasion, a child reads the 23rd Psalm, and someone else recites a humorous, religious poem. Perhaps to attract a youthful following, a gospel ensemble sings *a cappella*. The day's program is reminiscent of the Baptist youth department meetings. The annual closing program instills longstanding values and absorbs the next generation, institutionalizing singing conventions as a recreational and spiritual activity. The evening program is one of the few occasions at this site when I have witnessed a minister delivering a brief sermon. Signifying that this occasion is an ally of but not the singing convention itself, the program returns to a robust exhibition of virtuoso gospel singing, sung by soloists and without congregational participation. Even the handclapping is restricted to those performing, marking the event as occasional. Thus, the shape-note musical frame is held in reserve until the next day, bringing a climactic finale to their year in song.

Seldom does a network assemble to sing without a reference to a Psalm, in passing or as an overt theme: "I will praise Thee O Lord among the people, and I will sing praises unto Thee among the nations" (Psalm 108:3). Besides an appropriate theme for their programs, as with most sacred and secular performance communities, this south Alabama convention also selects an appropriate theme song: "Lord Give Me Just a Little More Time." The repetition of themes and songs across performance communities speaks volumes about their shared spiritual communalities. These collectives wish to uplift. Unlike Sacred Harp (four-shape music), seven-shape singing attracts more middle-aged singers. Although this participation is no guarantee of the form's preservation, it buys

them time. Moreover, although they do not dominate numerically, there is a recognizable presence of younger adult males.

My attendance at these singings has been a lesson about African American cultural diversity. I envy how emigrants from my hometown of Gary, Indiana (and elsewhere in the North), know to time their visits to coincide with these singing conventions. During remarks, on the Saturday before the Fifth Sunday in November 1997, a visitor expressed: "I enjoyed myself while I've been here, but I'm going back up that way." The industrial North claimed a lot of the convention's children. Yet they constitute a large portion of the non-singers at these cultural performances. Giving testimonial to an appreciation of shape-note, someone else remarked: "I can't sing, but I love it and am glad to come to hear anybody else sing." Their presence speaks to the push and pull of the South in African American culture. In March 2003, during its eighty-third annual session, hosted by Sweetwater Missionary Baptist Church, families visited from far and near: Etta Thomas from Detroit; Weetha McCant from St. Albans, New York; and Bernice DuBose Ethridge and Lillie Hughes from Montgomery.

As is customary, remarks conclude the singing. Some songsters return after years of absence and testify: "I got rusty. I laid out twenty-five to thirty years but decided to come back but I ain't got right yet." On the other hand, I overheard another gentleman state that he had only missed three conventions since 1948, when he was without transportation. Someone else commented: "I haven't been here since the '30s, used to come in a truck, people change and things change. We don't talk about singing [conventions] in our churches anymore." This convention, indeed, is representative of a community demonstrating its fluidity and cohesion, the ebb and flow of those attuned to this tradition. No doubt many would concur with the following sentiment: "I wouldn't walk across the street to hear Sacred Harp singing, but I'd walk two hundred miles to help sing it. Sacred Harp is singers' music; it's not a listeners' music—you have to participate to get the good out of it."⁵ Yet, as previously expressed, things change and the listeners who come return to claim an inheritance.

AS A FOLKLORIST, one of my most fulfilling fieldwork experiences was locating the Southeast District Singing Convention Building outside of Elba, Alabama.

It peeled back another layer of the metaphorical onion. Whenever I thought I was at the saturation point in my fieldwork, another intriguing element unfurled. There is no way to know how many similar autonomous spaces may exist among African Americans. From its inception in December 1955, local gospel singers and musicians set upon obtaining a venue for their singing union. This structure antedates the time when most musicologists identify the mainstreaming of gospel music in urban African American communities. This building even predates the South Alabama Seven Shape Singing Convention Center in Greenville (established in 1973). It existed longer and exclusively to support gospel music performances. The Southeast District Convention Building, besides functioning as part of a singing union on Fifth Sundays, also hosts its own Baptist union meeting, which is formatted like the others, except when it breaks for lunch. After the break, the second period consists of a devotion period, a President's Address, and finally a full-blown gospel program.

At the Southeast District Building, the morning session parallels structural units happening concurrently at Baptist district union meetings throughout Wiregrass Country. The meeting is presided over by a single in-house minister.



FIGURE 4

The Southeast District Singing Convention Building

Rev. John Lawrence marshals congregants through the key ritual acts common to regular church services. Lawrence bridges both periods by being a minister and gospel musician. He introduced bongos into the musical performances and is a competent electric guitarist. Whereas, in Greenville the participants adhere strictly to shape-note music on Fifth Sunday, traditional gospel music is the cornerstone of this singing building.

The Southeast District Building's singing union is the umbrella organization for five gospel groups: the Seven Stars, Rising Stars, Traveling Stars, Spiritual Five, and Bright Stars. The group names exhibit a limited number of proper nouns, often containing the word "star." At an anniversary program at this same site one January, Morning Star and the Silver Stars were also on the roster. It is not uncommon for several groups to possess the same names. When there are duplications, possibly only members of each network know which group will actually appear. One can imagine the difficulty groups have with defining themselves. Many of the names are certainly duplicated wherever gospel groups flourish. They go by such names as: True Gospel Singers, Friendly Five, Gospel Starlights, Supreme Angels, Traveling Angels, Heavenly Angels, Spiritual Harmonizers, Gospel Interpreters, the Gospel Wheels, and so on. The names containing "angel" often denote male quartets. Ultimately, you sense that the group-naming hermeneutics are of little significance, and some names are plainly generic, such as the Florida Gospel Singers.

Members of the Spiritual Five form the leadership of the Southeast District Building. This ensemble is comprised of three sisters along with one member's spouse. Ollie Henderson is the secretary and her husband Charles is a group member and also their booking agent. Annie Perlsher coordinates the ushers. Alice Dozier is the assistant director and often emcees the gospel program. The president of the union is a male, A. Z. Stoudmire, who does not perform with them. Ovella Cunningham, who informed me about the existence of this singing building, is a member, and her family hosts one of the more elaborate anniversary programs there. The Cunningham Family's network includes groups throughout the region—Texasville, Enterprise, Montgomery, Webb, Dothan, Ozark, Grady, Lapine, to Defuniak Springs, Florida—and actually reaching as far as Tallahassee.

In the ritual cycle of Fifth Sunday, both Alabama singing buildings serve

as venues for down-home gospel music programs. Like singing conventions, gospel programs also customarily operate outside of any official church structure. The close relationship that once existed, even between singing conventions and many small community churches, has eroded. Gospel singers and musicians find it increasingly difficult to negotiate the use of churches. Accordingly, singer Ovella Cunningham testified: “[Gospel singing] got so big, a lot of churches don’t want quartets.”⁶ Because of this trend, singing buildings exist for the exclusive use of anything “having to do with singing.” Gospel music proves to be a relatively lucrative form of artistic expression needing its own space. Also, given their individual and collective purposes, attendance numbers do not generally matter. When attendance is diminished, it is not uncommon to hear: “We’re not gonna worry about who’s here and who’s not here. We’re here to praise the Lord.” Unlike one’s personal sense of obligation to attend church worship, it is by more voluntary assent that anniversaries are celebrated. People come, as they will.

Also, it is important to explore the role that remembrance played in the



FIGURE 5

The Cunningham Family anniversary at the Southeast District Singing Convention Building.

construction of singing buildings. The cultural performances at these sites preserve favorite songs of bygone days. The indigenous sounds and music serve as devices of archival reclamation. The reclamation of a usable past is a kind of recovery that is part of a communal ideology. The construction of these sites stands as tangible proof of the powerful musical traditions that have withstood the test of time. While not fossils, for outsiders, the style of gospel performances popularized locally may be tantamount to singing Gregorian chants. The singing building allows for a sacred performance community to stave off disruptive changes that might curtail singing to God's glory without compromising their aesthetic and community values.

These programs generally are not occasions for soloists. In the event that only one active group member remains, volunteers materialize to back up any lone performer. For instance, Mittie Edwards, a long-term member of the Seven Stars, routinely enrolls and stands alone, but soon a makeshift assemblage of singers will spontaneously appear to accompany her. She responds by saying: "Praise the Lord for those coming up to join me." Because reciprocity is the primary principle and spirituality the foundation of a network, a lone singer may attend programs for years under his or her group's name, such as the Stars of Faith: "Ya'll looking for a whole group of people back here behind me, but I've been going for the last three years by myself."⁷ There are no regulations to suggest that it should be otherwise. ■

Notes

- 1 Doris Lewis interviewed in Dothan, Alabama, on August 5, 1994.
- 2 "The fifth Sunday was . . ." Wendy Coleman, "A Brief Introduction to 'Vocal Music': A History of the North Wayne County (MS) Singing Convention." Student paper submitted June 15, 1995, 3.
- 3 Roger Abrahams, 1982. "The Language of Festivals," *Celebrations*, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 167.
- 4 George Pullen Jackson, 1933. *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 405.
- 5 "I wouldn't walk . . ." Hugh McGraw's quote appeared in Richard L. DeLong's "Fasola Singing," *NSHN*, July 1985, 5–6.
- 6 Ovella Cunningham interviewed in Opp, Alabama, on May 20, 1996.
- 7 Stars of Faith member's commentary at the Southeast District Convention Building in Elba, Alabama, on July 30, 1995.

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Japheth Jackson and the Jackson Memorial Singing

Joey Brackner

For more than seventy years, members of the Jackson family and friends have gathered at Union Grove Baptist Church near Ozark, Alabama, for a special singing to honor Judge Jackson (1883–1958), the author of *The Colored Sacred Harp*. When Jackson died, what had been an honorary birthday singing became a memorial singing, organized by his son Japheth with help from other family members.¹ Channeling the spirit of his father, Japheth Jackson kept this hymnbook in print while becoming a bulwark for a dwindling regional music tradition. Through the years, hymnbook compilers, singers, and scholars alike have determined Judge Jackson's legacy. The desires of this African American composer to have his music accepted into the body of Sacred Harp music have now been realized years after his death due, in part, to the efforts of Japheth Jackson and his other children. However, at this writing in 2010, the future of his memorial singing, which has taken on its own significance, is seriously in doubt.

The Colored Sacred Harp was composed and published because, until recently, the local version of the Sacred Harp hymnbook did not include hymn compositions of African Americans. Judge Jackson, a self-made man in the era of Jim Crow, had the means to publish a Sacred Harp hymnbook that would include this music. Henry Japheth Jackson (born 1916), one of twelve children of Judge and Lela Jackson, remembered riding with his father in a mule-drawn wagon to pick up new copies of *The Colored Sacred Harp* at the Ozark train station in 1934.² With the exception of its use at the Jackson Memorial Singing, the little paperback book of seventy-seven songs never earned widespread use among the black community of singers who, though spurned as contributing authors, were devotees of *The B. F. White Sacred Harp* (Cooper Revision).³

Judge Jackson's book was almost forgotten until the folk song revival of the 1950s and '60s when various scholars, including University of Pennsylvania student Joe Dan Boyd, rediscovered this interesting work.

Joe Dan Boyd, a Texan, was very familiar with Sacred Harp singing and learned of *The Colored Sacred Harp* while doing research at the Library of Congress in 1968. He then got in touch with the Jackson family in Alabama and proceeded to research and write a manuscript about the hymnbook. Japheth Jackson recalled his initial fear when being contacted by a white man "from Pennsylvania" on the heels of the Civil Rights era. He was concerned that Boyd was a "freedom rider" who could bring unwanted attention to the family. However, it soon became apparent that Boyd was interested in music and not politics and he proceeded to document black Sacred Harp singing in the area. Boyd produced a well-received article for the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1970⁴ but his larger manuscript about *The Colored Sacred Harp* was put on hold while he went on to a distinguished career in journalism. Finally, in 2002, the manuscript was published with a CD containing many field recordings that he made at the Jackson Singings of 1969 and 1972.⁵



FIGURE 1

"In Remembrance of J. Jackson." (Photo by Joe Dan Boyd, 1969)



FIGURE 2

Dewey Williams and Japheth Jackson. (Photo by Melissa Springer, 1987)

Joe Dan Boyd was one of a long line of scholars to visit the community and examine the intricacies of the local shape-note traditions. Ralph Rinzler in the late 1960s and later other folklorists such as Doris Dyen, Hank Willett, Brenda McCallum, Barbara Hampton, and Steve Grauberger documented the singing around Ozark, largely because this community offered the most cohesive group of African American Sacred Harp singers in the United States. After the death of Judge Jackson, Dewey Williams (1898–1995) became the elder statesman for this tradition. Williams was a winsome and politically savvy singer who led a loosely organized group known as the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers.⁶ The group became regular performers at folk festivals around the country. Because of his humble bearing and relative youth, Japheth Jackson deferred to Dewey Williams, especially after Williams was in the 1983 class of National Heritage Fellowship recipients. As a member of the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers, Jackson traveled widely with Williams, representing this Alabama song tradition at music festivals including the 1970 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the

1971 “Man and His World” international program in Montreal, and numerous other national festivals and workshops.

