

SACRED HARP SINGING IN ALABAMA


By

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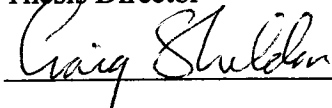
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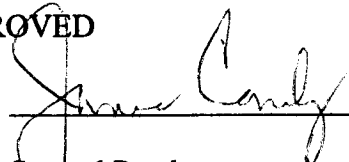
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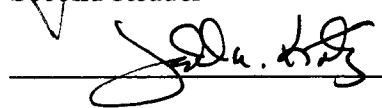
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		
I.	Introduction to Sacred Harp Singing.....	1
II.	Origin and Development of Sacred Harp Singing.....	6
	A. Singing schools and Shaped Notes.....	6
	B. Sacred Harp Singings .....	14
	C. Sacred Harp as Worship.....	17
III.	Sacred Harp Tunebooks.....	18
	A. Development of Four-Shape Tunebooks.....	19
	B. <i>The B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition</i> .....	26
	C. <i>The Sacred Harp (5th Edition) and The Original Sacred Harp</i> .....	28
	D. <i>The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition</i> .....	31
	E. <i>The Colored Sacred Harp</i> .....	32
IV.	Contents of Sacred Harp Tunebooks.....	39
V.	Sacred Harp Traditions of Alabama.....	47
	A. Sacred Harp and the “New South”.....	49
	B. A Family Tradition.....	53
	C. Division within the Tradition.....	58
VI.	Sacred Harp in the Twenty-First Century.....	63

Appendix A: Calendar List of Annual Sacred Harp Singings in Alabama using	
<i>The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition</i> tunebook.....	74
Appendix B: Calendar List of Annual Sacred Harp Singings in Alabama using the	
<i>B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition (2000)</i> tunebook.....	86
Bibliography.....	89

## LIST OF FIGURES

### Figure

A.	Four Syllable Shape note scale (Treble Clef) .....	9
B.	“Cambridge Short Tune” from <i>Bay Psalm Book</i> (1698).....	9
C.	“Westminster” from <i>An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes in a Plain and Easy Method</i> (1714 edition).....	10
D.	Shaped Notes: Fa, So, La, Mi (Smith and Little).....	11
E.	Shaped Notes: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti (Aiken).....	12
F.	“Amazing Grace,” <i>The Sacred Harp, Cooper Revision</i> (1992).....	13
G.	<i>Repository of Sacred Music Part II</i> (1820) .....	20
H.	Benjamin Franklin White (1800-1879).....	22
I.	<i>The Sacred Harp</i> (1844).....	23
J.	<i>The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition</i> (1992) .....	26
K.	Judge Jackson (1883-1958).....	33
L.	“Florida Storm,” <i>The Colored Sacred Harp</i> .....	37

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRED HARP SINGING TRADITION

Sacred Harp singing has been practiced in America for nearly 200 years. It is a distinctive style of music that is rich in history, involves unique musical techniques, and creates an uncommon musical sound. Although many Americans live their entire lives without realizing that this musical tradition even exists, for those involved in the singing, Sacred Harp singing is very much alive and well in many corners of the United States, especially in the Southeast. Several factors played a role in the eighteenth-century development of Sacred Harp singing, including the European style of psalm singing, the printing of shaped notes in early America, and the popularity of singing schools. Sacred Harp singing is both a musical and a social event that values participation more than perfect performance.

Sacred Harp music is unlike any other sacred music in America. Any and all voices are welcome and encouraged to participate in the unaccompanied singing of three- and four-part tunes. There is a driving rhythmic pulse throughout, and the singing is loud and brazen from the start. Participants sing with all their heart, creating a glorious sound that rings through the countryside.

People from all walks of life often travel long distances to be a part of Sacred Harp gatherings that involve all day singing and dinner-on-the-grounds. In addition to creating music, people participate in Sacred Harp singings for many other reasons,

including to worship and praise God, to spread the gospel of the “Great Awakening” movement, to remember family and friends that have passed away, and to visit with friends.

This thesis will provide a historical examination of the Sacred Harp tradition in the United States and, more specifically, in the state of Alabama. This will include discussion of singing schools, tunebooks, composers and compilers. There will be analysis of how Sacred Harp singing has evolved and survived, including a breakdown of the text and music, a description of a typical “singing,” and an account of how Sacred Harp music became especially popular in Alabama.

As we examine the role of Sacred Harp singing in Alabama, it will be clear that there are three separate factions within the tradition in Alabama, each defined by the tunebook that is used at the singings. The thesis will show how the Sacred Harp tradition, which bloomed and flourished under the hand of Benjamin F. White, split into three groups in Alabama. The first and largest of the three traditions is associated with *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*. This tunebook is primarily used in northern and central Alabama. (Though often referred to as the “Denson book,” due to the 1936 publication of *Original Sacred Harp, Denson Revision*, the 1991 edition is dramatically different from the 1936 publication and is therefore more correctly nicknamed “1991.”) The second tradition is associated with *The B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition* (2000). The “Cooper Book,” sometimes known as the “Blue Book” (referring to its cover), was originally edited and published in 1902 by W.M. Cooper. This tunebook is popular with Sacred Harp singers in southeast Alabama, known as the Wiregrass region.

The third tradition, which survives on a much smaller scale than the previous two, uses *The Colored Sacred Harp* (1934) as its tunebook. *The Colored Sacred Harp* is used solely by the black Sacred Harp singers of southeast Alabama.

The thesis will explore the history and contents of each of the tunebooks currently used in Alabama. At first glance, the 1991 and *Cooper Book* revisions of *The Sacred Harp* appear to be more alike than different. The thesis will show that while both tunebooks preserve many tunes from the 1800s, both have added newer compositions. Analysis will highlight the differences between the three traditions of Sacred Harp music in Alabama, from singing styles to tunebook contents.

The historical background included in the thesis will be based primarily on the research of George P. Jackson, but will also utilize the work of Gilbert Chase, Charles Hamm, and Alan Lomax. Jackson is noted for his extensive work in documenting and recording folk singing in the southeastern United States. Jackson's research, conducted in the first half of the twentieth century, was the first of its kind in the United States. It is because of Jackson's work that we have accurate descriptions and recordings of folk song traditions of the early 1900s.

The best resource currently available on the Sacred Harp tradition is *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (1989), by Buell Cobb of Alabama. Cobb built upon Jackson's research and studied developments in the Sacred Harp tradition in Georgia and Alabama. A "born and bred" Sacred Harp singer himself, Cobb's work not only examines the music of the Sacred Harp tradition, but the people who were and are



involved in preserving this tradition. Cobb's writings will provide material for the study of the various tunebooks and the study of the Denson and Cooper families.

John Bealle's *Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong* (1997) provides an examination of the survival of the Sacred Harp tradition in the midst of the Industrial Revolution and building of the "New South."

Additionally, writings by Henry Willett, folklorist and director of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, offer descriptions of specific families of Alabama involved in Sacred Harp singing. Documentaries, video recordings of Sacred Harp singings, and audio recordings gave further support to the research. Finally, there is much information available on Sacred Harp singing (history, origins of tunes, and maps to annual singings) available on the Internet at [www.fasola.org](http://www.fasola.org). Several essays and descriptions of singings were used from this valuable website.

The author also attended five Sacred Harp singings in Alabama. The first was the "Jones Memorial Singing" on April 3, 1999. The Jones Singing was held in southern Alabama at the Cool Springs Church near Opp (Covington County), Alabama. There were approximately 50 singers in attendance and the *Cooper Book* was used. The next singing attended was the "State Line Singing" at State Line Church on April 10, 1999. The State Line church in Cleburne County near Muscadine, Alabama, a few miles from the Georgia state line. There were approximately 80 singers in attendance and the *1991 Book* was used. The third singing was the "Sacred Harp Book Company Stock Holders Meeting and J. W. Basset Memorial Singing" held at Traveler's Rest Church on the west side of Samson (Geneva County), Alabama. This singing, held May 1, 1999, had

approximately 30 singers in attendance and the *Cooper Book* was used. The “National Convention of Sacred Harp Singing” was held June 19, 1999, at the Trinity United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The National Convention lasted three days and the author attended the third day. There were hundreds of participants in attendance over the three days, with many from states other than Alabama, and several participants from Europe. The *1991 Book* was used at this convention. The last singing attended was the “Historic State Capitol Rotunda Singing,” which was held February 5, 2000, in the Alabama State Capitol Rotunda, Montgomery, Alabama. There were approximately 40 singers in attendance. The organizers of this singing make a special effort to be all-inclusive by using each of the four-shape tunebooks that are used across Alabama: the *1991 Book*, the *Cooper Book*, and *The Colored Sacred Harp*. Additionally, the Rotunda Singing utilizes a seven-shape tunebook that is common in northeast Alabama, *Christian Harmony* (1994).

Using information obtained through both fieldwork and research, the thesis will illustrate the three Sacred Harp traditions within Alabama, highlight the differences between the groups, and analyze the Sacred Harp music of Alabama in terms of musical style and social significance.

## ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SACRED HARP SINGING

### Singing Schools and Shaped Notes

The origins of the Sacred Harp tradition are found in the singing schools of colonial America. Singing schools taught sacred harp singing, also called *shape-note* or *fasola* singing. “Sacred harp” was an early term used to describe the human voice (Steel, “Sacred Harp Singing” 2). Singing schools began in New England in the eighteenth century as a means to teach “the art of psalmody” to anyone who wanted to learn (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 58). In the early 1700s, most churches were without hymnbooks, hence congregations learned music by rote (Brush 1). Congregational psalm singing was achieved by “lining-out” the psalm. A deacon of the church would “line out” the psalm by reading or singing each line, after which the congregation repeated the line in a chant-like fashion (Brush 1). “Lining-out” the psalm was effective because not everyone was literate and very few people had music reading skills. The musical sound that resulted depended on the talent of the deacon, creating either unison singing of simple melodies or rhythmic chanting without melody.

The goals of the singing school movement were to improve the psalm singing and to give new life to the melodies that most people had learned in churches of Europe (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 58). The singing school included a brief course of musical instruction devoted to the rudiments of sight singing. The schools met daily (or nightly)

for two to three months, usually during times of slack agricultural work. The singing school might run for several weeks in one town and then move on to the next. Rev. E.

Wentworth provides a description of a New England singing school circa 1820:

The musical elements of staff, key signatures, notation, and time were memorized and practiced. Only four notes were used: faw, sol, law and mi. The scale ran faw, sol, law, faw, sol, law, mi, faw. The Continental scale, do, re, mi, had not yet been imported. The key note was the “pitch,” and preliminary to singing, the leader would sound the pitch and the starting notes of each part. (qtd. in Chase 184)

The description by Rev. Wentworth goes on to discuss how the rudiments of key signatures were taught:

The elements were given out as a lesson to be memorized, studied by question and answer for a couple of evenings or so, and then we were supposed to be initiated into all the mysteries of staff, signature, clef, flats, sharps, and naturals, notes rests, scales, and, above all, the ability to find the place of “mi.” The table for the “mi” had to be recited as glibly as the catechism, and was about as intelligible as some of its theology:

The natural place for mi is B

If B be flat, the mi is in E

If B and E, the mi is in A and C

If F be sharp, the mi is in G

If F and C, the mi is in C and C. (qtd. In Chase 186)

Singing schools were popular because they provided the enjoyment of singing and learning, and because they offered the opportunity for pleasant social interaction. However, toward the end of the eighteenth century, singing schools fell out of fashion in cities, and the singing teachers left for the rural areas of the expanding frontier. "The main path of the singing-school movement appears to have been from New England to Pennsylvania, thence southward and westward. After 1815, the chief concentration of the fasola movement was in the South and Midwest" (Chase 183).

One American composer who supported the efforts of singing schools was William Billings (1746-1800). Called "the father of New England music," Billings published two tunebooks that were used as texts in the singing schools: *The New England Song Singer* (1770) and *The Continental Harmony* (1794). Billings drew on British models to develop a stark style of composition appropriate to the New England church. His harmonies are simple and open, and there are often sharp metric and textural contrasts, as seen in the many contrapuntal, fusing tunes. The fusing tunes in Sacred Harp music are those in which the "theme is assumed in turn by each of the parts" (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 61). The fusing tune typically has a fast tempo, thus making it a fun challenge for the singer. "It is music for the singer rather than the listener" (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 61).

As mentioned by Wentworth in the previous description, only four syllables were used in the singing schools: fa, so, la, and mi. Using these syllables, the major scale read fa, so, la, fa, so, la, mi, fa. The syllable "mi" is only used once because of it has the important role of being the leading tone, thus pointing the singer to the key center.

## FIGURE A

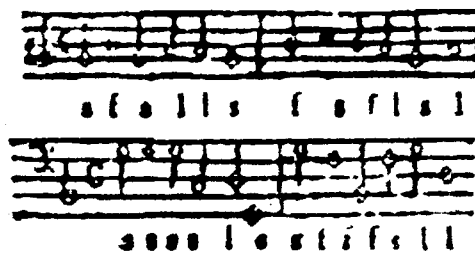
## Four Syllable Shape Note Scale (Treble clef)



This music reading system, brought from Europe to America by the first colonists, was a simplified version of the Medieval six-note system of Guido d'Arezzo: ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la (Stefanov-Wagner 1). An early tunebook printed in England in 1562 by Sternhold and Hopkins utilized the six solfege syllables. The initial of each syllable was placed under the note, thereby assisting the singer in determining which syllable was to be sung. The *Bay Psalm Book* (1698), an oblong book of sacred music that was the first book printed in the new world, also printed the initials of the syllables under each note as an aid to sight-singing. However, only four syllables were used: fa, so, la, mi. "Cambridge Short Tune," from *Bay Psalm Book*, is written with the melody on top and the bass underneath and illustrates the use of initials for the solfege syllables. (The diamond shaped notes were standard musical notation of the time.)

## FIGURE B

## "Cambridge Short Tune", Bay Psalm Book (1698)



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The Rev. John Tufts' *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes in a Plain and Easy Method* (1714) had the further innovation of printing the initial letters on the staff in place of the note-heads. (Durations are indicated by the extra dots to the right of the letter – each dot *doubles* the length of the note.) Figure C, “Westminster,” utilizes Tuft’s new notation.

FIGURE C

“Westminster,” *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes in a Plain and Easy Method* (1714)



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The next development was shaped notes. Rather than identifying the notes with initials, each syllable was given a different shaped note-head. David Warren Steel writes that shaped notes were introduced in the publication *Easy Instructor* (Philadelphia, 1801) by William Smith and William Little (“Sacred Harp Singing” 2). John Connelly, a Philadelphia shopkeeper, had devised the four shaped notes around 1790, and he sold the idea to Smith and Little (Steel, “Sacred Harp Singing” 2). In this system of shaped notes (also known as “patent notes” or “buckwheat notes”), “fa was represented by a right-

angled triangle, sol by a circle or round note, la by a square, and mi by a diamond shape, each with a stem appended to it” (Chase 187).

#### FIGURE D

Shaped Notes: Fa, So, La, Mi (Smith and Little)



This four-note system by Smith and Little was but one of several notational experiments that appeared in America during the first decade of the nineteenth century. The popularity of the four-note system was largely due to its adoption and use by compiler John Wyeth in the 1810 publication, *Wyeth's Repository*. In the article “John Wyeth and the Development of Southern Folk Hymnody,” David Warren Steel writes that Wyeth had seen the popularity of the numerous editions of Smith and Little’s *Easy Instructor* and *Easy Instructor, Part II* (1803) (2). Wyeth decided to put forth his own tunebook using the same fonts, “evidently sensing that claims to shape-note systems would not prove legally binding” (Steel, “Wyeth” 2). Other compilers of shape-note tunebooks “chose variant shapes, either to avoid infringing on another’s claims, or perhaps to enable themselves to claim proprietary right to their own system if it proved popular” (Steel, “Wyeth” 2). Jesse Aiken’s *Christian Minstrel* “introduced the seven-note system into the American singing scene in 1846” (Chase 200). Aiken combined the accepted four shapes with an isosceles triangle for do, a half-circle for re, and a quarter circle for ti. The seven note scale placed fa, so, la, and mi within the new notes, thus conforming to the accepted European practice of do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do.



## FIGURE E

Shaped Notes: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti (Aiken)



Regarding European influences on American music, Chase comments, “Folks preferred to go their own way rather than take up newfangled notions (seven syllables) and scientific innovations. The four syllable ‘fa-so-la’ system was good enough for the first American settlers, so it was good enough for the rural singing folk of the South and West” (188). Opinions regarding which syllables to use represented two conflicting cultural trends. The seven syllable ‘do-re-mi’ system, with all that it implied in the way of scientific improvement, was victorious in the cities and areas dominated by urban culture (primarily along the eastern seaboard). *Christian Harmony*, originally compiled by William Walker in 1866 and reprinted several times since then, is an example of a seven-shape tunebook that has remained popular in some communities (Jackson, *Another Sheaf* 78). In contrast, rural areas held fast to the four-syllable scale and shaped notes.

All sacred tunebooks of this period were similar in appearance and followed the format of numerous earlier collections of sacred music, according to historian Warren Steel (“Wyeth” 2). The oblong shape, the open score with the melody in the tenor, and the pedagogical introduction were standard. The earliest shaped note tunes were originally written for three voices: bass, tenor, and treble. Over time a fourth voice part, “counter” (also known as alto) was added so that the majority of tunes after 1800 include four-part harmony: bass, tenor, counter, and treble. Ananias Davisson, in his 1816 compilation of tunes *Kentucky Harmony*, gave the following instructions for singing:

“The bass staff is assigned to the gravest of men, and the tenor to the highest; the counter to the lowest voices of the Ladies, and the treble to the highest of the Ladies” (qtd. in Chase 190). The principal melody was carried by the high male voices in the tenor part, with the women singing subordinate parts. This practice is a heritage from colonial times that has roots in Renaissance Europe, and was opposed to the “improved” urban practice of having the women sing the melody in the soprano. The custom of the tenor holding the melody prevails in Sacred Harp music, although it is also important that each voice is melodically interesting and independent. Figure F, an excerpt of “Amazing Grace” reprinted from the *Cooper Book* (page 45), illustrates the customary four-voice open score used in Sacred Harp tunebooks. The familiar melody is in the tenor line (third from the top).