Despite the charismatic leadership of Dewey Williams, Japheth Jackson steadily developed into an indispensable figure for the African American Sacred Harp scene in the Wiregrass region of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. He was an expert singer who was depended upon to key singings and to anchor the bass section, eliciting Williams to exclaim, “You can’t beat him at bass!”⁷ But he also had the cachet of the Jackson name and the mantle of his father Judge’s role as publisher. By securing grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA), and with the help of the Alabama Folklife Association, Japheth Jackson kept new editions of *The Colored Sacred Harp* in print because the original softcover copies of the song book were deteriorating in users’ hands. The reprinted editions (1973, 1983, 1992, and 2004) have been published in hardcover with supplementary front matter. In 1973, Japheth added the “History of the Colored Sacred Harp” to the book. Then in 1983, he added the “rudiments of music,” acknowledging that his father always felt the book should have this important introductory section. The 1992 edition added the “Autobiography of Judge Jackson” and the 2004 volume includes a one-page profile of “Henry Japheth Jackson, chairman Revision Committee, son of Judge Jackson.”

When I first became a folklorist at the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) in 1985, the Jackson Singing and Dewey Williams Birthday Singing were the two best-attended singings associated with the African American Sacred Harp tradition in Alabama. I made a point of attending both. For a public folklorist, the annual trek every third Sunday in April to the Union Grove Baptist Church was a job-related pleasure and a window into an important community of artists in the Wiregrass region of Alabama. I was immediately drawn to the Jackson Singing, recognizing it as similar to many ritual memorials in my own life. The Singing, as an act of piety, had many of the characteristics of the decoration days and homecomings celebrated in thousands of churches in the South. But instead of flowers, the participants brought their voices.⁸ Family and guests would lead their favorite hymns or those of departed loved ones. For many of the younger generations of Jacksons, this was the only contact they had with this early form of singing. So, for the Jacksons, a family

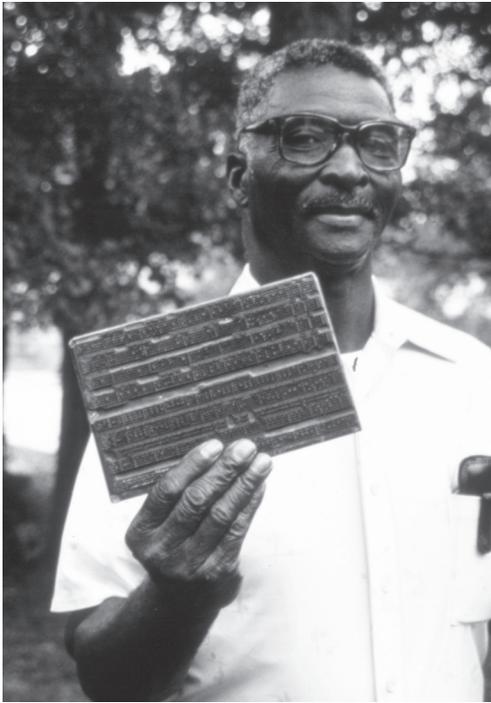


FIGURE 3

Japheth Jackson with Colored Sacred Harp printing plates. (Photo by Maggie Holtzberg, 1988)

whose name was synonymous with Sacred Harp singing and publishing, the Judge Jackson Memorial Singing developed the greater purpose of preserving Sacred Harp singing.

Since 1935, the Jackson Memorial Singing has been celebrated on the third Sunday in April. Hundreds would come to Union Grove Baptist Church outside Ozark near the southeastern corner of Alabama. The first Jackson Singing was on April 21, 1935, and was called the Jackson Birthday and Reunion Singing.⁹ The last and seventy-fourth occasion of the singing was held on April 19, 2009. Much to the dismay of the children of Judge Jackson and their generation, the singing did not ensure the healthy

survival of Sacred Harp singing in the Wiregrass African American community. But, during its last few decades, the Jackson Singing became an important regional meeting ground for a diversity of Sacred Harp singers from outside the community, even outside of the South.

Honorary or memorial singings tend to have more casual visitors than annual conventions where the official business of the convention (the organizing structure of singers) also transpires. For example, at the Jackson Singing, no one signs in to be called upon to lead but instead, Japheth Jackson simply calls upon each one of the singers in order of how they are sitting in the “class.” Most singers lead one or more of their favorite songs during the course of the singing. At each Singing, special guests are invited to stand and address the

audience. These folks are persons like myself who do not live in the community or perhaps moved away from the community but have returned for the singing. Complying with the wishes of the late Judge Jackson, each Jackson Singing was opened and closed with a prayer and song led by the oldest living son.¹⁰

For decades starting in the 1950s, the children of the Jacksons and other African American Sacred Harp singers have eschewed the formalized singing schools and other rigors of learning shape-note singing. They have opted for other forms of sacred music. Despite this, the occasion has offered an important mechanism for younger Jacksons to learn of Judge Jackson and the archaic singing tradition that he and his children championed.

The program for a typical Jackson Singing was quite formal and was designed to involve a large number of the family. For example, in 1995, the printed program was:

11:00 am	Devotion & Prayer	Rev. J. C. Jackson
11:30 am	Singing Class Begins	
12:30 am	Offering	
12:55 am	Song	Ms. Shanda H. Jackson & Ms. Traci C. Jackson
1:00 pm	Lunch	
2:00 pm	Singing Class Begins	
2:30 pm	Tribute	Mr. Herman F. Jackson
3:00 pm	Memorial Service	Judge and Lela Jackson's Children
3:30 pm	Offering	
4:00 pm	Dismissal	

Even if not on the program, family members, especially older family members, were prominent in the performance of favorite hymns, leading of spirituals, and memorable prayers. Every year, Reverend Shem Jackson would lead "Life Is the Time to Serve the Lord" segueing into a mini-sermon. The Reverend John Jackson was a powerful prayer leader and, as the oldest surviving son, took a leading role in the proceedings.

In 1989, Japheth was to be part of the Bill Moyers documentary, *Amazing Grace*. Early that morning, he had heard the distressing news that his sister

had been robbed and assaulted. This news was so traumatic that he stood up, blacked out, and fractured his neck as he fell against the wall in his home. I was in Ozark acting as a liaison with the Moyers crew and was awakened soon thereafter in my hotel room by Dewey Williams calling to tell me this horrible news. After the day's filming, I headed to Flowers Hospital in Dothan. As I viewed Japheth, his head immobilized in a metal halo brace, I would have never thought that he was poised to take Dewey's leadership role for the next two decades.

The *Amazing Grace* documentary marked the zenith of Dewey Williams's career and acclaim and the beginning of the slow decline of his health. When Dewey died in 1995 at age ninety-eight, his funeral was so large that it had to be held in the Ozark Community Center. After Williams's death, the Jackson Singing assumed a greater importance and became an event for singers and scholars to connect with this regional music. However, because of Japheth's significant physical injuries and a diminishing cadre of experienced singers it seemed that nothing could stem the receding tide of African American Sacred Harp singing in southeast Alabama. It was around this time that I visited a singing school in Tennille, Alabama, funded through ASCA's Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program. As I approached the country church, I was surprised to hear very robust singing. But when I opened the door it was Japheth playing a documentary cassette tape of field recordings made by John Work in the area in the 1930s.¹¹ Japheth said, "Now this is what singing is supposed to sound like." The singing school was attended primarily by older singers, some of whose voices were on that Work recording.

The decline of African American Sacred Harp singers coincided with an increase in white participation nationwide. In fact, a hallmark of the Jackson Singing for the last twenty-five or so years has been the increasing visitation of white singers. After the death of Dewey Williams, whose own Singing also attracted a diverse singing audience, the Jackson Singing took on this symbolic importance. Prominent white Sacred Harp singers such as Buell Cobb of Birmingham and David Ivey of Huntsville would make a special effort to attend and would encourage local African American singers to participate in state and regional events such as the National Sacred Harp Convention in Birmingham and Camp Fasola in Anniston. In particular, local white singers



FIGURE 4

This later, racially mixed version of the Wiregrass Sacred Harp singers performed regularly on Dothan television. Stanley Smith and Tommie Spurlock are the white singers facing each other in the back row. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

Stanley Smith and Tommie Spurlock have been faithful attendees of the Jackson Singing for a quarter century and perhaps longer and in later years became de facto members of the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers.

Stanley Smith, revision committee chairman of the Sacred Harp Book Company, helped get a song by Judge Jackson into recent editions. In 1992, *The B. F. White Sacred Harp* included Jackson's "My Mother's Gone." This seemingly modest event was a substantive development documenting the changing attitudes within the Sacred Harp community.

On the morning of April 19, 2009, I drove from Montgomery to Ozark to what was billed as the last Jackson Memorial Singing. Before I arrived, Dothan television station WTVY (channel 4) interviewed Japheth on the cultural significance of this bittersweet occasion. He patiently explained his

father's role in the history of Sacred Harp singing and the publication of *The Colored Sacred Harp* in 1934. He bemoaned the decline of participation in this important African American singing tradition.

Sitting in a wheelchair as he received the scores of well-wishers and local dignitaries, Japheth Jackson looked resigned to his decision to discontinue this annual singing. Earlier in the week, he had made it widely known that this would be the last Jackson Singing. This was a sad occasion as it ended one aspect of his father's legacy and symbolized a singing community on the decline. He was also dealing with the reality of his own aging, especially with his loss of hearing, which to a man who loves singing must have been devastating. Over a year later, Japheth would confide to me that Judge Jackson, before his death, told his children to carry on the singing "til the last boy." Japheth viewed himself as the last boy since his only living brother Ham was then ill and living in the North.¹²

Japheth's son Judge Jackson, the namesake of his grandfather, directed this last Jackson Singing. He started with a poignant regret that he had never learned to sing this style of music adequately. He then led a spiritual. His sister Janice Jackson-Johnson was also prominent at the singing. By assisting her father in the last reprint of *The Colored Sacred Harp* and by leading songs at singings, Janice has done much to forward the legacy of her grandfather.

For this singing, quite a few notable white singers from outside the Wiregrass area were present. Famed Georgia singer Richard DeLong keyed the singing. Bill and Nancy Hogan of Wetumpka also attended. In addition, Allison Schofield of New York and Jonathan Smith of Knoxville, Tennessee, were in attendance. In fact, Schofield's leading of "Religion Is a Fortune" was a highlight of the day.

The crowd slowly built as lunchtime approached. As in years past, a large lunch provided by the Jackson family was a gift to all who came to sing. After lunch, more folks arrived who had been to other churches but knew that the Jackson Singing would proceed until about 3 p.m.

The last song of the 2009 Jackson Singing was the most emotional moment of any Sacred Harp singing that I have attended. With Stanley Smith weeping openly, the class sang "The Morning Trumpet," number 85 in *The B. F. White Sacred Harp*. With the last chorus of "Shout, O glory! For I shall mount above

the skies, When I hear the trumpet sound in that morning” the “last” Jackson Singing came to an end.

On April 18, 2010, Ruth and Pauline, the only other surviving children of Judge Jackson, along with various grandchildren, convened another Jackson Singing at the Perry Community Center in Ozark. The singing attracted supporters from around the state and region but Japheth and his children elected not to go. Having presided over the Singing for so long and concerned for Japheth’s failing health, they had moved on from hosting the annual event.

The Jackson Singing persisted for seventy years as a testament to the work and vision of Judge Jackson and the devotion of his family. For most of these years, Japheth Jackson was the primary guiding force. Judge Jackson sought to have his songs included in the dominant Sacred Harp hymnbook of his community during the 1920s. His spirit continues through the acceptance of those same songs by the greater Sacred Harp community thanks in large part to the impact of the Jackson Memorial Singing. Despite the uncertain future of the Singing, the legacy of Judge Jackson and his son Japheth lives on. While singers may not fill Sacred Harp singings in Ozark the way they once did, selections from *The Colored Sacred Harp* are now sung well beyond the Wiregrass.