FIGURE F

“Amazing Grace,” *The B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition* (1992)

The figure shows a musical score for the hymn "Amazing Grace" in four voices. The score is arranged in four staves, each with a different clef and key signature. The first three staves are in the treble clef (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor), and the fourth staff is in the bass clef (Bass). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are printed below each staff, with the first line of lyrics under the Soprano staff, the second under the Alto staff, the third under the Tenor staff, and the fourth under the Bass staff. The lyrics are: 1. A-maz-ing grace! how sweet the sound, That sav'd a wretch like me! 2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved 3. Thro' ma-ny dangers, toils and snares, I have at-ten-tly come; 4. The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope se-cures;

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Figure F also illustrates the common practice of printing the different verses under each voice part, thus saving space on the page. Although confusing to the beginning reader,

all voices sing their own notes while their eyes must jump up or down the page to read the text for each verse. Repetition and practice are the only ways to become accustomed to this style of printing; the experienced singer finds no trouble in reading this way.

### Sacred Harp Singings

Present day singings are conducted in the same manner as they were two hundred years ago. The singing begins around nine in the morning. There is a break at midday for “dinner-on-the-grounds” (potluck dinner), and then more singing until around three in the afternoon. The majority of the singings are scheduled in the summer months, following the tradition of the time of year for singing schools, but there are singings all year long in various parts of America. (See Appendices A and B for a list of annual singing dates in Alabama.) People drive long distances to be a part of one, two, or even three-day singing conventions. Historian Alan Lomax provides the following description of a typical singing in his *Folk Songs of North America in the English Language*, published in 1960:

The singers stand [sit] in a hollow square round the leader – the basses on his right, men and women trebles on his left, a mixed choir of tenors in front and the woman altos behind him. He calls out the number of the song. There is a rustling of pages, as his choir riffles the leaves of their books to the chosen song. The leader keys the parts by singing the first note of each, and then he sweeps his country choir through the whole song in sol-fa, cueing each part, and finally they sail through all the verses at a

rattling pace. Children, graybeards, shy young girls – everyone takes his turn as conductor. The most skilled singers move round the square changing their part from bass to treble and from alto to tenor just for the fun of it, scarcely glancing at their books, seeming to know all the parts for five to six hundred hymns. No one who knows the songs and who loves to sing is barred from these conventions, and no vocal snobs are present. Here music making is the thing. (242)

The participants are very friendly and appreciative of those in attendance, while old acquaintances and friendships are renewed with a hug around the neck. But the business at hand is the music making, singing praise to God.

The sound that is created by singing the four-part harmony of Sacred Harp music is noticeably different from that of hymn singing in most modern churches. The first recognizable difference is that the melody is not in the highest female voice as it is in twentieth-century hymns. The highest female voice, also known as the treble, is singing harmony; the Tenor line carries the tune melody. Both male and females can be heard singing the Tenor line in their own octave. Other audible differences are lack of accompaniment, strict rhythmic pulse, embellishments on the tune (including scooping, anticipating, and slides in any or all voice parts), non-observance of some accidentals, addition or subtraction of a raised leading tone, and a very loud, “untrained” vocal tone. Sacred Harp singing is “untrained” in the sense that it is created harshly, off the throat, and sung through the nose. These qualities help with the projection of sound. As one participant instructed, “If you can hear your neighbor, you’re not singing loud enough”

(Walsh 2). The singers sing with the same diction as if they were speaking, with many a variety of regional accent. Each singer brings to the sound his or her own timbre and tone, and there is no attempt to blend the voice qualities in performance. The sound comes straight from the heart and soul, without the interference of a director trying to refine it.

Another factor that contributes to the unique sound of Sacred Harp Singing is the style of the harmonizations. Sacred Harp tunes do not follow academic rules of harmony and composition. Sacred Harp arrangements are conceived horizontally, with great attention paid to the individual lines, and with considerably less concern for the vertical dimension. Authentic part-singing was the focus for composers, rather than making sure the notes on each beat formed an acceptable chord. Charles Seeger, music historian, has found that in the contrapuntal style of the three- and four- part tunes, many established composition rules are violated, such as “those forbidding parallel fifths and octaves, parallel fourths, unprepared and unresolved dissonances, and crossing of voices.” He continues, “It is not because these rules are violated that this type of American music is interesting to us, but rather because, in seeking their own style of expression, these early composers created a kind of choral writing that has a rigorous, spare, and disciplined beauty of its own.” (qtd. in Chase 191). This style of composition plays a large role in creating the unusual sound of Sacred Harp music.

### Sacred Harp as Worship

While Sacred Harp singing is a group activity, it allows much freedom for individual and personal worship. Singings are public worship events that include group prayers to begin and end the day, and short testimonials by individuals. But the individual singer explores his private faith during the singing, pouring heart and soul into the ancient texts and singing the psalms as a musical prayer. There is also a feeling of communion with the other singers. This feeling is sometimes connected with the textual content of the songs, but not always. Martha Henderson, a life-long Sacred Harp singer, describes the emotion that often accompanies the worship experience:

It is as if our bodies have fallen away, and our souls rise above the floor and unite in perfect love. Our hearts are open for all to see, and nobody minds if someone weeps; in fact, sharing tears of joy and sorrow makes the experience sweeter. This feeling doesn't happen every time a person sings; it is a gift that comes of its own accord. You can no more force it to appear than you can force Heaven to come down to earth. But when it does come, it can be overwhelming. (Henderson 1)

Sacred Harp singing lends itself to becoming a spiritual worship experience for each individual. The personal communion with God gives the singer a feeling of peace. The Sacred Harp experience can also be about connecting with friends and family that have died. This, too, is a personal and private. Sacred Harp singing is a group activity, but the song often inspire individuals to meditate on connections to God and family.

## SACRED HARP TUNEBOOKS

As the popularity of singing schools spread across nineteenth-century America, there was a need for more tunebooks. In 1844, Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha King, singing teachers of western Georgia, compiled and printed a new tunebook, *The Sacred Harp*. Hundreds of similar tunebooks appeared in nineteenth-century America, but none showed the staying power of White and King's work. Of 38 four-shape books published between 1798 and 1855, only one, *The Sacred Harp*, retained wide usage into the 1930s and beyond (Bealle 4). Along with holding singing schools and teaching shape-note singing, Mr. White saw the need for musical organization to give stability to future singings, and so he went on to establish annual music conventions in various communities of Georgia. A second edition of *The Sacred Harp* was printed in 1850 that retained the original tunes and added 100 new songs. "The shape-note singing movement enjoyed a tremendous popularity in the rural South until about 1870, and the oblong 'Sacred Harps' ran into editions of hundreds and thousands" (Lomax 241). White himself supervised revised and enlarged editions of his book three times, in 1850, 1859, and 1869. Following White's death, other Sacred Harp leaders carried on in the same tradition and published further revisions and appendices under the name *The Sacred Harp*. The Preface of the 1991 edition of *The Sacred Harp* reads, "Each revision and each appendix was done to put new life in the books, each time adding new or present-day anthems. This is the main reason it has lasted so long and will continue to survive."

Revised and reissued many times over, *The Sacred Harp* has given its name to a living tradition.

There are three lines of tunebooks that stem from White's 1844 compilation that continue to be widely used in Alabama in the twenty-first century. By order of popularity, they are *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Revision* (although previously nicknamed "the Denson Book," it is now known simply as "1991"), *The B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition* (2000, known as the "Cooper Book"), and *The Colored Sacred Harp* (revised 1973). Neighboring states of Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee also use these three tunebooks, but others, such as *Southern Harmony* (1854), *Christian Harmony* (1994), and the *Original Sacred Harp* (1911), are also popular. In Alabama, it is the faithful allegiance people have to one of the three tunebooks derived from White that gives the singing tradition its strength. In Alabama singing communities, the allegiance to a particular tunebook is almost comparable to the fanatic allegiance Alabamians have for football teams from Auburn University or the University of Alabama. This chapter will discuss the progression of tunebooks from the first four-shape book to the tunebooks currently used in Alabama.

#### Development of Four-Shape Tunebooks

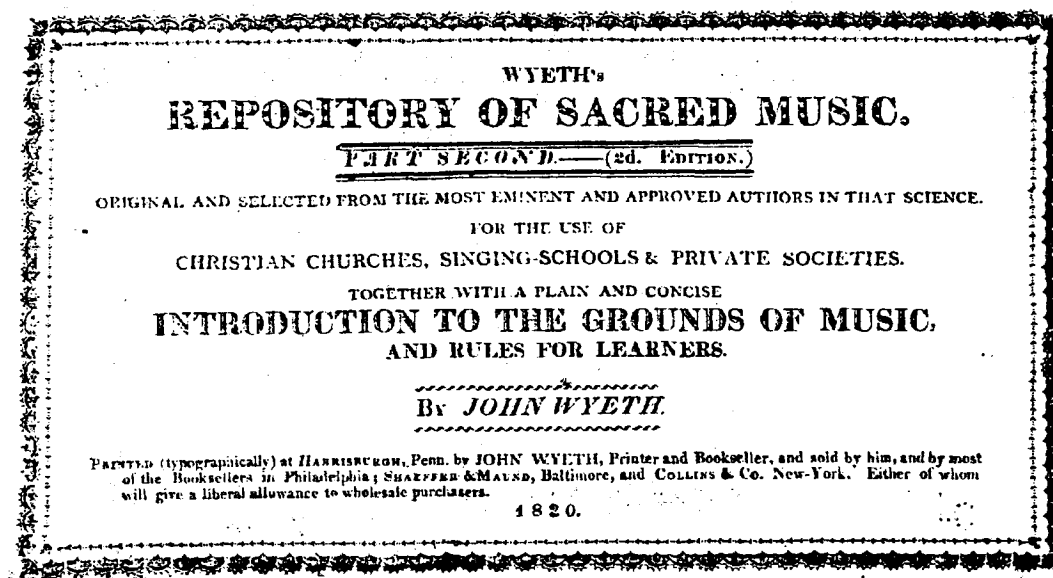
The story of the Sacred Harp legacy began when William Little and William Smith compiled and published the popular tunebook *The Easy Instructor* (1801) and *The Easy Instructor Part II* (1803), the first four-shape note tunebooks to be successful. *The Easy Instructor* is also important to the history of American music because "it gave



predominance to compositions by American composers at a time when the tendency was to include a greater number of European compositions in collections of this kind” (Chase 188). The continued popularity of *The Easy Instructor* and the four-note system was largely due to its adoption and use by compiler John Wyeth (1770-1858) in his *Repository of Sacred Music* (1810), and *Repository of Sacred Music Part II* (1820).

FIGURE G

*Repository of Sacred Music Part II* (1820)



Wyeth compiled and published *Repository of Sacred Music* in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He chose Little and Smith’s notational system because *The Easy Instructor* was popular with the audience for which Wyeth was publishing. “That this shape-note system prevailed in the South and West during the Nineteenth Century was at least partly due to Wyeth’s efforts” (Steel, “Wyeth” 3). The appearance and shape of Wyeth’s *Repository* were based on numerous earlier collections of sacred music. The

oblong shape, the open score with the melody in the tenor, and the pedagogical introduction were all solidly within the tradition to which Wyeth was contributing.

The music in Wyeth's *Repository* consists of New England compositions, together with a variety of pieces of foreign origin. It is representative of the New England taste in sacred music during the years 1770-1810. This was a time when the music of New England composers such as Billings, Holyoke, Read, and Swan "was falling into neglect in the North but continued flourishing in the songbooks and singing conventions of the South and West" (Chase 187). The sources for the music in Wyeth's *Repository* were eclectic and included both American and British tunes. Of the 129 compositions in the 1810 *Repository*, no fewer than sixty-four had previously appeared in *The Easy Instructor* and five more had appeared in *The Easy Instructor Part II*. "Thus 69 tunes in Wyeth's collection had been published in shape notes before 1810" (Steel, "Wyeth" 4). The *Repository* went through seven editions by 1834 and had extremely wide circulation for those times.

Wyeth was one of many compilers who compiled and published a tunebook in the hope that it would reach a wide audience. There was plenty of competition. Ananias Davisson's *Kentucky Harmony* of 1816 was also quite successful, "with four later editions up to 1826" (Chase 189).

Benjamin Franklin White (1800-1879) of South Carolina became the most successful compiler of the nineteenth century. As a young child, White was more of a farmer than a student (Reynolds 2). Nevertheless, White had a strong interest in music and mastered the tunebooks that were available to him, including *The Easy Instructor*.

His brother-in-law William Walker of South Carolina joined White in making a collection of tunes that had been published in earlier tunebooks, tunes they had heard sung, and newly-composed tunes of their own. Walker took the resulting manuscript, *The Southern Harmony*, to New Haven, Connecticut, and had it published in 1835. “According to Walker’s figures, for the period of 1835 up to the Civil War, there were 600,000 copies of *Southern Harmony* published in an uncertain number of reprintings and enlargements” (Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals* 78). (It is interesting to note that White’s name was not included along with Walker’s as author of *The Southern Harmony*.)

#### FIGURE H

Benjamin Franklin White (1800-1879)



MAJOR B. F. WHITE  
Author

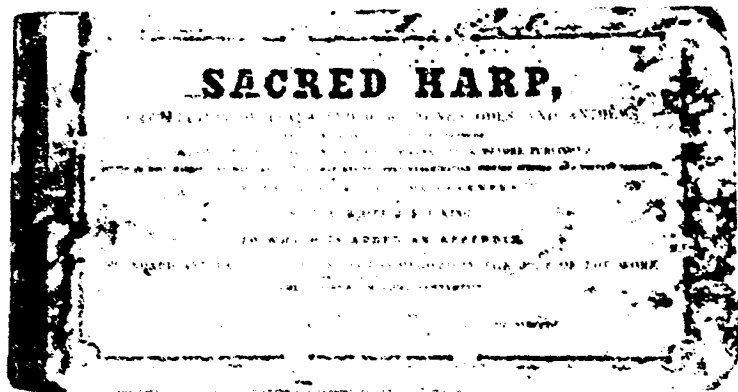
-Copyright 1992, *The Sacred Harp*, Cooper Revision. Used by Permission

In 1842 White moved his family to Harris County, Georgia, and continued his work of gathering tunes and teaching in singing schools. He joined with Elisha J. King

from Wilkinson County, Georgia, and compiled *The Sacred Harp*. It was printed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1844 and was one of many songbooks in the first half of the nineteenth century with the word “harp” in the title. (The titles of tunebooks are often fanciful, and refer to religious symbolism. The Harp is the instrument of David, who “wrote” the Psalms. Steel writes that “present day singers interpret the term ‘sacred harp’ to refer to the human voice in general, or the vocal chords in particular” (“Singing” 2).) Unfortunately, Elisha J. King died shortly after the printing was complete and never saw the finished product. However, White’s reputation and popularity increased considerably. He held singing schools, taught the shape-note singing of the fasola syllables, and promoted his tunebook. “By virtue of its comprehensiveness and of White’s wide personal influence, this songbook eclipsed all others in the South, including *The Southern Harmony*, and earned a place of honor in most homes second only to that of the Bible” (Carnes, “All Day” 2).

## FIGURE I

The Sacred Harp (1844)



-Copyright 1844, Sacred Harp Publishing Co. Used by permission.

Perhaps most important of all, White perceived the need for a musical organization in Georgia that would give stability to the singings, and assure continuity into the future. In the decades before White, Ananias Davidson, Joseph Funk, Allen D. Carden, Alexander Johnson, William Moore, James P. Carrell, and William Walker had all held singings schools and published oblong shape-note tunebooks in the South. But none of these men established musical conventions to insure the continuation of annual singings (Reynolds 3). In 1845 White organized the first permanent singing convention, The Southern Musical Convention, at Hunterville in Upson County, Georgia. Over the next twenty years, this convention met in nine different counties in western and central Georgia. The success of the Southern Musical Convention, of which White was president for over twenty years, resulted in the organization of the Chattahoochee Musical Convention in Coweta County, Georgia, in 1852. The Chattahoochee Convention was also successful and it continues to be held annually during the first weekend of August. The establishment of a consistent musical tradition is what set White apart from other compilers (Reynolds 3). It is the principal reason *The Sacred Harp* has survived with an extensive following for over 150 years.

The first edition of *The Sacred Harp* (1844) had 262 pages. Twenty-six of these were devoted to the Preface, Instructions on the “Rudiments of Music,” and a “Dictionary of Musical Terms.” The 1849 session of the Southern Musical Convention decided that there was a need for a new edition, and in 1850 a revised and enlarged edition was published. The convention appointed an eight-member committee with B.F. White as chair to undertake the task of revision. The basic body of the original work was

undisturbed, but an additional 97 songs were added as an appendix. In 1859 a second revision and enlargement, authorized by the same convention, provided a second appendix of 74 additional songs (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 86).

In 1869 a third revision and enlargement of *The Sacred Harp*, under the same auspices, “introduced a large number of new compositions from the pens of the most eminent teachers and composers of vocal music” and did away with some less popular tunes in the former editions (Jackson, *Uplands* 95). The book had now grown to 480 pages. This revision is significant because it appeared at a time when the new *Christian Harmony* and other seven-shape books were making their way into the Sacred Harp precincts. The Sacred Harp committee, once again appointed by the Southern Musical Convention, was faced with the question of whether or not this book should follow suit and change to the system of seven shape-notes. In the Preface to the 1869 edition, B.F. White, still the chairman of the committee, settled the dispute on (somewhat exaggerated) historical grounds:

During the last 27 years... we have been especially vigilant in seeking musical terms more appropriate to the purpose than the four note-names used in this book. But candor compels us to acknowledge that our search has been unavailing. The four-note scheme ... has had the sanction of the musical world for more than four hundred years [!]; and we scarcely think we can do better than to abide by the advice... “Ask for the old paths and walk therein.” (qtd. in Jackson, *Uplands* 95)

In 1879 a committee prepared to make a fourth revision of the Sacred Harp, but its activities were terminated by the death of its chairman, the venerable B.F. White.