Japheth Jackson died on July 2, 2010. At his funeral, an ensemble of black and white singers, including his daughter Janice, performed some of his favorite hymns from *The B. F. White Sacred Harp* and *The Colored Sacred Harp*. ■

Notes

- 1 The birthday singing was scheduled in late spring instead of Judge Jackson’s birth month of June. Email correspondence with Janice Jackson-Johnson, July 1, 2010.
- 2 Prior to the publication of *The Colored Sacred Harp*, Jackson sold some individual hymns as broadsides in the streets of Ozark.
- 3 The Sacred Harp Publishing Company currently located in Samson, Alabama publishes *The B. F. White Sacred Harp*. It is the preferred variant of the *Sacred Harp* in the areas of south Alabama, south Georgia, south Mississippi, east Texas, and the panhandle of Florida.
- 4 “Judge Jackson: Black Giant of White Spirituals,” *Journal of American Folklore* 83:446–451.
- 5 Boyd’s resulting manuscript was meant to be volume two in the University of Pennsylvania’s series on American Folklife but funding ran out. Henry Glassie’s

Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States was the first volume. Boyd's manuscript was finally published in 2002 by the Alabama Folklife Association and titled *Judge Jackson and The Colored Sacred Harp*.

- 6 At a 1986 reception at the Governor's mansion following a concert of noted Alabama musicians in Montgomery, I noticed George Wallace and Dewey Williams visiting with each other at some length. Apparently the two men knew each other better than others in attendance. This was due to the grassroots political activity of Dewey Williams.
- 7 Boyd, Joe Dan (2002). *Judge Jackson and The Colored Sacred Harp*. Montgomery: Alabama Folklife Association, p. 88.
- 8 According to Janice Jackson-Johnson, placing flowers on Judge Jackson's grave on the weekend of the Jackson Singing was a family ritual for many years. Email correspondence with Janice Jackson-Johnson, June 30, 2010.
- 9 Boyd, Joe Dan (2002). *Judge Jackson and The Colored Sacred Harp*. Montgomery: Alabama Folklife Association, p. 22.
- 10 Email correspondence with Janice Jackson-Johnson, June 30, 2010.
- 11 John Wesley Work visited the Wiregrass in 1938. He recorded Judge Jackson, Dewey Williams and others in congregational singing at this time. He was the first scholar to document the tradition in any detail. The tape he was playing was a copy of a program produced by Middle Tennessee State University's Bruce Nemerov, ca. 1989 for a public radio series called "Roots of American Popular Music."
- 12 Ham died later that year, in November of 2009.

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“A Joyful Sound”: The Church Music of Covington County, Alabama

C. Randall Bradley

Covington County has a rich church music history. From Hacoda to Hester’s Store and Wing to Rose Hill, people in this county play instruments and sing from the depths of their hearts. From this deep well of God-inspired emotion and the richness of thought and commitment, worship in this area of Alabama thrives.

When we look at church music multi-dimensionally, we observe that beneath the surface are many colors, patterns, shapes, and textures. Like a crazy quilt the patches are varied with no recognizable pattern; however, the fabrics are ones that we recognize in each other. This article explores some of the richness and diversity of the music in the churches of Covington County, Alabama.

General History

Covington County was formed on December 7, 1821, only two years after Alabama was admitted to the Union (1819). Macedonia Church (near Rose Hill) was the earliest established church in Covington County. The town now called Andalusia was originally called Montezuma, and it was located near the banks of the Conecuh River; however, when the area flooded in 1841, a yellow fever epidemic occurred and the settlers fled to the highest point in the area—where the courthouse square now sits. Five years later, a post office was established at this “New Site,” later known as Andalusia. Five courthouses have stood in Covington County.¹ The loss of all county records due to fires in 1839 and in 1878 limits study of the early days of the county. Covington County saw only minimal growth until 1899 when railroad lines were established from Searight and from Georgiana through Andalusia and Opp to Graceville,

Florida, and later to Florala. Until this time Covington County had only an agricultural and timber economy.²

Church Demographics

As you will see in the following chart, dozens of Christian denominations are represented: the largest single group (slightly more than one-third) is Baptist, followed closely by nondenominational churches.³ Fourteen others comprise the remaining slice—approximately one third.

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Number of Churches</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
African Mission Episcopal	2	1.0%
Assembly of God	8	4.1%
Bahai Faith	1	0.5%
Baptist	69	35.4%
Catholic	2	1.0%
Church of Christ	8	4.1%
Church of God	4	2.1%
Episcopal	1	0.5%
Full Gospel	2	1.0%
Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	1	0.5%
Kingdom Hall	2	1.0%
Lutheran	2	1.0%
Methodist	3	1.5%
Missionary Baptist	9	4.6%
Nazarene	1	0.5%
Non-Denominational	63	32.3%
Pentecostal	6	3.1%
Presbyterian	2	1.0%
Primitive Baptist	2	1.0%
Seventh Day Adventist	1	0.5%
United Methodist	6	3.1%

FIGURE 1

Denominational Breakdown, Covington County Churches.

Sacred Harp Singings

Sacred Harp Singing dates back to 1844 with the publication of *The Sacred Harp*, an oblong tune book by Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha J. King. Using four shapes (sung in the scale fa-sol-la-fa-sol-la-mi-fa), this unaccompanied singing traditionally is performed by singing the syllables before singing the text.⁴ Singers sit in four sections by voice part forming a hollow square, and the leader stands in the center. Everyone who is willing takes a turn leading. The version of *The Sacred Harp* used for singings varies; however, the edition used almost exclusively in south Alabama and north Florida is the the *B. F. White Sacred Harp* (popularly known as the Cooper Edition) which is published in Samson.

Today there are nine Sacred Harp singings in Covington County.⁵ While there were twenty to twenty-five singings in Covington County in 1960 and approximately eighteen in the late 1970s, Sacred Harp singing remains strong, and many singers gather on Sundays and spend the day singing with occasional recesses and time for lunch—always provided by the host church. Current singings in Covington County include the Bulger-Cockroft Singing at Red Oak Baptist Church which celebrated its 106th session in the summer of 2009. Other churches that host regular singings include Enon Baptist, Florida; New Hope, Opp; Cool Springs Primitive Baptist, Opp; Shady Hill, Andalusia; Beda Baptist, Wing; Valley Grove Primitive Baptist, Opp; and Pleasant Home Baptist, Andalusia. Today, Covington County has more active Sacred Harp Singers than any other county in the area.⁶

In the past, Sacred Harp singing schools were prominent in Covington County and they were taught by such teachers as D.J. (Dee) Bryan of Rose Hill, Jum McKinney of Opp, Taylor Wise, Cephas Maddox of the Red Oak Community, and Preacher Williams. The last Sacred Harp Singing School was taught at Cool Springs Church, Opp.⁷ Though I have found no direct evidence of African American Sacred Harp singings in Covington County; there was a singing in Dozier for many years⁸ and there is an African American Sacred Harp Singing in Elba (Coffee County).^{9 10}

Sacred Harp Singings were held regularly in the Covington County courthouse courtroom as seen in this *Andalusia Star News* notice from Sunday, July 14, 1974:



FIGURE 2

Sacred Harp singing from Covington County Courthouse (1973) depicting the typical square seating set-up.

Sacred Harp Singing

74th Annual Andalusia Sacred Harp Singing will be held in the courtroom of the Covington County Courthouse Wednesday. A local radio station will broadcast the songfest from 10:30-11:30. Fred Kelly is the chair of the singing.¹¹

A full-page spread from the *Andalusia Star News*, July 21, 1974, provides photos from the July 14th courthouse singing. Sue Bass Wilson had the following recollection of courthouse singings from her childhood in Andalusia:

When I was a child, I would hear singing coming from the courthouse when I would be at my grandfather's bakery. (He had a bakery for forty-five years in downtown Andalusia.) It was before the days of air conditioning and one might be riding around in the car with the windows down and you could ride around the square and you could hear the strains of the shape note singers—lots of singers coming from the courthouse area.¹²

Seven-Shape Singing

Seven-shape singing uses a different syllable for each note of the scale,

and it is usually performed with piano. Seven-shape singings have long been popular in this area, and Covington Countians can be found many Friday nights participating even today.¹³

In the past, these singings were more prominent, and in the 1970s singings were held at Smyrna Baptist Church, Florala; Salem Baptist, Andalusia; Liberty Home Baptist, Andalusia; East Highland Baptist, Andalusia; and Mt. Zion United Methodist, Straughn Community.¹⁴ Dudley Maddox remembers singings in an earlier era at Red Oak, Enon, Blue Springs School, and in an activity room at the Micholas Mills in Opp.¹⁵ The singings often used one of Bazzell Mull's songbooks or the Winsett publication, *Best of All*. However, in addition to these two favorites, the latest books by either Stamps-Baxter or Vaughan publishing company were used for learning new songs.

Seven-shape singings have provided and still offer important training for musicians who serve their churches. Everyone who participates sings parts; therefore, music reading and literacy are stressed. Additionally, everyone takes a turn leading his or her favorite song(s). The leader chooses a pianist from the group-identified pianists who are present. Many young people have begun their church piano playing in these settings, and many reticent pianists have learned to sight-read as a result.

Quartets and Radio

Quartet singing remains prominent in Covington County. One can readily hear quartet and gospel singing on Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings on local stations as well as throughout the week. While lots of vintage gospel music is played, it is interspersed with songs by newer artists. The Andalusia Quartet is one such group that sang live on the radio in the 1940s.

Many remember hearing the Powells live on WAMI in Opp on Sunday mornings in the 1960s and 1970s. Each Sunday morning at 8:30, Lola, Lois, and their brother J. C. Powell from the Enon Community sang gospel songs after which their younger sister, Clara, preached.¹⁶

Begun in 1944 and held in July or August until 1994 (the fiftieth anniversary), the Rural Electric Association (REA) meeting brought to Andalusia such gospel groups as the Chuck Wagon Gang, the Speer Family, the Florida Boys, Wendy Bagwell and the Sunliters, the LeFevres, the Blackwood Broth-



FIGURE 3

Wendy Bagwell and the Sunlighters at the REA meeting (1974).

ers, Thrasher Brothers Quartet, and the Cathedrals. Appearing in more recent years are such groups as the Inspirations, the Davis Brothers, Tony Gore and Majesty, the Rhythm Masters, Brian Free and Assurance, the Isaacs, the Greens, the Hoppers, the Fox Brothers, Gold City, Rex Nelson Singers, the Singing Americans, the Kingsmen Quartet, and the Oldtimers.¹⁷

Particularly in the past, gospel groups (primarily quartets) often sang as a part of other community events. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the South-

ernaires Quartet from Mobile sang all around Covington County including yearly concerts at W. S. Harlan Elementary School in Lockhart as a PTA fundraiser to provide a television for each classroom. Due to a bus breakdown in Andalusia, the Sego Brothers and Naomi even sang an unplanned concert at a barbecue supper at the Stanley Community Center circa 1970.

African American Church Music

Dating back to the oldest African American church in Covington County, the First Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church (1865) on Highway 84, the tradition of music in African American churches in Covington County is diverse and rich. Veteran music educator Elmore Lewis offers the following observations on music in African American churches in Covington County:

- (1) Music consists of metered hymns, gospel songs, and contemporary music.
- (2) Most songs used in the services are geared to the atmosphere of the service and are determined by the musician.
- (3) Certain songs or hymns are often used prior to the minister's sermons.
- (4) Music is a very spiritual means of expression towards God.
- (5) Songs are sometimes injected during the service to enhance the mood.
- (6) Most musicians in the churches are not professionally trained, i.e., they are self-taught—they play by ear.
- (7) While training is important, anointing “breaks the yoke.”
- (8) Music is viewed as ministry, praising God in song. It is a chance for group participation, brings about unity, and changes attitudes.¹⁸

The archaic practice of lining out is still used in local African American churches. Elmore Lewis describes the process:

The deacon will come before the congregation and line out a hymn. To line out the hymn he will set the tune to the hymn and then everyone will come in and sing that stanza. Then he will give another stanza and they will sing that. That will set sort of the tone for the service—for that particular part of the service.¹⁹

Also prominent in the African American church is the tradition of “Choir Day.” Local educator and church musician, Willie Lee Wilson, reflects on this practice:

“Choir Day” is a day you have a special time for the choir—recognition of the choir for its years at church and we normally have it in the month of August at Bethlehem. And so we have something where we invite the area choirs to come and be with us and share in singing.²⁰

The music of every church has changed in the last fifty years. When Elmore Lewis was asked about changes in the music of African American churches of this area, he shared the following reflection:

People were more sincere then than they are now. Those people had gone through a lot of trials and tribulations and they were singing—you could see the feelings they had for the songs. “I Know the Lord Will Make a Way Somehow” and they put their feelings in there. And I tell everybody, now my mama was one of the worst singers. But Mama would sing loud, off-key and you’d better not say anything to her about it. She’d say, “Boy, what the Lord has done for me, I don’t care what you folks say ’cause, I’m thinking about Jesus. I got to live with Jesus. They can talk about me all they want to talk about. I’m gonna make my noise and ain’t nobody gonna stop me.”²¹

Diverse Denominations

While Baptist and nondenominational churches comprise two-thirds of the congregations in Covington County, other denominations also play a significant role. This section will highlight four congregations that illustrate this rich diversity.