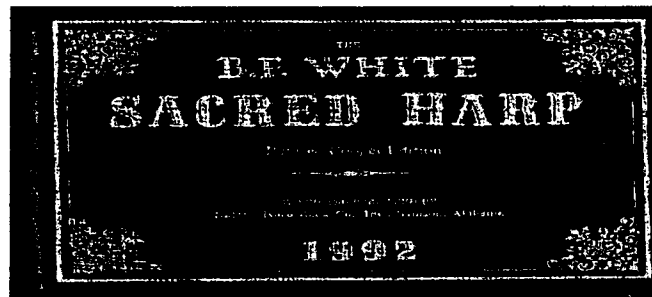
The deep roots the Sacred Harp tradition established in Georgia sustained it through the storm of the Civil War and the hardships of Reconstruction. A number of well-organized singing conventions from this period and earlier still meet annually. But following the death of White in 1879, the course of the book's future publication became less clear, and several competing editions eventually emerged.

*The B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition*

In 1902, over thirty years after the last revision supervised by White, William M. Cooper of southeast Alabama produced what he called a "revision" of the book. *The B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition*, was the first edition of *The Sacred Harp* that was not directed by the Southern Musical Convention. "The reawakening of interest in the old book brought about by the Cooper revision is seen from the fact that it enjoyed subsequent reprintings in 1907 and 1909" (Bealle 106).

FIGURE J

The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition (1992)



Cooper wanted to keep the Sacred Harp tradition intact, but he also saw room for improvement. He transposed many of the songs into a lower key, “probably closer to the key they might be sung in” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 90). Second, he replaced some old tune names with descriptive or first line titles (“Wells” became “Life Is the Time to Serve the Lord,” “Windham” became “The Road to Life and Death”). Also, Cooper altered the character of the tunebook by adding a number of gospel tunes, as well as “Rock of Ages” and “There’s a Great Day Coming.” Lastly, Cooper made a change that would affect all subsequent Sacred Harp tunebooks: he added an alto part to each tune.

The addition of the alto part reflected a modernization in the world of folk song and the appeal of gospel music. It was the addition of triadic harmony. The bare bones sound of Sacred Harp now had the third that was previously missing in many chords. “The original spare harmony, without the relief of the convenient third on which the alto usually centers, gave the music a tension that seemed to accord with other elements of the music as well as the texts” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 92). Open fourths and fifths were still present in Cooper’s four-part arrangements, but fuller harmony now prevailed in many songs.

It must be admitted that the modernization step was an inevitable and vital compromise, a move for survival. Already losing ground to the new music and new shape notes of the Christian Harmony and gospel folk music, the Sacred Harp could not let these upstarts have the monopoly on the increasingly popular [alto] part as well. (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 92)



This gospel-influenced revision has since been amended periodically, and it was reprinted in 1927, 1949, 1992, and 2000 by the Sacred Harp Book Company, Inc., of Samson, Alabama. Most of these editions added new music, including traditional-style Sacred Harp songs, and also tunes written in the gospel-song style, such as “Sweet By and By” and “There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood.” The *Cooper Book* contains 595 songs, and many of them also appear in the *1991 Book*. It also has many songs that “have a relatively sweet harmony, including ‘call-and-response’ songs and folk hymns” that it does not share with “1991” (Steel, “Tunebooks” 1). The *Cooper Book* has continued to be used into the twenty-first century in south Alabama, south Mississippi, east Texas, and panhandle Florida, as well as in the black Sacred Harp communities of southern Alabama (Carnes, “All Day” 3).

#### *The Sacred Harp (5th Edition) and The Original Sacred Harp*

The success of 1902 Cooper revision “inspired the Atlantans” to publish their own revision of White’s *Sacred Harp* tunebook in 1911 (Bealle 106). *The Sacred Harp (5th Edition)* was compiled under the leadership of James Landrum White, son of B.F. White, with a revision committee from the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. Although it bore his father’s name, this edition by J.L. White was “widely criticized because it tampered with the old harmonies” (Carnes, “All Day” 4). J.L. White went on to publish a more conservative revision two years later which did fare slightly better, but it did not remain long in print. “The active use of the White Book is today restricted to North Georgia” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 110).

Another revision of *The Sacred Harp* was published in 1911 under the leadership of Joe S. James, chairman of a committee that had been appointed in 1906 by the United Sacred Harp Musical Association (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 94). (One member of the committee was S.M. Denson whose descendants would later produce the 1936 publication, *The Sacred Harp, Denson Revision*.) The James revision was called the *Original Sacred Harp*. This committee was more closely aligned with the elder White's endeavors and quickly won the loyalty of singers in the "Old Harp" stronghold. The *Original Sacred Harp* kept the 1869 edition intact, but added 71 new songs. Many of these "new" songs had been included in the earliest editions, but they had been discarded in the edition of 1869. Of the songs that were actually new, Alabamians contributed twenty-eight tunes (largely due to the influence and compositions of S. M. Denson), while Georgians composed but six. A summary statement opens this book of 609 tunes, stating "S. M. Denson composed and added 327 allos which have made almost all the old three-part tunes over into those of four-parts and have added two inches to the latitude of the book (it is eight by ten and one-fourth inches tall)" (qtd. in Jackson, *Uplands* 96). The "Summary" also says that there are 1,226 names of authors of music and composers of words, showing that James and his committee worked hard to find out who was who. Out of those 1,226 contributors, 46 are Georgians and 360 are Alabamians, with a total for all the southern states of 861, or about two-thirds of the entire number. This edition also has a "Preface" that expresses the gratification of the editors that "the music writers of the South have kept before the singing public more of the standard hymns and melodies than those in any other part of America" (qtd. in Jackson, *Uplands* 99). Cobb

writes that the James edition was the first to place a biblical verse below each title as an attempt to place each text in a biblical context (*Sacred Harp* 26).

The "Preface" to the *Original Sacred Harp* specifically emphasizes its continued use of dispersed harmony (one part to each staff) and its rejection of close harmony and of "secular, operatic, rag-time, and jig melodies" (James xi). It laments the fact that many sacred song books in this area are "badly tainted with operatic, secular, and rag-time strains of music," and expresses satisfaction that there are in the *Original Sacred Harp* "but few twisted rills and frills of the unnatural snaking of the voice, which in the last decade so demoralized the church music... in this section, but in other sections to an alarming extent." Here the editors were "making a veiled comment on the seven-shapers whose livelier and newer songs were competing keenly for the community's interest and allegiance" (Jackson, *Uplands* 99). The rejection of "secular melodies" is ironic in that many "traditional" Sacred Harp tunes are taken from secular songs. The other compilations of James and the close-harmony compositions of Denson "suggest that the rejection of close harmony was not personal; rather, the committee probably demanded it. Individuals could then be advocates of Sacred Harp or new works of music, or both, as they chose" (Garst 1).

Naturally, the Cooper revision of 1902 and the James revision of 1911 clashed. Cooper had recourse to the courts to help him defend what he conceived to be his exclusive right to title and songs, but his claim was not sustained. The Cooper book was used widely in Alabama and the Florida panhandle, while the James revision was popular in Georgia and spread into parts of northern Alabama.

*The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*

In 1933, The Sacred Harp Publishing Company, organized by Thomas J. Denson, purchased legal rights to *The Sacred Harp* from the James family. Under the leadership of Denson and his son, Paine Denson, the Sacred Harp Publishing Company of Cullman, Alabama, presented the *Original Sacred Harp (Denson Revision)* in 1936 (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 6). The *James* book continued to be used for singings in central and southern Georgia until 1975, when the singers in that area made the changeover to the *Denson Book*. Sections of northern and central Alabama continued to use the *Cooper Book* until the 1950s and 1960s, “when the supply of *White* and *Cooper Books* gradually ran dry in their area and when family members began to venture out to singing sessions in other communities that regularly used the *Denson Book*” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 110).

New editions of the *Denson Book* with revisions and additions followed in 1960, 1966, and 1971. In 1991 a new edition was published under a slightly different title: *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*. With this name change, singers began calling the tunebook the “*1991 Book*” rather than the “*Denson Book*” (Steel, “Tunebooks” 1). As in the past, each revision has admitted a few new compositions, as long as the songs remain close to the traditional style. The *1991 Book* contains 554 songs, including 18th- and 19th-century classics that had previously been deleted, as well as new songs by living composers. The *1991 Book* also contains a new Rudiments section relevant to modern singers by John Garst (Steel, “Tunebooks” 1). The *1991 Book* is now the best-known version of the Sacred Harp songbook. Its strength comes from being rooted in the *Original Sacred Harp* (1911), and from the support of the Denson family of Alabama, a

family of singers and singing teachers. Although the *Cooper Book* is also widely used, the *1991 Book* is the most popular four-shape Sacred Harp tunebook in the United States (Steel, "Tunebooks" 1).