- **ST. MARY’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH** is the only Episcopal church in Covington County—the next closest Episcopal churches are in Brewton, Greenville, and Troy. This church was organized in 1947 and met in homes until the congregation built their first church on Second Street in the early 1950s. According to longtime member Frankie Lancaster, the church has had its own priest in the past but is currently served by a supply priest from the Central Gulf Coast

Diocese. During Sunday worship, the congregation sings from *The Hymnal* (1982) which is used by most Episcopal churches in the US.²²

• **CHRIST THE KING CATHOLIC CHURCH** is the only Catholic church in Covington County. The next closest Catholic churches are in Pike and Butler counties. The current church (built in 1973) has an active ministry to the community, particularly through their St. Vincent DePaul Society. The parish has a full-time priest, and Cindy Perrin has been the organist and cantor for twenty-four years. Having not used Latin since Vatican II (1962 to 1965), the members are currently beginning to sing more Spanish songs in their worship in response to the growing number of Spanish-speaking Catholics who are moving to Covington County. Cindy Perrin shares about the movement toward more Spanish music in the Mass:

I think that's just happening right now. I think because for so long we've been so focused on not having to factor the Hispanics into it—we've not had that many and realize that we have that many now. That's when Father asked me, "Can we put Spanish and English in there. And I'm looking at this and going—how? But then we have Spanish and English speaking (bilingual people). Working with them, I was able to do that. . . . Because they have so many (Spanish speakers) our missalettes have Spanish music in them. We don't do it but we're learning to do it."²³

Like other churches in the area, Christ the King also participates in the community Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony. Mary Jane Winkler, a longtime member of Christ the King cites their recent involvement:

One of the things we have is the Christmas Tree Lighting and we have choirs from different churches to come and sing. We've tried different variations of it but this seems to work well. They had the bell ringers this time from the Baptist church. We have Santa Claus there for the children. A guy from our church sang, and he used the guitar because he said that's how they originally did it ["Silent Night"], and he sang all four verses of *Stille Nacht* which was beautiful.²⁴

• **CEDAR GROVE CHURCH OF CHRIST:** There are currently five mainstream

Churches of Christ in Covington County with the largest being the Cedar Grove Church of Christ near Andalusia. Samford Barron, who came to Andalusia from Troy, first introduced the Church of Christ to Covington County in 1875. Based on the denomination's reading of the New Testament, the Church of Christ always sings *a cappella* in worship, and the position of song leader is reserved for men. Some leaders memorize the keys for songs and others use pitch pipes or tuning forks to pitch songs. The Church of Christ, like others in Covington County, shares the heritage of shape-note singing schools, although there has not officially been a Church of Christ singing school in many years. As a result of their young people going to camps and learning praise songs, in more recent years the Church of Christ has begun to incorporate praise songs into the Sunday worship.²⁵

PRESSLY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH is located in the Loango community. The church, which has an average attendance of about sixty, is one of the oldest congregations in Covington County and was established in the 1820s by a minister who traveled from South Carolina through Tennessee and into the edge of Florida. A sister church of Pressly Memorial was established in 1827 about two miles from the present church. In the early 1900s two other Presbyterian churches were begun—one in Red Level and the other just across the Conecuh County line from Loango. By the mid 1960s these four churches—served by one pastor—were declining and a decision was made to consolidate the churches. Pressly Memorial was chosen as the church to survive because of its central location and because there were more younger people in the congregation. In addition to the denomination's hymnal, Pressly Memorial uses *Bible Songs: A Selection of Psalms* (eighth edition), 1982. The congregation has sung from a version of this Psalm book since 1946. On a typical Sunday they sing three hymns and one Psalm.²⁶ This unique congregation is one of nine Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Alabama. They are the only congregation in the county that regularly sings Psalms.

Instruments in Covington County Churches

The number and quality of musical instruments in Covington County reflect

the relative affluence of this part of Alabama. Presently, there are eight pipe organs in Covington County with the oldest at First Baptist, Florala (1922), and the largest and newest at First Baptist Church, Andalusia (1975).²⁷ Following are the locations, builders, and installation dates: (1) First Baptist Church, Florala—1922 Moller; (2) First Presbyterian Church, Andalusia—1926 Pilcher; First Methodist, Andalusia—1926 Austin; First Methodist, Opp—circa 1940s Hilgreen-Lane; First Baptist Church, Andalusia—1975 Reuter; First Baptist Church, Opp—1920s Wurlitzer; Carolina Baptist Church, Andalusia—1939 Wicks; First Presbyterian Church, Florala, 1949 Hilgreen-Lane.²⁸

J. T. Hughes gave the county's first pipe organ to First Baptist Church, Florala, at an original cost of \$4000. Mr. Hughes was treasurer of the church and was a prominent timber dealer.²⁹

The second oldest organ in the county was installed at First Presbyterian Church, Andalusia, in December 1926 at a cost of \$5,100. However, before the organ debt was paid, the church came upon hard times due to the Depression. On September 20, 1930, the session appointed a committee to negotiate a loan of \$3,000 to pay off the organ and other outstanding debts using the manse as collateral. However, it was not until 1934 when Mr. E. L. More died and left \$5,000 to the church that the debt was finally paid in full. Prior to the present pipe organ, the church used a pump organ which was dropped and broken when the church was moving into its new building in 1908.³⁰ Incidentally, the First Presbyterian Church is the oldest church building in Andalusia.

When they began to gain prominence in the 1930s, other town churches in the county began to use electronic organs. Prior to the pipe organ they purchased in 1975, First Baptist, Andalusia, had two different Hammond organs (1937 and 1954).³¹

Most rural churches did not have an organ prior to the 1970s and many still do not. However, the opening of the Covington Mall in 1968 and its inclusion of a music store, Melody Carousel, provided a local option for churches to purchase instruments. Such was the case at Red Oak Baptist when the new sanctuary was dedicated in 1969 and a new piano was purchased by the young people of the church with funds they raised from car washes and other projects. In the same year, Ollie Davis gave the church a small, two-manual Thomas electronic organ that was purchased at Melody Carousel.³²

There are a number of excellent pianos in churches in Covington County and one harpsichord (Carolina Baptist Church). Likely, every piano in the county has a story of how it was obtained, and often the stories reflect sacrifice and hardship. One such story involves the original piano used at Red Oak Baptist Church. Prior to its purchase there was not a piano in the church. The following account by Willene Kelley explains how money was raised to purchase the instrument:

If you are old enough, then you can remember the Coca-Cola boxes filled with ice-cold colas that were on the grounds across the church on the First Sunday in August. [Date of the yearly Sacred Harp Sing.] Various groups were responsible for selling the refreshments. One such group sold the ice drinks, saved money, and purchased the piano that is in the educational building. Not only profits from these sales, but some ladies also made quilts to sell in order to add to the savings for the piano.³³

A relatively new addition to most churches is the purchase of a sound system. Starting in the 1970s as soloists and some choirs began to utilize recorded accompaniments, churches began to explore the need for sound reinforcement—first to play music and amplify a soloist and eventually to enhance speaking. As a result, nearly every church, regardless of size, now has a sound system, and many churches have added screens for visual imaging projection as well.

Full-Time Church Musicians

Musicians who have served in churches as full-time ministers of music have often served the larger community as well as the local congregation since often these ministers have led music-related activities beyond their congregations. First Baptist, Florala, seems to be the first church in the county to employ a full-time minister of music. They called Bill Buchanan on October 1, 1954.³⁴ First Baptist Church, Andalusia, called their first full-time music minister, George Blaylock, in July 1959.³⁵ First Baptist Church, Opp, also has had full-time music ministers.³⁶ Roger Breland, the founder of the singing group Truth, was the choral director at Opp High School for a period in the 1960s

and was the music minister at First Baptist Church, Opp.³⁷

Choir Festivals and Revivals

Revivals and evangelistic meetings have long provided opportunities for churches to revive their spiritual vigor and to increase their numbers; however, these events also provided opportunities for churches to share their music and musicians. As a result, churches heard and learned new songs, and they found out what their neighbors throughout the county were doing in their churches. In the glory days of revival meetings—through the 1970s—rural churches often invited a soloist, group, or choir from a neighboring community to provide “special” music for the revival. This cross-fertilization of churches was a healthy process, at a time when many current modes of communication were not available.

Well into the 1980s some Baptist churches in the county participated in yearly district choir festivals, usually held at First Baptist Church, Andalusia. Churches brought their choirs, each choir performed two pieces, and music professionals from other counties or towns adjudicated them.³⁸

Youth Choirs

Prominent in Covington County during the 1960s and 1970s were large youth choirs that reflected the youth choir movement in churches across the country resulting from the Baby Boom and the youth musical movement.³⁹ Sue Bass Wilson reflects on her experience in youth choir at First Baptist Church, Andalusia:

Early '60s to mid '60s to late '60s there were a lot of youth activities then—a big youth choir. Sunday nights were youth night. They had a big youth choir 7-12 grades and that was a wonderful time for the youth of the church. The choir loft was full and we met there on Sunday afternoon and quite a few (of the students who sang in the youth choir) have gone on to be active in church activities. Many ministers are from that youth choir from the 1960s.⁴⁰

Lurleen B. Wallace Community College

Opening in the fall of 1969, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College (LBW)



FIGURE 4

First annual community *Messiah* presentation conducted by Jerry Padgett (1974).

has provided training for many church music leaders throughout Covington County. The influence of the college is also felt through faculty who move to Andalusia to teach and often serve in churches and through the enrichment that concerts and performances offer.⁴¹ For example, the *Messiah* production that Jerry Padgett first conducted with a community chorus in 1974⁴² became a regular event with a more recent addition of ballet. The first *Messiah* performance in Covington County was by the choir of First Baptist Church, Andalusia, for Christmas 1961 under the direction of George Blaylock and accompanied by Louise Barrow and Juanita Turner.⁴³

Particularly significant to LBW and to the music of Covington County is Jerry Padgett who came to Covington County in 1972 and served as instructor of music at LBW until his death in 2002. While he directly influenced the music of three churches, the scores of students that he taught continue to impact the churches where they serve.

High School Band and Choral Programs

Covington County has long had a superb tradition of music in the schools, and the training has positively impacted the churches of Covington County.⁴⁴

Through exceptional band programs in Andalusia, Opp, Florala, Red Level, and Straughn, thousands of young people have developed musical skills.⁴⁵

Andalusia and Opp have long been known for their superb choral music programs. Particularly notable in Opp is the fine program developed and maintained for decades by Joe and Faye Tisdale.⁴⁶ Paula Sue Dubel⁴⁷ later continued the rich history of choral music at Andalusia High School begun by Mary Clyde Merrill, Merilyn Jones, and others. Merilyn Jones was cited by many as a significant influence both through the high school and her work as minister of music at First Methodist Church, Andalusia.⁴⁸

Prior to integration, Elmore Lewis was the choir director at Woodson High School, the county's African American high school in Andalusia, starting in 1960. Mr. Lewis's student Willie Lee Wilson reflects on the choir (which numbered nearly one hundred) at Woodson during his student days in the 1960s:

Music was great in the high school. I feel I had one of the greatest teachers to get me started—Mr. Elmore Lewis—because I was the high school accompanist for the high school choir. So we did a whole lot. We did spirituals—"Ain' Got Time to Die." We did a whole lot of spirituals. But we did a lot of classical, too. We did "Alleluia" by Randall Thompson. We did "Last Words of David."⁴⁹

Piano Teachers

Covington County has boasted many fine piano teachers, and many of them have played regularly in the churches. Additionally, the piano teachers of Covington County have trained hundreds of pianists who have served the churches of this area. Some of the significant teachers who have taught in Covington County include Irene McCloud, Lockhart; Jo Ann Green and Mayo White, Florala; Alice and Clarice Rainer (the Rainer Twins), Opp; and Helen Harwell, Straughn. Piano teachers in Andalusia include Anne Long Albritton, Louise Barrow, Mary Lou Bostic, Mildred Carter, Dorothy Cook, Martha Givhan, Annie Leigh Dean Kearley, Jeanise Kirkland, Ann Turner Martin, Mary Clyde Merrill, Mark McGowan, Robert McGowan, Joy Garner Sowards, and Juanita Turner.



FIGURE 5
Songbooks used in Covington County singings.

Singing Schools

Beginning around the turn of the previous century and into the 1970s, itinerant teachers came into local churches and taught groups of children during the summer mornings once the crops were laid by—they sometimes taught piano in the afternoons. In the evenings, the whole community came together for additional lessons and to practice their music reading and song-leading skills. Covington County had many singing schools though the 1970s. Singing school teachers who taught in Covington County included Cephas Maddox, Walt Powell, Willie Johnson, and Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Hollingsworth.⁵⁰ The most well-known singing school master to come to Covington County was B. B. McKinney, who taught singing schools during the 1930s or early 1940s.⁵¹ McKinney was the author of many well-loved hymns⁵² and was the editor of the *Broadman Hymnal*. McKinney later became the first director of the Church Music Department for the Southern Baptist Convention.⁵³ L. D. Huffstutler,

the author of the gospel song “Hand in Hand” and who also wrote a widely-used rudiment book, also taught in Covington County during this period.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Alabama Baptist Convention sent out college music majors to teach singing schools in the churches. Buck Creek Baptist Church, Red Level, was one of the churches that employed Earlene Rentz as teacher for a two-week school.⁵⁴

The Broadman Hymnal

The most widely sold hymnal in the United States is the *Broadman Hymnal*. This hymnal, produced by Broadman Press (Southern Baptist Publisher) in 1940 and edited by B. B. McKinney, was used in most Baptist churches in Covington County until the first *Baptist Hymnal* was published in 1956. However, many rural churches continued to use the Broadman hymnal even into the twenty-first century. Still in print seventy years later, the hymnal is the repository of memories for many older adults.

Summary

Through this article you have seen many of the patches that make up the crazy quilt that forms Covington County’s church music. Though gathered with different theologies and worship practices, unity and deep faith connect Covington County churches to each other and contribute to a tightly-knit community spirit. Elmore Lewis captures this spirit well:

Group participation brings about unity . . . and it’s [music] important in achieving unity. It’s basically what we’re striving for here. This is one of the objectives you know that we look for when we go to church—to be inspired and to share your feelings with your fellow Christians. It’s our desire to become closer together . . . as a group of people and to work with people even though they might not be of the same faith that we are. But, they are all handiworks of God. And so what we do is to try to blend in and respect the rights of others and enjoy each other, as the Lord would have us. And we feel like in the end of our life on this earth, we all are gonna be blessed to be with the Lord. So it’s not gonna be any race, creed or color. Everybody will be alike; so what we emphasize is practice down here. Let’s practice down here on how it’s gonna be

when our spirit gets with Jesus. We always say, “If you can’t get along with your brothers and sisters down here, how you gone do when you get up in glory? Are you even gonna be able to make it to Glory?”⁵⁵ ■

Author’s Note

A version of this article was first delivered as a paper in Andalusia, Alabama, on March 4, 2010 as part of the conference, “Our Story, Our Song: Celebrating Our Heritage of Hymns.”

Notes

- 1 The first, a log structure in Montezuma; the second, a log structure in Andalusia; and the third, a clapboard building were destroyed by fire in 1878. The fourth was a brick building located east of the present town square, and the fifth is the present courthouse erected in 1916.
- 2 City of Andalusia, “History of Andalusia,” <http://www.cityofandalusia.com/community.aspx> (accessed November 15, 2009).
- 3 This data was compiled from the 2009 *Covington County Telephone Directory* and from Google searches for Covington County churches.
- 4 While Sacred Harp is not often sung in regular worship services, it has significantly influenced mainstream church music in the following ways: (1) Sacred Harp singers are often song leaders in their congregations. (2) Many of the tunes from *The Sacred Harp* made their way into mainstream hymnals. (3) The music literacy that is necessary to sing Sacred Harp provided a strong foundation for other music learning and participation.
- 5 Wayne Jones, e-mail message to author, February 24, 2010.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Wayne Jones, telephone conversation with author, February 24, 2010.
- 9 There is evidence of Elba singings on YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBic1-twVKA> Accessed August 19, 2009.
- 10 Three years ago, Sacred Harp Singers in Covington County were contacted by George Burnett (African American from Atlanta) and asked to sing for the Burnett family reunion held in Andalusia. This seems to be evidence that there was a strong African American connection to Sacred Harp in the past. Jones, e-mail.
- 11 *Andalusia Star News*, July 1, 1974.
- 12 Sue Bass Wilson, interview with author, December 30, 2009.

- 13 Regular and well-attended singings still occur at Red Oak, Enon, and in other churches.
- 14 Martha Parker, telephone conversation with author, October 14, 2009.
- 15 Dudley Maddox, e-mail message to author, February 17, 2010.
- 16 Unfortunately, no archives from those programs can be located.
- 17 Archives of the Rural Electric Association.
- 18 Elmore Lewis, from a handout given to author, December 31, 2009.
- 19 Elmore Lewis, videotaped interview with author, December 31, 2009.
- 20 Willie Lee Wilson, interview with author, December 23, 2009.
- 21 Elmore Lewis, interview December 31, 2009.
- 22 Frankie Lancaster, interview with author, December 30, 2009.
- 23 Cindy Perrin, interview with author, December 23, 2009.
- 24 Mary Jane Winkler, interview with author, December 23, 2009.
- 25 Curtis Thomasson, interview with author, January 27, 2010.
- 26 Fred Hartin, interview with author, January 26, 2010.
- 27 David Finch, e-mail message to author, January 7, 2010.
- 28 Although the organ at Carolina Baptist was built in 1939, it was installed at Carolina in 1992. Likewise the organ at First Presbyterian, Florala, was not installed in that location until 2002, and the organ at First Baptist, Opp, was installed there many years after it was built.
- 29 Mr. Hughes's wife and daughter played the organ in the church for many years. *History of the First Baptist Church of Florala, Alabama: 1881-1961, 80th Anniversary Edition*. (Dothan, Alabama: Southeastern Publishing Company, 1961), 63.
- 30 Annie Lou Flowers, *The History of First Presbyterian Church of Andalusia, 1901-1941*, unpublished, 6-7.
- 31 Louise Barrow, *A History of the Music of the First Baptist Church of Andalusia*, unpublished manuscript, 1986.
- 32 Keith Bulger, *Red Oak Baptist Church—A Brief History, 2001*, unpublished manuscript, 2001, 28.
- 33 Bulger, *Red Oak*.
- 34 *History*, First Baptist Florala, 42.
- 35 Other full-time ministers of music at First Baptist Church, Andalusia, include the following: Harrell Sinclair (1965-1970), Ray Burdeshaw (1971-1974), Ronnie Parker (1974-1978), Don Lingle (1979-2007, Dwight Crigger (2007). Particularly notable is Ray Burdeshaw who went to Springhill Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama, and later became the director of church music for the Alabama Baptist Convention until his recent retirement. Barrow, *History*.
- 36 Full-time ministers of music at First Baptist Church, Opp, include Tommy Lane,

- Jesse Duffy, and Bill Haas. Corrie Mae Anderson Owens, interview with author, December 23, 2009.
- 37 He later went to Springhill Baptist Church, Mobile, and has recently served as the dean of the school of music at the University of Mobile.
- 38 Typically, choirs from Andalusia, Opp, Florala, Evergreen, and even Flomaton came to these festivals.
- 39 Songs books reflecting this movement include a whole series of books published by Word Music (Waco, Texas) beginning with *Sing and Celebrate* in 1971.
- 40 Sue Bass Wilson, interview.
- 41 Dr. Steve Hubbard who teaches English at LBW Community College is the organist at First Presbyterian Church, Andalusia, and the organizer of the 2010 conference, "Our Story, Our Song: Celebrating Our Heritage of Hymns."
- 42 Cindy Myrick Pollock sang in this *Messiah* Presentation as a ninth grade student at Red Level High School. Cindy Pollock, interview with author, March 4, 2010.
- 43 Barrow, *History*.
- 44 When you advocate for music in the schools, you are also helping the church. Through music education, students gain a love and appreciation for music and develop skills, and their teachers often serve as music leaders in their churches.
- 45 Band directors at Andalusia High School such as Lacey Powell and Jim Nettle; directors such as Charles Chalker, Erskine Ziglar, Tommy Maddox, and Andy Alsup at Florala; Gary Bradley at Red Level High School, and Tony Pike at Straughn High School, and other fine teachers guided some of these programs to statewide recognition throughout the years. Particularly notable is Lacey Powell who went on to be inducted into the Alabama Bandmasters Hall of Fame and later to teach at the University of South Alabama.
- 46 Joe and Faye Tisdale have made a lifelong impact not only through their teaching music in the public schools of Opp but also through their contributions to the First United Methodist Church, Opp.
- 47 Paula Sue Dubelt served as choral director at Andalusia High School from 1978 to 2008, and has served as minister of music at First United Methodist, Andalusia, since 1984.
- 48 The Glee Club under her direction traveled widely, and the ensemble of folk singers she organized sang for hootenannies all over Alabama. Several students from these years went on to study music including Corrie Mae Anderson Owens and Sue Bass Wilson. Marilyn Jones went on to earn a doctorate and completed her career on the faculty of the University of Alabama.
- 49 Willie Lee Wilson, interview.
- 50 Bulger, *History* and Maddox e-mail.
- 51 McKinney is known to have taught singing schools at Red Oak Baptist Church and at Judson Baptist Church. Maddox, e-mail.

- 52 McKinney's hymns include "Have Faith In God," "The Nail Scarred Hand" (1924), "Let Others See Jesus in You" (1924), "Satisfied with Jesus" (1926), "Speak to My Heart" (1927), "Neath the Old Olive Trees" (1934), "Breathe on Me" (1937), and "Wherever He Leads I'll Go" (1937).
- 53 McKinney died in 1952 in an auto accident on his way back to Nashville from Ridgecrest, North Carolina (near Asheville), where he had just led the music for the church music week. Louise Barrow, Sara Ellen McGowan, and Elizabeth Everage from First Baptist, Andalusia, were in attendance at Ridgecrest that week. Barrows, *A History*.
- 54 When I moved to Baylor in 2000, Earlene Rentz was my colleague. In casual conversation I discovered that she spent two weeks in Covington County teaching singing school in the 1970s when she was an undergraduate at the University of Montevallo. She vividly remembered people I knew from the Buck Creek Community.
- 55 Elmore Lewis, interview December 31, 2009.

Singers, Singing-school Teachers, Songwriters, Editors, and Publishers of Shape-note Gospel Music in Alabama

Steve Grauberger

The method of writing music using uniquely shaped note-heads in conjunction with a conventional musical staff with the elements of lines, spaces, clefs, key, and time signatures was developed at the turn of the nineteenth century. “Shape notes” were first published in New England in an 1801 tunebook titled *The Easy Instructor* by William Smith and William Little. This music notation system, and singing thereof, is commonly called “four-shape,” or “fasola.” The old British solfege (syllabic note-singing) system in use at that time featured only the syllables fa sol, la, and mi for the gamut of the scale, thus only four shapes were needed to fit this notation method.

After the rise in popularity of singing schools in the eighteenth century, music publishers began printing books for an expanding musically educated market. The first published tunebooks that used shape notes had the distinctive oblong shape which is now an icon of reference for this genre of American sacred folk music (Crawford). The early titles *Kentucky Harmony* (1816), *Missouri Harmony* (1820), *Southern Harmony* (1835), and *The Sacred Harp* (1844) are examples of the format.

A new evangelical movement in the mid to late nineteenth century—spread by evangelists like Dwight Lyman Moody—ushered in a new commercial genre of spiritual music led by song and lyric writers such as Fanny Crosby, author of “What a Friend We Have In Jesus,” and William Bradbury, who wrote “Angel Band.” The term “gospel music” is usually credited to Philip P. Bliss and Ira D. Sankey, who used it in their 1875 publication, *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs*. This songbook, initially in a seven-shape notation system, was one of

the first of a new type of small inexpensively printed paperback songbooks intended for religious gatherings (Stanley). The same songbook form is still used at today's new-book gospel shape-note singing conventions.