### *The Colored Sacred Harp*

In addition to the tunebooks books previously mentioned, *The Colored Sacred Harp* is also very important, although it does not have wide circulation. Sacred Harp music has a rich history in the African-American communities of southeast Alabama. The black Sacred Harp singers can trace their origins to the white "fasola" singers of the mid-nineteenth century. "African-American slaves may well have sung Sacred Harp with southeast Alabama whites as early as the 1850s, establishing segregated conventions and singings after the Civil War" (Willett, "Jackson" 51). Although specific documentation about when blacks began singing Sacred Harp is lacking, John W. Work's 1941 article "Plantation Meistersinger" related that the 1938 convening of the Henry County Convention (of Alabama, a black convention) was the fifty-eighth meeting of that body (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 118). With such a longstanding tradition, the Black Sacred Harp singers of southeast Alabama have a higher number of organized African-American Sacred Harp singings than any other area of the United States. Today approximately fifteen African-American singings occur annually in the Wiregrass region of southern Alabama. (See Appendix B for singings that use *The Colored Sacred Harp* as a supplement to the *Cooper Book*.)

Although their singings are traditionally segregated, both black and white Sacred Harp singers use the *Cooper Book*. Even after the publication of *The Colored Sacred Harp* in 1934, black Sacred Harp singers primarily used the *Cooper Book*, with *The Colored Sacred Harp* as a supplement. *The Colored Sacred Harp* contains 77 songs; all but one are composed by African-American singers from southeast Alabama and northwest Florida. Although there are 26 composers represented in *The Colored Sacred Harp*, Judge Jackson (1883-1958) is listed as the “author and publisher.”

#### FIGURE K

Judge Jackson (1883-1958)



J. JACKSON, OZARK, AL  
Author of *The Colored Sacred Harp*  
1931

-Copyright 1992, *The Colored Sacred Harp*. Used by permission.

Judge Jackson and members of the Jackson family are responsible for twenty-seven compositions, while Methodist preacher H. Webster Woods composed fourteen songs. “Eternal Truth Thy Word” is the one composition included in *The Colored Sacred Harp* that was not written by an African-American. The composer was Bascom F. Faust, a white banker and Sacred Harp singer from Ozark, Alabama, and his work is presumably

included because he gave substantial financing of a thousand dollars toward publication of the tunebook (Willett, "Jackson" 51).

Since the black Sacred Harp singers had a tradition of using the *Cooper Book*, it is uncertain what motivations or events led to the publication of *The Colored Sacred Harp*. Henry Willett believes *The Colored Sacred Harp* may have been started because the 1927 edition of the *Cooper Book* failed to accept any new songs by black composers. Judge Jackson, for example, submitted several compositions to the all-white *Cooper* revision committee. They were all rejected (Willett, "Jackson" 53). A 1954 autobiography by Judge Jackson which is included in *The Colored Sacred Harp* makes no mention of these rejections, but instead discusses Jackson's participation in the Dale County [Colored] Musical Institute. He writes:

I have been a lover of Sacred Harp singing from my youth. I was in the organization of the Dale County Musical Institute of which I am president at present. In 1932 we had a discussion at the Institute, "What can we do to improve." After discussing for a long time, someone suggested that we stop talking and do something. So we appointed a committee on composition (to write music) and I was appointed chair of that committee. After working about two years, we were able to publish *The Colored Sacred Harp* in 1934, which I am the author and publisher and J. Walker is the associate author. (viii)

The written report of the Dale County Colored Musical Institute offered the following recommendations:

First: That we will have a musical book.

Second: That the name of the book will be *The Colored Sacred Harp*.

Third: That four shaped-notes be used.

Fourth: That Bro. J. Jackson be author of the book.

(qtd. in Willett, "Jackson" 52)

Fifteen members, many representing families still prominent in the black Sacred Harp tradition, signed the committee report. Jackson's son Japheth (currently president of the Alabama-Florida Union State Convention) remembers accompanying his father "in a mule-drawn wagon to pick up the one thousand of the newly printed paperback songsters at the Ozark, Alabama train station" (qtd. in Willett, "Jackson" 54).

The African-American singing community did not readily adopt *The Colored Sacred Harp*. This is surprising considering the "careful crafting of the composition committee to include a variety of families from a number of counties through southeast Alabama" (Willett, "Jackson" 52). One reason it did not gain immediate popularity was that its initial appearance came during the Depression and expendable cash was scarce among African-Americans in southeast Alabama. Secondly, the Sacred Harp community is conservative and only slowly accepts new songs into its repertoire. Finally, Willett suggests that it is possible that "jealousy and resentment of Judge Jackson's involvement in the publication caused it to be boycotted, especially by singers from outside Dale County, Alabama" ("Jackson" 52).

George P. Jackson reported that there were many songs in *The Colored Sacred Harp* that were "variants of the original Sacred Harp melodies" (Cobb, *Sacred Harp*



119). But other songs bear little resemblance to songs in the standard books. Cobb criticizes the songs on the basis that “many of them present troublesome rhythmic patterns and syncopations not found in the regular volume. For the most part, the writers of these tunes seem to have had little concept of phrasing.” Some tunes have unnecessarily difficult notation and awkward barring. But Cobb also notes that singers often “re-bar the music as they sing, altering the syncopated patterns and straightening out the musical line” (*Sacred Harp* 122). In a review of a recording by the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers of selections from *The Colored Sacred Harp*, David Warren Steel observes, “It is instructive to compare the strong and confident rhythms on this recording with their rather inaccurate representation on the pages of Jackson’s tunebook—this suggests that the performance by Jackson’s own descendants and community represents the compiler’s musical conception better than the often inconsistent and inept notation in the book” (1).

A few songs from *The Colored Sacred Harp* have, over time, become popular with singers. One such song, “Florida Storm” by Judge Jackson, although popular, is an example of the awkward rhythmic notation found in many songs from *The Colored Sacred Harp*. The excerpt below (from page 87) shows a text that does not fit well with the notated rhythm. Normally accented syllables fall on unaccented beats and vice versa. As notated, the syncopation does not fall into a pattern that is easy to sing.

FIGURE L

**“Florida Storm,” *The Colored Sacred Harp***

**FLORIDA STORM** Composed by J. Jackson, July 13, 1928

J.J.

1. Sep - tem - ber Eight - eenth, Nine - teen Hun - dred and Twen - ty - six, The peo - ple cried mer - cy in the

2. A pit - y and a shame all the peo - ple in the rain, But God show'd His mer - cy in the

3. The wind with a might - y sound laid man - y build - ings down, But God show'd His mer - cy in the

4. The streets were all a mess it was so no one could pass, Moth - ers look'd for chil - dren in the

5. The doc - tors gnt the news so man - y that were bruised, To - geth - er with the Red Cross on the

36424

-Copyright 1992, *The Colored Sacred Harp*. Used by permission.

*The Colored Sacred Harp* almost disappeared from the black Sacred Harp singing community's active repertoire before its first reprinting in 1973. (The 1973 edition includes a history and rudiments written by Japheth Jackson that the earlier printing did not.) This tunebook was not extremely popular, but it was also not rejected. There has been a newfound interest in black Sacred Harp singing among scholars outside of Alabama. As a result, the African-American singing community has rediscovered the book, and it has undergone several reprintings since 1973. "As the singing tradition began to wane, attracting fewer and fewer participants, *The Colored Sacred Harp* became a symbol of pride among members of Alabama's shape-note singing community" (Willett, "Jackson" 53). *The Colored Sacred Harp* has never supplanted the *Cooper book* at black Sacred Harp singings. A handful of songs have become standard within the community, but most of the book lies unused. However, at the Jackson Memorial

Singing in Dale County, Alabama, held annually in April, a special effort is made to honor Judge Jackson by singing many of his compositions.

## CONTENTS OF SACRED HARP TUNEBOOKS

In preparing a tunebook, compilers have many things to consider, but most important is what will appeal to the audience they are serving. The characteristic oblong shape of “fasola” tunebooks is due to the special typesetting requirements of dispersed harmony. In this style of composition, which harkens back to Renaissance polyphonic part writing, each vocal part--treble, alto, tenor, and bass--contributes a sort of tune, occupying its own separate staff, with the parts freely crossing one another. The tenor, or third line, carries the chief melody. Sacred harp singer Jim Carnes comments he “would gladly sing from any book *wider than it is tall*” [italics added] (“All Day” 2). But more important than the shape of the book are the contents within.

In accordance with the singing school tradition, most tunebooks contain a section on musical instruction called “Rudiments of Singing.” The “Rudiments” in B.F. White’s *Sacred Harp* (1844) “were the same as in all the song books of rural appeal for nearly two hundred years back in America” (Jackson, *Uplands* 98). The *Denson Revision* (1936) was the first to make improvements on this section by revising the rudiments and adding a chapter on harmony and composition. “This re-writing, by Paine Denson, brought the rudiments closer in line with conventional music theory” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 113). The Rudiments discuss all aspects of the music, including staves, rhythm, note names, intervals, accidentals, key signatures, dynamics, harmony, and musical form.

The *1991 Book* has a new Rudiments section “relevant to modern singers” by John Garst (Steel, “Tunebooks” 1).