Comparison between the Old and New Shape-note Singing

Shape-note music publishers, starting in the mid nineteenth century, turned to the more progressive do-re-mi solfege method and developed a "seven-shape" notation method based upon the older four-shape model. Several alternate seven-shape systems emerged, but the Aiken shape-note system (see Figure 1, first line) won out and is now the standard. Both four-shape and seven-shape

	SEVEN-SHAPE NOTATIONS						
	Do	RE	Mi	FA	SoL	LA	Si
AIKIN, 1846 (See p. 320)							
AULD, 1847 (See p. 322)							
SWAN, 1848 (See p. 324)							
FUNK, 1851 (See p. 330)							
GILLHAM, 1854 (See p. 331)							
JOHNSON, 1853 (See p. 331)							
WALKER, 1866 (See p. 331)							

¹⁵ Kieffer's songs are on pp. 192, 222, 239, 260 and 368; Dennington's, p. 314; Gabriel's, p. 317.

FIGURE 1

Competing shape-note methods from *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* by George Pullen Jackson, 1933.

singing conventions have coexisted up to the present.

Important democratic and social elements, rooted in older tunebook singing conventions like *Southern Harmony*, *The Sacred Harp* and *Christian Harmony*, stood as examples for subsequent new-book gospel singing conventions in organizational structure and cooperative spirit. The election of officers to set programs and agendas for each event and the process of alternating song leaders during a singing are common to all shape-note conventions (sometimes called classes).

Some controversy surfaced during the transition between the two musics. Supporters of the older, staid, oblong tunebooks decided to keep their mostly static repertoires and “old-time” four-shape system, while the new gospel music advocates had their songbooks published annually or biannually with do-re-mi seven-shape notation. The older tunebooks were revered by adherents for the compositional style of music called “dispersed harmony,” known for its heterogeneous harmonies. In general, it is harmonic arrangements that give individuality to each voice part.

Four-shape written notation features a four-staff brace, with a variety of clefs grouping the voice parts from top staff to bottom; treble, alto, tenor (melody) and bass. Originally the music was often a three-staff brace without the alto part, which was a later addition. This is in contrast to “hymn style” found in the new-book, seven-shape publications where the basic musical notation is a brace of two staves, similar to piano sheet music. In hymn style the top staff combines the soprano (melody) and alto parts with a treble clef and the bottom staff connects the tenor and bass parts in bass clef.

Melodic and harmonic differences between the two shape-note genres are obviously quite distinct. New-book music is almost wholly in major keys as opposed to the mixture of major, minor and some modal keys found in the old tunebooks. Generally, new gospel has a more positive, uplifting, upbeat, modern sound using homorhythmic composition in which the voice and/ or instrument parts move in one rhythm in a chordal style in a basic structure most often of I, IV, V chords (Virginia Gurlinski. “Gospel Music,” www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article284949).

Seven-shape thus contrasts with the contrary motion, polyphonic compositions, and the many tunes that develop somber drone harmonies sung

B. Beddome, 1787. **WEeping SAVIOUR. S.M.** Arr. by E. J. King, 1844; alto by W. M. Cooper, 1902.

1. Did Christ o'er sinners weep, And shall our cheeks be dry? Let floods of pen - i - ten - tial grief Flow forth from ev'ry eye.

2. The Son of God in tears, The wond'ring angels see, Be thou a - ston - ished, O my soul, He shed those tears for me.

3. He wept that we might weep; Each sin demands a tear, In heav'n alone no sin is found, And there's no weeping there.

FIGURE 2

Example of four-shape brace and musical notation from *The Sacred Harp*.

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my

FIGURE 3

Example of seven-shape brace and musical notation from a new-book publication.

in parallel intervals (fourths and fifths) that give four-shape music its unique and antique sound. The lyrics of the two genres contrast a more grave nature juxtaposed to a more positive worldly outlook regarding eternal salvation in new-book compositions. In general, new-book lyrics incorporate a refrain, lines that are repeated after each verse, with different music than the verse, compared to the mainly strophic verse-after-verse lyric structure found in the songs of the older oblong tunebooks. Simple gapped scales, those with fewer than seven notes, are common for both genres of music, although one finds more chromatic melodic treatment in many new-book compositions.

Singing schools and conventions for *The Sacred Harp* and *Christian Harmony* in Alabama were common before the turn of the twentieth century, while new-book gospel singing gained popularity early in the first half of the twentieth century with the transition to popular music styles. Annual sing-

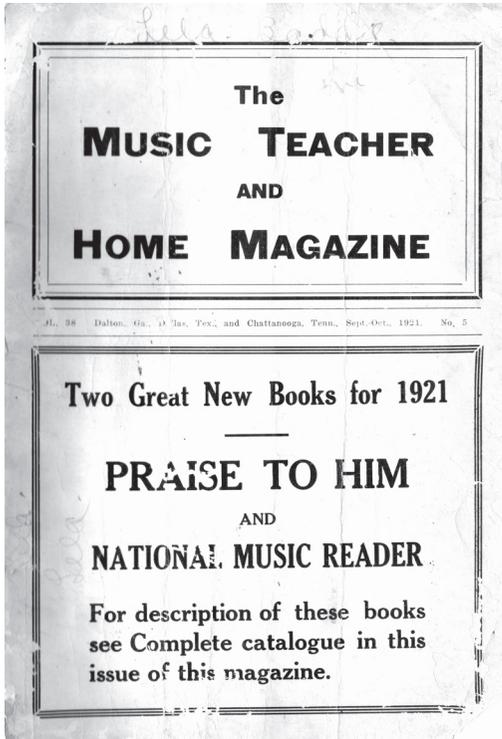


FIGURE 4

Title page from A. J. Showalter's *Music Teacher and Home Magazine*.

Showalter's *Music Teacher and Home Magazine*, Vaughan's *The Musical Visitor*, and Stamps-Baxter Company's *Gospel Music News* soon followed (Goff, pp. 25, 46, 71, 90).

The periodical magazine model kept singing-school teachers and the singing communities in touch with current shape-note singing events, singing schools, and new musical publications. Singing-school teachers advertised their talents in the magazines so they could be hired to teach singing schools, most often in rural communities. Early copies of *The Music Teacher and Home Magazine* produced by the A. J. Showalter and J. D. Patton Company list professional singing-school teachers endorsed by the company. In 1919, 68 out of 136 teachers were from Alabama, with similar numbers shown in a 1921 publication.

ing events at a home, church, or community would often combine when these groups would gather to form larger associations. Community singings were much-anticipated events for many people. Folks would travel for miles to reach the events that were cherished times of socialization among friends and relatives and new acquaintances. Children were introduced to new playmates and many adults found matrimonial partners during these events.

Starting in 1870, Ruebush-Kieffer & Company published the *Musical Million and Singer's Advocate*, continuing an idea from the singers' magazine subscription model. Similar competing publications like

Endorsed singing-school teachers provided selected accounts of successful students, singing classes, and book sales. Here is an example of a correspondence from the 1921 *Music Teacher and Home Magazine*:

FROM BEXAR, ALA.

On July 26, 1921, I began one of the most interesting schools I have ever taught. This was at our Baptist church at Liberty Grove. I had taught a school at the same place several years ago, but all of my old students have married or gone into other lines of service and so nearly all of those in this school were children of the "teen age." But it was a very interesting school with an enrollment of 68, three of whom studied harmony. We used the Showalter publications throughout. I would use no other, for a teacher of music is usually judged by the "material found in his saddle packs."

The interest was so great that a contract was made for a school of fifteen days to begin in July, 1922. Special thanks are due Mr. U. G. Sumerford who worked faithfully from the beginning to the end, helping very much in the practice work. Much success goes to the editor of our magazine. But how could "a live wire" like him be any thing else than a success? I like to read the reports from all the co-workers, but especially those from my old teacher, Prof. J. D. Patton.

Yours for better song service,

D. A. Camp.

With the impetus of publishing companies like the James D. Vaughan Music Company of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee (created in 1902), and Stamps-Baxter Music Company (created circa 1928, Dallas, Texas), regional and county singing conventions eventually came together. In 1931 the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention convened in Birmingham, as did the National Gospel Singing Convention in 1936. Other states' conventions followed suit.

Charles Wolfe writes:

The conventions were established by the most prominent publishers of shape note song books in 1936, including the Morris-Henson Company, the Vaughan Quartet, James D. Vaughan Music Publishers, the Hartford Music Company, A. J. Showalter Company, Denson Music Company, Theodore Sisk

Music Company, Tennessee Music and Printing Company, George W. Sebren, W. P. Ganus, and the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company. The first event was held in 1936 in Birmingham, Alabama, with Adger M. Pace serving as the convention's first president.

According to *Vaughan's Family Visitor*, the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention was created at the Winston County Convention that met at Double Springs the first Sunday in August 1931. At that time a committee was appointed to draw up convention by-laws that were submitted and, with minor changes, approved by the convention. It was comprised of the following members: Whit Denson from Arley, John M. Dye from Birmingham, G. T. Speer from Double Springs, Mr. Higgins from Belle Mina, Oliver Cooper from Crane Hill, Solon Hulsey from Delmar, Dr. Freeman from Cordova, and Mr. Blackwood from Gadsden. The committee decided that the first session of the convention would be held at the Birmingham Electric Power Company's auditorium, located at Twelfth Street and Sixth Avenue. The first session of the Alabama State Singing Convention was held in Birmingham the second weekend in November 1931. John M. Dye presided as temporary chairman. John M. Dye was elected to serve as president.

The close relationship between new-book publishers and singing conventions cannot be overstated, nor that of the singing-school teachers and songwriters who were often liaisons between the two entities. Quite a few Alabama State Gospel Convention officers were (and are) singing-school teachers, excellent gospel songwriters, editors, and quartet singers.

Publishing in Alabama

Although the larger music publishing companies dominated the field, there were quite a few regional songbook compilers and publishers throughout the South in the first half of the twentieth century. Several small music publishing companies were started in Alabama. This includes four oblong tunebook publications. W. M. Cooper from Dothan published his first edition of B. F. White's *Sacred Harp* in 1902. In 1936, brothers Seaborn and Thomas Denson (with Thomas's son, Paine), produced what is commonly called the "Denson book," an Alabama version of White's *Sacred Harp*, based on the 1911 Atlanta

edition by Joseph Summerlin James.

In 1958 an Alabama edition of William Walker's seven-shape *Christian Harmony* was printed under the leadership of Oren A. Parris and John H. Deason. This edition featured some new-book songs. In 1934 Judge Jackson, an African American songwriter and singing-school teacher from Ozark, Alabama, with contributing community composers from the Wiregrass area in the southeastern part of the state, published a four-shape tunebook called *The Colored Sacred Harp*. This book was unusual among oblong hymn books in that

all its songs were newly composed. The lyric form featured both the verse-refrain style of new gospel and the strophic verse style of the older tunebooks.

Singing schools, songwriters and publishers have always played important roles for both the oblong and new-book songsters in the continuation of the convention singing tradition. Many singing-school teachers were themselves songwriters and arrangers; some also became book editors, songbook compilers, and publishers. Regional communities helped by hiring singing-school teachers, who then, with the publishers mentioned above, developed a web of singing conventions that covered the South.

New-book Publishing, Singing Schools and Songwriting in Alabama

New-book publications are varied in their scope. A number of publishers have produced compilations featuring a variety of songwriters. Some songbooks contain a majority of songs owned or written by the publisher mixed with the work of other songwriters. In the past the larger companies like Vaughan and Stamps-Baxter issued several special compilation books using songs from their previous new-book releases. Examples include Stamps-Baxter's *Heavenly Highways Hymns* and *Convention Classics*. Gospel radio host and entrepreneur J. Bazzel Mull published a very popular compilation series of books titled *Mull's Singing Convention*. Other compilations, like the 1941 *Precious Memories of*



FIGURE 5

O. A. Parris. (Courtesy of the Parris family)

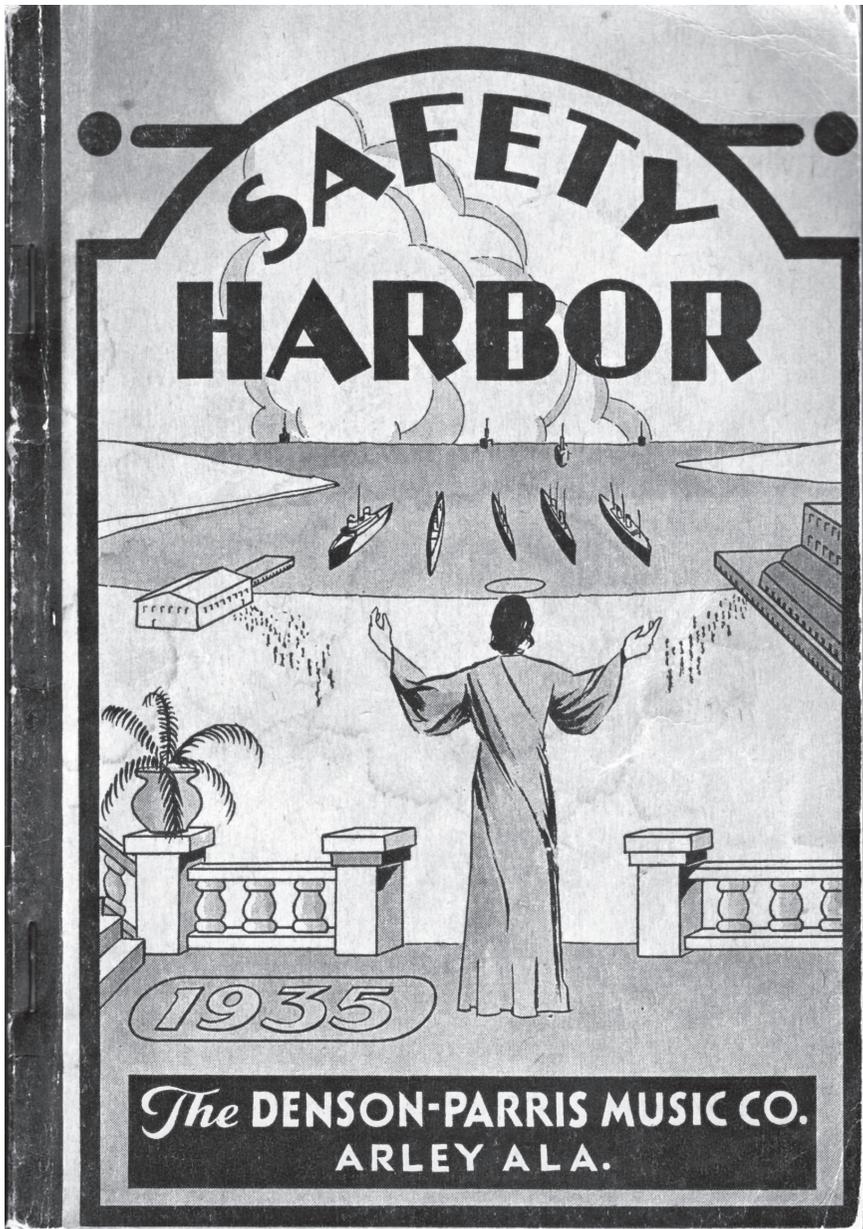


FIGURE 6

Example of new-book cover page published by the Denson-Parris Music Company.

Virgil O. Stamps by the Stamps Baxter Company, are memorials to certain composers. There is a recent songbook titled *Heavens Jubilee: the Songs of G. T. "Dad" Speer and the Speer Family* compiled and edited by Shawn Degenhart. Some songbooks exhibit the life's work of individual gospel songwriters who have produced so many compositions that they chose to self publish their own books. Two Alabama examples are the late T. L. Gilley from Fyffe and K. Wayne Guffey, originally from Alabama's Sand Mountain, who now lives in Georgia.

Charles Wolfe gave a detailed description of the Athens (Alabama) Book Company history in his article, "The Case of the Athens Music Company," in *In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions*. He mentioned the work of G. T. Speer, in cooperation with his wife Lena's father, C. A. Brock and his brother-in-law, well-known gospel pianist Dwight Brock. Speer worked as a teacher and songwriter for the J. D. Vaughan Company in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, before his career with Stamps-Baxter and with the Singing Speer Family.

The Denson-Parris Music Company of Arley, Alabama, was created by O. A. Parris and Whitt Denson in the early 1930s. As mentioned previously, Parris was important as an editor for the 1934 Denson edition of *The Sacred Harp* as well as the Alabama edition of *Christian Harmony*. He also published songs in the W. M. Cooper edition of B. F. White's *The Sacred Harp*. Both Denson and Parris made commercial recordings singing convention-style music. Parris helped found the Convention Music Company in November 1962 with O. C. Boone; their first book was printed in 1963. Parris died soon after the company started and the company ended in 1973. B. F. McLemore mentions several other Alabama publishing companies in his self-published booklet, *Tracing the Roots of Southern Gospel Singers*. These include: Ganus Brothers of Attalla, Gospel Song Publishing Association of America in Cullman, National School of Music of Roanoke, Rainbow Music Company of Cullman, Watson Music Company of Heflin, M. H. Woodard Music Publisher of Cullman (McLemore 1988, pp. 37-8). Other small publishers include Southern Progressive Music Company of Birmingham, with branch houses in Columbia and Phil Campbell; Marion Davis Company of Fayette; Edwards Music Company of Bessemer; and Tuscaloosa Music Company.

The gospel convention system as a whole has waned from its heyday in the



FIGURE 7

Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention, Decatur 2004. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

first half of the twentieth century. However, there is a determined effort for the continuance of the tradition by its adherents, with the support of remaining new-book publishers and through singing schools that continue to teach sight-singing, music theory, writing and arranging, conducting, and keyboard instruction. For instance, the Alabama School of Gospel Music, held each year at Snead State College in Boaz, is a separate entity supported to a great extent by the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention. Other singing schools are run in other states by new-book publishing companies and independent singing masters.

New-book music publishers have come and gone. The declining popularity of convention singing in general has rendered shape-note publishing unprofitable and large publishers like Vaughan and Stamps-Baxter no longer have a presence. There is little or no profit margin for current new-book publishers, and the few new books now available each year are published wholly from

the love of the music and to preserve the tradition of singing conventions and gospel songwriting.

The books now used in the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention (and most other state and national conventions) are from the Cumberland Valley Music Company (Eugene McCammon); Leoma Music Company in Tennessee; Texas Legendary Music Company; Gospel Heritage Music (Charles Towler) in Tennessee; and Jeffress-Phillips Music (Marty Phillips) in Arkansas.

Importance of Contemporary Songwriters

Many published writers of Southern gospel songs are not well-known outside their own community of convention singers. They rarely receive remuneration for their efforts and usually give up ownership of their songs. Nonetheless, the community of contributing songwriters has always been integral to keeping new-book gospel publishing and singing viable. A mind-boggling number of songs have been composed over the past century and are still being written for this important genre of American music. Each year new books are introduced and the previous year's books put to rest. New books appear after each year's annual state convention, thus allowing local classes to practice and become familiar with the new songs before the next annual convention comes along. One marvels at the ability of the singers to sight-read songs upon seeing them for the first time.

Southern gospel convention songwriters whose compositions have been brought into the sphere of popular music have usually not been given as much credit as they deserve considering the overall influence this music has had in the realm of American folk and related commercial genres. Songs like "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" by A. J. Showalter, "I'll Fly Away" by Albert Brumley, "Have a Little Talk With Jesus" by African American songwriter Cleavant Derricks, and, among Alabama songwriters, G. T. "Dad" Speers's "Heaven's Jubilee" and J. R. "Pap" Baxter's "Farther Along" have spawned myriad arrangements in American commercial and traditional religious music genres. The Southern gospel repertory bridges all kinds of American folk musics, as well as church hymnody in both black and white populations, in a variety of denominations. The music crosses over into popular genres such as contemporary country, R&B and jazz.

For example “Lord, Build Me A Cabin in Glory Land” written by Jasper native Curtis Stewart during World War II, is a very popular song with gospel quartets. It can be heard on commercial recordings by the Brown’s Ferry Four, Bill Monroe, Roy Acuff, Charlie Pride, Ralph Stanley and many others. Stewart was surprised to find that Hank Williams sang his song on the radio. The song is featured on Disk 2 of *Hank Williams REVEALED: The Unreleased Recordings*, a compilation from the Mother’s Best Flour Show, which was a fifteen-minute morning radio broadcast advertising flour and feed products.

Charles Wolfe provides another example of how Southern gospel influenced popular music:

In *Songs of Love* [from the Athens Music Company] in 1925 appeared a



FIGURE 8

Curtis Stewart, at the senior center in Cullman, Alabama. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

song entitled "Bound for the Shore." with credits to Mollie Delmore and Alton Delmore. This marks the first published song by the senior member of the Delmore Brothers, arguably the best folk composers to come out of Alabama, and members of the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Mollie Delmore was Alton's mother, and W. A. Williams (founder of the Athens Music Company) was Alton's "Uncle Will." The following year's *Bright Melodies* found two more Delmore songs, "We'll Praise Our Lord" and "The Vision of Home, Sweet Home." The 1928 book *Praises of Jesus* contained "What a Moment of Gladness," penned by Alton and Mrs. Bacon, and "My Blessed Guide," written by his mother in collaboration with Maggie Sharpton.

Alton and Rabon Delmore were part of the popular recording gospel group The Brown's Ferry Four, along with Grandpa Jones and Merle Travis.

The American close harmony vocal style employed by many country/bluegrass performers can be linked to the influence of mid nineteenth-century gospel styles that began with songwriters like Frances "Fanny" Crosby, Ira Sankey, P. P. Bliss and many gospel singing convention composers. One can hear this familiar harmony style in the commercial recordings of Bill Monroe, the Louvin Brothers, the Delmore Brothers and even later in the rock and roll era with the Everly Brothers.

Lyrics found in the old oblong books relied heavily upon hymnists like Isaac Watts, the father of English hymnody; John Henry Newton, writer of "Amazing Grace"; William Cowper; John Wesley; and others. Tunes matched to these masters' verses were often anonymous and interchangeable based upon the specific poetic meter of the verse. The oblong tunebooks' American composers, like William Billings, Daniel Read, Timothy Swan, Justin Morgan, Oliver Holden, Lewis Edson, and Jeremiah Ingalls, were mainly self-taught musicians who composed and compiled tunebooks and traveled around the country teaching in singing schools. A century later, the emergence of new-book publishing also brought many new songwriters and teachers from the ranks of lay singers.

While *The Sacred Harp* repertory remains mainly static, newly composed songs are still added, both in lyric and melodic content to updated revisions. To a limited extent, contemporary songwriters introduce new material into



FIGURE 9
Songwriter Stanley Smith. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

Alabama's homegrown editions of *The Sacred Harp* and William Walkers *Christian Harmony*. New songs are added and some are taken out at each revision in an effort to please the constituency with the music and lyrics, fitting the style and principles of the singing community.

For example, Stanley Smith of Ozark, a past president in the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention, is deeply rooted in the four-shape tradition of Sacred Harp. A published composer of several new-book songs, he has contributed several songs to the Cooper Edition of *The Sacred Harp* and has served on the book's 1994 and 2006 revision committees. To strengthen his songwriting skills, he has attended the Cumberland Valley School of Gospel Music in Tennessee and

Jeffress-Phillips Singing Schools in Arkansas.

The common practice of collaboration between songwriters in the creation of music in the old oblong tunebooks has carried on in new-book compositions. There was similar compositional collaboration from the community of African American singer/songwriters in southeast Alabama that composed all but one of the songs for *The Colored Sacred Harp*. In this unique tunebook an effort was made to conform to an older, staid aesthetic by trying to match the tone, mood, and harmonic construction of Sacred Harp music with most of its content.

Collaboration in new-book music remains widespread. Adger Pace was a lyric writer for the Vaughan Company and wrote the words for many songs, including many with G. T. Speer. The well-known "Heaven's Jubilee" is from that

partnership. The CD *New Book Gospel Shape Note Singing* (Alabama Traditions 205) features collaborations between lesser-known contemporary composers like Francis Graves and K. Wayne Guffey, Stanley Smith and Marty Phillips, Sidney Hicks and Dale Garrison, Sidney Hicks and Robert Stephenson, Darrell and Ann Maddox, and Amanda Sexton with Alan Mahaffey.

Well-known in singing convention circles, Alabama natives K. Wayne Guffey and the late T. L. Gilley self-published personal collections of their own gospel songs, *God's Love* by Tilley and *Songs from the Heart* by Guffey. Included in each are collaborations with several other songwriters.

Selected Contemporary Alabama Gospel Songwriters

Recommended reading as a companion to this article are the liner notes for a new media project, *Traditional Musics of Alabama: New-Book Gospel Singing*, the fifth in a series from the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture and the Alabama Folklife Association. Most recordings in this project were made during annual gospel singing conventions in Alabama. The liner notes can be downloaded from www.alabama-folklife.org, the AFA web site.

Below are introductions to a few contemporary Alabama gospel songwriters who are included on this CD.