The tunes and texts of Sacred Harp tunebooks were gathered from a variety of sources. Compilers gathered together music that they believed would appeal to their audience and presented it as one collection. These men were craftsmen rather than creators though in some instances the compilers attached their own names to the tunes. They inherited a “large body of traditional music, derived mainly from the British Isles. Sometimes they took over these tunes in their natural state, sometimes they altered them, or even constructed new tunes with the same melodic elements” (Chase 191). Although the tune’s composer is often listed near the title, it is difficult to say with certainty if the tune was actually composed by the musician whose name is affixed to it. There are many cases where composers took a tune from a large body of “unwritten music” (folk music transmitted by oral tradition) and were given credit for the tune for putting it on the page, or for adding harmony parts. Thus a single tune may have several harmonizations with different titles and texts. One such example is the Sacred Harp tune “Plenary,” which shares a melody with “Old Grime is Dead” as well as the better known “Auld Lang Syne” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 30).

Some tunebooks give almost no sources (such as *Missouri Harmony* of 1836), while others give credit only to the person who compiled the tunes. The Georgia and South Carolina books, *Southern Harmony-revised* (1854), *Sacred Harp* (1854), *Hesperian Harp* (1848), and *Social Harp* (1859), give a great deal of source information which seems to be fairly reliable, especially when the source is a southern collection or a

composer known to the compiler. Arrangers, adders of parts, spiritualizers or moralizers (of a secular text), and “southernizers” are also credited. Jackson tells us “compilers were careful to credit themselves with any small or big part they may have had in inventing, recording, or changing tunes and texts, and that part is often exaggerated” (*Uplands* 153).

That in mind, several composers that made notable contributions to early shape note tunebooks were Andrew Adgate, William Smith, William Little, John Wyeth, and Ananias Davidson. The name of Ananias Davidson “appears oftener than that of any other southerner. We leave it to others to determine the correctness of his claims and, with it, the inappropriateness of his given name” (Jackson, *Uplands* 154). The most frequently named source for the words of early books is “Watts,” referring to the Calvinist and revivalist Isaac Watts (1674-1748) (he was not a man of tunes). “Over sixty texts in [*The Sacred Harp*] can be attributed to Watts” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 22). Cobb explains that Watts’ texts were popular because “they were written to the level of the common man and his hymns emphasize dramatic images which would appeal to a people whose inclination in music and theology was always for a suffusion of emotive power” (*Sacred Harp* 22).

Historian George Jackson reminds us that nearly all the early source collections that compilers used contained words only. “This fact becomes significant when realizing that these textual borrowings were incorporated by the fasaola singers into what were primarily books of music” (Jackson, *Uplands* 155). There was a divergence of interest between the church congregations and the singing schools, the former laying stress on the

words of the songs, the latter on the music. Jackson further writes, “There was almost complete dependence of the fasola book compilers and composers on the churches’ hymn writers for their supply of texts, and to the rural singer’s self-sufficiency in the matter of melodies. They could write tunes and harmonize them after a fashion. But, for some reason, they did little in creating verse for those tunes” (*Uplands* 156).

This brings us to a discussion of the texts that compilers had available to them in the early nineteenth century. James C. Downey has distinguished doctrinal streams within American Protestantism and suggested distinctive types of religious poetry favored by each. First, there were the “Old Side” Congregationalists, who had opposed the evangelical movements of the 1740s, and had by 1800 become either Unitarians or Episcopalians. They were largely confined to the urban upper classes, their clergy were educated at Harvard, and they tended to use Brady and Tate’s *New Version* of the Psalms. The second group was the “New Side,” or moderate evangelicals, who had largely inherited the Congregational and Presbyterian structures of New England and the Middle States following the “Great Awakening” of the 1740s. Their clergy was trained at Yale, Nassau Hall (Princeton) and Rhode Island College (Brown), as well as in less formal “log academies” (Steel, “Wyeth” 3). They overwhelmingly favored the Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts, supplemented by the hymns of other English evangelical poets. Most of the New England composers of the period 1770-1820 were at least nominally associated with this party (Steel, “Wyeth” 3). Last, there were Radical evangelicals, often called Separatists, who frequently joined Baptist and Methodist groups, especially on the frontier, where a continuing revival movement developed. “Their preachers were mostly

uneducated, but by 1800 they had produced a distinctive body of devotional poetry in a popular style” (Steel, “Wyeth” 3).

Using Downey’s categories, we can see that John Wyeth prepared his *Repository* with the needs of moderate evangelicals in mind. At least 79 of the 122 texts can be traced to Isaac Watts; 53 of these are psalm paraphrases. Only ten texts come from Brady and Tate’s *New Version*, sanctioned by the Protestant Episcopal Church. Of the remainder of the metrical texts that have been identified, most come from British writers such as Charles Wesley, Thomas Flatman, Anne Steele, and Joseph Addison, who are all represented in John Rippon’s *Selection of Hymns*, a well-known supplement to Watts. The subjects of the hymns are drawn from a wide range of evangelical themes. However, Wyeth, like other tunebook compilers, avoided texts that treated controversial or sectarian doctrines, such as predestination, total sanctification, or specific modes of baptism. Wyeth also included texts that were chosen for their vivid imagery or their suitability to the American scene. Although taken from Watts’ Psalms, these texts represent stanzas other than the first of a given psalm or section. Among these are “Ocean,” “Virginia,” and “Pool,” all taken from the “nautical” section of Psalm 107, with appropriate musical illustration (Steel, “Wyeth” 4). This text of Watts’ “Ocean,” as given in the *1991 Book*, reworks verses 23-26 of the Psalm.

Thy works of glory, mighty Lord,  
That rul’st the boist’rous sea;  
The sons of courage shall record,  
Who tempt the dang’rous way.



At Thy command the winds arise,  
 And swell the tow'ring waves;  
 The men astonished mount the skies,  
 And sing in gapping graves. (222)

Though the fasola folk did not create their own texts, they did “unmake” some of them. The colloquialisms used in their spoken language often find a way into their song verses (Jackson, *Uplands* 156). One example is “I’ll never turn back no more,” (*Social Harp* 52) instead of “I’ll never turn back again.” Another example of colloquial language is “Are there anybody here like Mary a-weeping,” (*Social Harp* 98) rather than “Is there anyone here like Mary a-weeping.”

A substantial number of Sacred Harp texts have themes of death and farewell. Cobb tells us these themes are common to tunebooks of the 18th century and “invariably the theme of death occurs as a warning, often made ominous by the intensity of its imagery” (*Sacred Harp* 24). The text below is a powerful example:

Your sparkling eyes and blooming cheeks  
 Must wither like the blasted rose;  
 The coffin, earth, and winding sheet  
 Will soon your active limbs enclose. (qtd. in Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 24)

The themes of farewell and parting are also common, as titles such as “Farewell Anthem,” “Parting Friend,” and “Never Part” indicate. “The fact of parting and the hope of reunion are the common bond of Sacred Harp followers. [Furthermore], the singers are made to reflect on the last farewell—and on a time when ‘parting will be known no

more.’ The tension between the necessity of parting (or the desirability of leaving this world) and the pain it brings is the recurring theme of the parting songs” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 25-26).

In addition to verbal content, compilers also had to keep in mind the meter of their texts when selecting or composing tunes to include in the tunebook. In preparing a tunebook “for the use of Christian churches of every denomination,” a compiler had to provide at least one tune for each of the meters used in church psalmody and hymnody (Steel, “Wyeth” 4). In English speaking churches, the meters most frequently used were the iambic 8686, 8888 and 6686, known as Common Meter, Long Meter, and Short Meter respectively. The numbers stand for the number of syllables in each line of the text. The text of "Ocean," given above, has the meter 8686 because the first line has eight syllables, the second line has six syllables, *et cetera*. Common Meter, Long Meter, and Short Meter account for 99 of the 122 texts in Wyeth’s *Repository*. The remaining texts provide a scattering of other psalm and hymn meters such as 6666.444, 668.668, six 10s, four 10s, 7777, 8787, and amphibrachic 8888, all known collectively as Particular Meter. There are also two set pieces of fluctuating meter, and five prose anthems. By providing a wide variety of tunes to these popular meters, Wyeth and other compilers left room for congregations to improvise by singing different texts to the tunes in his book. A new text could be sung to any existing tune that employs the same meter.

Fasola compilers used many methods to give a title to a song. Some titles refer directly to the words, especially those of “experience,” “hallelujah” and “farewell” songs. More often the titles indicate nothing about the character of the text or tune, but instead

refer to a place where the song may have originated, or to people associated with the song in some way. Fasola songs bear the names of all the southeastern states, many counties (DeKalb, Cleburne, Cullman, etc.), towns (Nashville, Chattanooga, Spartanburg, Knoxville, Vicksburg, Hartwell, Milledgeville, Bowman, Jonesboro, Atlanta, Jasper, etc.), and numbers of little “places” like Arbacoochee (in Northern Alabama), too small to be found on a map. The names of rivers (Pacolet, Holston, French Broad), creeks, springs, valleys (Blue Vale of Nacoochee), hills (Golden Hill, Cole’s Hill, Pleasant Hill, Red Hill), and Groves (Eagle Grove, Valley Grove, Harmony Grove, Mulberry Grove, Union Grove, Pleasant Grove, Shady Grove), may show where the song “came to” its composer, or they may tell merely of a favorite place for singings or singing schools.