- **EZRA “BUDDY” KNIGHT** is originally from Roanoke, now from Wadley in Randolph County. He is another prolific songwriter, singing-school teacher, and piano player. Knight attended regional singing schools in Alabama when he was young and eventually traveled to the Stamps-Baxter School in Dallas to obtain his teaching certificate. Knight has taught singing and



FIGURE 10

Songwriter and singing-school teacher Ezra Knight. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

piano in many states for more than sixty years. He remembers attending and teaching singing schools with more than three hundred students.

- **DR. SIDNEY HICKS** began studying music at age six, working with such masters as O. A. Parris, Eugene Wright, Rupert Cravens, Adger M. Pace, and Videt Polk. A piano prodigy, Hicks began studying that instrument at age seven. Again he worked with several private teachers, among them the incomparable James D. Walbert. In addition to the instruction he received in the



FIGURE 11

The Reverend Dr. Sidney Hicks, songwriter, pianist, and singing-school teacher. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

homes of his teachers, Hicks also studied at the Williamson School of Music and the Cheatham Conservatory of Music. During his college years he excelled in music appreciation, harmony, classical piano, and voice. Since finishing his own formal music education, Hicks has been continually in demand to teach in singing schools, beginning with the Vaughan schools and continuing on to the Ben Speer/Stamps-Baxter School of the present day.

- **WILLIAM HEAPS** is a great favorite among convention singers and has published more than one hundred songs in various books. He is an avid supporter of the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention and helped found

the Alabama State School of Gospel. Heaps remembers that between spring planting and fall harvest in rural Franklin County, Alabama, where he grew up, he attended ten-day singing schools taught by Vaughan Music Company representatives. In 1965 he began writing songs and since then has published one to four songs a year in various publications. Heaps was president of the Alabama State Gospel Convention in 1974 and has supported convention singing since the 1950s.

- **PHILLIP DALE GARRISON** is from Franklin County. At fifteen he started attending singing schools locally and later attended the National School of Gospel Music in Roanoke under the musical leadership of Yarbrough and another Alabama songwriter, C. C. Stafford. In 1969 he started writing songs for the Convention Book Company. By 2003, at the age of fifty-one, he had ninety published songs to his credit and since has averaged five to six songs a year. He enjoys writing lyrics for other people and likes to use syncopation and counter-point in his musical compositions.

- **DAVID BERRY** from Vernon in Lamar County started attending singing schools and gospel singing conventions at the age of twelve. When he was fifteen his mother bought a used piano and he was then able to take a music



FIGURE 12

Songwriter and pianist David Berry. (Photo by Steve Grauberger)

correspondence course from the US School of Music. In 1999 he wrote his first published song for Jeffress-Phillips Music Company.

Conclusion

Southern gospel music repertory has influenced a variety of American musical sub-genres. First were commercial gospel quartets that originally promoted the printed music of new-book Southern gospel repertory but found a path into commercial venues of records, radio, and later, television. Other folk-oriented and commercial music genres, like old-time country/hillbilly, contemporary country, bluegrass, and bluegrass gospel added an assortment of instrumentations and took much of the Southern gospel repertory as their own. In the end, many of the new-book songs cannot be separated from those musical genres that appropriated them. Those who learned new-book gospel songs orally as traditional melodies often believe they derive from an even more distant past, and of anonymous origin. For instance, songs like Showalter's "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," Albert Brumley's "I'll Fly Away," or Cleavant Derricks's "Just A Little Talk With Jesus" are so embedded in American musical life that they have become standards for bluegrass, black and white gospel, country and even jazz music, arranged differently for each genre. Songs published by Stamps-Baxter, like "Precious Memories," "Farther Along," "If We Never Meet Again," "Victory in Jesus," and "I Won't Have to Cross Jordan Alone," are sung at some church services as hymns and are to many as familiar as the doxology.

When profits declined, the large amalgamated publishing firms abandoned production of Southern gospel music. Due to efforts of the gospel songwriters, the gospel singing convention community, and the few remaining professional music editors, new-book music continues to be published more out of love for the music than for the remuneration. New music is composed each year and the previous year's music is, for the most part, left behind. It is remarkable that this vital form of musical composition, conducting, sight-singing, and innovative instrumental accompaniment continue anew each year. It should be disconcerting to anyone to see this type of dynamic folk art wane.

It is to the credit of folks who continue to support the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention and other local, state, and national singing events that they are able to keep to the original purpose of new-book singing with-

out being subsumed by the commercial music entities that use so much of its historical repertory. ■

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Contributors' Notes

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JOEY BRACKNER is the director of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a department of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA). Since 1985, he has undertaken numerous special projects for ASCA including co-production of *Unbroken Tradition*, a film documentary on Alabama folk potter, Jerry Brown, and the production of the book and CD *Spirit of Steel*. Brackner is the author of *Alabama Folk Pottery* (2006) published by the University of Alabama Press. He is a native of Fairfield, Alabama. He received a B.A. in anthropology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 1977 and an M.A. in anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin in 1981.

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STEPHEN GRAUBERGER obtained bachelor's and master's degrees in ethnomusicology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He spent a year as a Fulbright

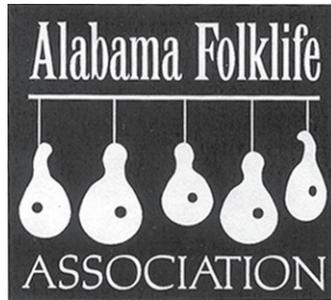
scholar in the Philippines researching the Cebuano diatonic harp and wrote a thesis titled “Diatonic Harp of the Philippines: An Historical Overview and an Organological Comparison of the Cebuano-Bisayan Harp.” For the past twelve years Grauberger has worked as a folklife specialist for the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture (ACTC), a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Since 2003 he has produced a weekly radio series, *Alabama Arts Radio*, that documents both fine and traditional arts and artists in Alabama. He has been the project coordinator for five audio CDs in the Traditional Musics of Alabama Series and a CD, *Traditional Music of Alabama’s Wiregrass Region*, produced in 1996 on contract for the ACTC. He has presented several papers on traditional music in Alabama for the Society for Ethnomusicology and the American Folklore Society.

JERRILYN MCGREGORY is an associate professor in the English department at Florida State University. She earned her Ph.D. in folklore and folklife at the University of Pennsylvania. She also has an M.P.S. in African studies from Cornell University, a master’s in English from Purdue University, and a bachelor’s degree in English from Illinois Wesleyan University. She specializes in African American folklore and folklife, African diaspora studies, and onomastics (the study of proper names). Dr. McGregory is the author of *Wiregrass Country*, a regional folklife study of the South. To supplement this general regional study, *Downhome Gospel: African American Spiritual Activism in Wiregrass Country* is forthcoming from the University Press of Mississippi. It centers little-known contemporary African American traditions such as the Twentieth of May (Emancipation Day); Sunday Morning Band (burial societies), and sacred music from shape-note to contemporary gospel.

DOUG SEROFF is an independent researcher/writer living in Greenbrier, Tennessee. His work with African American gospel quartets has had widespread influence. In 1980 Seroff produced the landmark Birmingham Quartet Reunion. He has written two books in collaboration with Lynn Abbott, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889–1895*, and *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, “Coon Songs,” and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz*, both published by the University Press of Mississippi, in 2002 and

2007 respectively. Most recently, he wrote liner notes for Archeophone's 2010 CD reissue, "*There Breathes a Hope*"—*The Legacy of John Work II and His Fisk Jubilee Quartette (1909–1916)*.

JONATHAN SMITH holds a bachelor's degree in music from Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina, and master's of music with an emphasis in ethnomusicology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He serves as organist at St. Paul United Methodist Church and teaches music courses at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville.



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The publications and recordings below have been produced with the support of the AFA. To order, list the items and quantities desired, include shipping and handling (a flat fee of \$2.50 for any number of items), and send a check (payable to AFA; may be combined with membership dues) for the total to the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, 201 Monroe Street, Suite 110, Montgomery, AL 36104. You can also order the following directly from our website at www.alabamafolklife.org.

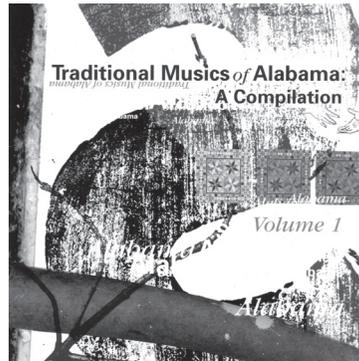
- Bullfrog Jumped!* (\$17) is a collection of songs sung by mothers, grandmothers, school teachers, babysitters, and children across Alabama. During the summer of 1947 they sat at their kitchen tables and on their front porches

in front of a portable disc recorder and enthusiastically shared their favorite folksongs with Professor Byron Arnold, a “songcatcher.” They wanted children to learn them and sing them for many years to come. Forty-two of these folksongs and games are on this CD along with a 72-page booklet that contains the words to all of the songs and gives information about the singers.

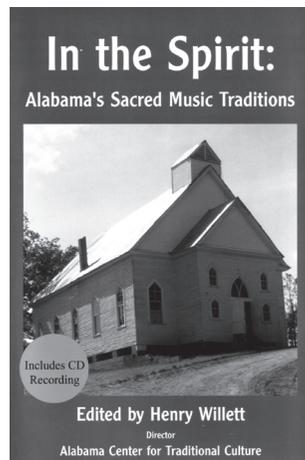
- Sweet Is the Day: A Sacred Harp Family Portrait* (\$20 DVD or VHS, please specify) produced by Erin Kellen and directed by Jim Carnes. In this hour-long video members of the Wootten family of Sand Mountain speak of their long and deep involvement with shape-note singing and sing more than a dozen hymns 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 shoal fish trap, Mobile Bay jubilees, quilting, occupational folklore, and 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 picking

mayhaws, the literature of Ruby Pickens Tartt, Mobile's Mardi Gras, and more.

- *Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 8 (\$8). Contains essays on Mobile foodways, Sacred Harp singing, women blues singers, Birmingham's Mexican population, and more.
- *Tributaries, Journal of the AFA*, Vol. 9 (\$8). Essays on river redhorse snaring, heritage gardening, Pineywoods cattle, and the MOWA Choctaw of Alabama.
- *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.
- *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. 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.
- *The Traditional Musics of Alabama: Volume...5, "New-Book" Gospel*



- Shape-Note Singing*. (\$17) This is the fifth CD in the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture's Millennium Series, produced by Steve Grauberger. Most tracks were recorded at annual Alabama State Gospel Singing Conventions or other associated gospel singing events. A primary focus of the CD highlights Alabama songwriters who submit their work to the various "New-Book" publications.
- ☐ *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*, (\$16). 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 Birmingham's City Stages festival of the state's blues, bluegrass, Sacred Harp, gospel, railroad calls, etc.
 - ☐ *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition* (\$29.95 hardcover). A book of essays exploring Alabama's oldest hymnal, published in 1841, and enclosed CD with twenty songs.
 - ☐ *In the Spirit, Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions* (paperback book/CD, \$15): A dozen essays about such forms of religious music as "Dr. Watts singing," bluegrass gospel, gospel quartet singing, African-American Covenanters, shape-note and more. CD features examples of each.



- Judge Jackson and the Colored Sacred Harp* (Book/CD, \$29.95) 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, \$16). The Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers of Ozark, Alabama, sing from Judge Jackson's 1934 compilation of shape-note songs.
- Desire for Piety* (CD, \$16). A rare example of black Sacred Harp singing from rural southeast Alabama as sung by the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers.
- With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow* (paperback book, \$19.95) A social history of old-time fiddling written by Joyce Cauthen.
- Allison's Sacred Harp Singers* (CD, \$13.50) Re-mastered selections of rare Sacred Harp recordings made in 1927-28 by singers from Birmingham.
- Religion Is a Fortune* (CD, \$13.50): Remastered commercial recordings of various Sacred Harp groups recorded in the 1920s and '30s.

- Lookout Mountain Convention* (CD,\$15) More than 30 songs from the 1960 edition of The Original Sacred Harp recorded at the Lookout Mountain Convention in August 1968.
- In Sweetest Union Join* (2 CDs, \$25) This 1999 recording commemorates the fortieth anniversary of Alan Lomax's historic Sacred Harp recording made in 1959.
- The Sacred Harp Hour*, WCPC Sessions (CD, \$15) Selections from Sunday morning radio show in Houston, Mississippi, on air since 1959.
- Spiritualaires of Hurtsboro, Alabama: Singing Songs of Praise* (CD, \$15) 16 songs by one of the last active gospel quartets with origins in gospel's golden age of the 1950s.