Song makers also named their productions for friends or relatives. Some musical people thus honored were Kay (Silas W.), Markham (Sarah Ann), Caldwell (William), Edney (Jas. M., through the title “Edneyville,” his North Carolina home), Sidney (given name of the composer’s mother), and White (B.F.). The Alabama composer, M. F. McWhorter, showed his regard for the notable song-making dynasty of his state in the *Sacred Harp* song, “Denson.” And “Fillmore” got its name from the popular Cincinnati tune maker of numeral notation fame (Jackson, *Uplands* 151).

## SACRED HARP TRADITIONS OF ALABAMA

During the middle of the nineteenth century, Sacred Harp singing spread westward from Georgia into Alabama, where singings became common in some northern and eastern counties. When settlers moved to Alabama, they brought their songbooks along. There was little organized music of the singing convention type in Alabama until after the Civil War. The *Organ*, a Georgia newspaper published by Sacred Harp leader B.F. White, reported a Sacred Harp singing convention in Alabama as early as 1855, stating that in that year there was a meeting of the Alabama Musical Convention in Russell County, Alabama.

Sacred Harp conventions were instituted in an era when singing was a fundamental part of community life in much of the south. In areas where shape-note singing thrived, how and what one sang were matters of interest and concern to the whole community. Organized singing was religion, recreation, and esthetic pursuit combined. “‘Sacred Harp’ was not what they were engaged in; that was only the name of the book they were using at the time” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 128). Accordingly, there was no reference to the Sacred Harp in the official titles of the original conventions. As the central agencies of the movement, the conventions were responsible for propagating the singing, and for instituting and distributing the revisions and re-publications of the songbooks. In addition they provided vital communication among the singers within the various territories.

Alabama conventions of the late 1800s were well attended, and Alabama began to rival Georgia as a center of Sacred Harp activity. The oldest Alabama convention that is still in existence is the Southeastern Alabama Sacred Harp Musical Convention, which was founded in 1858 and meets annually in September in Ewell, Dale County, Alabama (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 139). The Boiling Harp Sacred Harp Singing Convention was organized in 1866 in Clay County, Alabama. The Ryan's Creek Sacred Harp Singing Convention in Jasper, Alabama was organized in 1873 (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 140). The Ryan Creek Convention is now combined with the Rock Creek-Mountain Home Convention, and the combined organization held its 127th session in August, 2000 at the Masonic Hall, Crane Hill, Cullman County, Alabama.

Numerous other singings also emerged in northern Alabama counties in the late 1800s, including the Hillabee Singing Convention (Clay County, 1873), the Clear Creek Mountain Home Singing Association (Winston County, 1874), the Warrior River Convention (Sand Mountain area, 1875), and the Coffee County Sacred Harp Singing Convention (1876). In the next decade conventions in the southern part of the state emerged in steady succession: the South Alabama Sacred Harp Musical Convention in 1883, the Houston County Sacred Harp Singing Convention in 1885, the Central Sacred Harp Singing Convention in 1888, and the Covington County Sacred Harp Convention in 1889. Many more conventions have been established in the hundred years since. "Seven of the eight Alabama conventions founded over a hundred and twenty years ago are still holding sessions, and more than thirty others of more recent date meet at locations throughout the state each year" (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 141).

Two major statewide conventions emerged in Alabama, giving stability to the local conventions. In 1909 the Alabama Sacred Harp Musical Association was established, and it has continued meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, to the present time. Their 1929 minutes list 110 local Sacred Harp annual singings (held in areas of Alabama besides Birmingham) affiliated with this central organization (Jackson, *Uplands* 105). The other statewide singing organization, the B.F. White Sacred Harp Musical Society of Alabama, Inc., was founded in 1915 and also still meets in Birmingham.

If the number of conventions and local singings is combined, over 160 Sacred Harp singings have survived and are held annually in Alabama. (See Appendix A and B for listing of singings and dates.) While there are Sacred Harp singings all over the United States, Georgia is the only state that even comes close to the number of singings held annually in Alabama. The tradition is very strong due to the number of people that are dedicated to its preservation. The majority of the Alabama singings are held in the northern half of the state. *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition* is the tunebook of choice for many of the singings, while *The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition* (2000) is a close second in popularity. The Sacred Harp tradition came to Alabama before the industrial boom of the late 1800s and has survived over a century. We will now examine how this tradition co-existed with the changes of the turn of the century in Alabama.

### Sacred Harp and the “New South”

Before the last decades of the nineteenth century, Birmingham was nothing more than a proposed railroad intersection. But speculators had grand plans and dreamed of a

“Magic City,” even though bitter labor disputes, cholera, and a nationwide depression had dampened the hopes of some. By 1895, Birmingham was a youthful industrial boomtown sitting on top of rich coal and iron ore deposits. Turn-of-the-century Birmingham was “a gleam in the eye of 'New South' optimists in Alabama, vying for prominence with Atlanta and Nashville. Industry would supplant agriculture, and hope would replace the despair of war and reconstruction” (Bealle 88).

City planners had dreams for cultural advancement as well as economic growth. In 1895, the *Birmingham News* reported that Prof. Benjamin Guchenberger (later Guckenberger), with credentials from Cincinnati’s College of Music, had accepted an invitation to come to the city and direct the new conservatory of music. Four years later, “the city began planning its first May Festival, based on the model provided by Cincinnati, intending to promote the image of Birmingham as a music-loving and cultivated city” (Bealle 89).

Fortunately, reformers saw no need to campaign against the shape-note music in Alabama. And the fasola folk saw no reason to resist the new musical reform in Birmingham. The reason for this was that the “New South” was economically and culturally isolated from its surroundings. Unlike Cincinnati, which arose a hundred years earlier as a frontier cultural center, Birmingham was built as an economic enterprise designed to extract wealth from natural resources. Bealle writes that several factors contributed to this isolation:

Alabama’s elite planter class did not support the founding of the industrial site at Birmingham and would have had a diminished impact on its

culture. Nor was there an institutional basis for working-class influence: in the surrounding area, mining camps nourished the city's economy, where discontented laborers, some of them prison convicts, worked under the most austere conditions. Those who were lured to the mines from small farms might only stay a few months before returning to the land. Thus, they also would not have had cause to establish municipal cultural institutions. And in the hills where Alabama's "plain folk" operated small farms, resentment was building among those who saw promised prosperity sapped by industrialists (eventually dominated by northern companies), professionals, merchants, and large planters. (91)

It was in these rural areas away from Birmingham that Sacred Harp singing had the strongest following. The reform movement had no effect on the annual singing gatherings in the countryside.

In 1911, the Jefferson County Schools (Birmingham) installed a supervisor of music for its rural schools to visit teachers and provide curriculum materials, thus expanding into the land of shaped notes. Sacred Harp singers, likewise, sought to expand into urban areas and urban institutions. In 1910, organizers held the Alabama State Sacred Harp Singing Convention in Birmingham itself. The initial site was Birmingham's Southside Skating Rink, although the following year the convention began its lengthy run in the symbolic seat of municipal affiliation, the Jefferson County Courthouse. That first year, planners predicted that five thousand singers would



converge on the Magic City. The *Birmingham News* covered the meeting, granting it front-page status.

This was a significant cultural event. The July 15 headlines read “Weird Airs Handed Down by Sacred Harp Singers” followed by “Without Use of Pitch Pipe or Reed with Which to Sound Key, They Acquired the Art.” Sacred Harp singers were being described by and to their readers as exotic relics of bygone days. The effect of this was to formulate Sacred Harp so that it did not compete with reform efforts. With Sacred Harp safely projected into the past, music teachers could be sent into rural area as if no music existed there at all. (qtd. in Bealle 92)

Not all reports of singings took this approach. In rural areas where the “New South” movement had not penetrated, local newspapers used a more methodical style to describe singings. They posted advertisements of upcoming conventions or reports on the leaders of past conventions. “Even as late as 1932, the local newspaper describing the rural singings at Mt. Zion, Georgia, gave an account in the sparse style of Sacred Harp recorded minutes, providing the names of all leaders and officers and mirroring the sequence of events in its form” (Bealle 93).

The tradition of Sacred Harp music had an ally against reform in the rural Primitive Baptist churches of the south. “The Primitive Baptist movement, which had arisen in the 1820s and '30s in reaction against Sunday Schools, mission societies, and other 'unscriptural' contrivances, was especially strong in rural Georgia and Alabama, and the Sacred Harp, with its organizational simplicity and astringent flavor, offered these

independent churches a welcome enhancement to worship and fellowship” (Carnes, “All Day” 3). Though most Primitive Baptist congregations have by now adopted seven-shape, "new-book" or "little-book" gospel music, many continue to use the "old book" occasionally, and they graciously give over their facilities for annual and semiannual singings. Rural Methodist and Missionary Baptist churches, while not as receptive to the music for their own purposes, have also provided on their "off" Sundays a haven for the Sacred Harp.

#### A Family Tradition

The Sacred Harp tradition is not only passed on through communities, it is passed on through families to the young. Many extended families hold the singing tradition near and dear to their hearts. “While Sacred Harp, has passed from view and even from memory in many communities, it has survived in others where one or more large, close-knit families have absorbed it as part of their heritage and family identity” (Cobb, "Wootten Family" 41). This strong family dedication is the reason Sacred Harp music spread across the United States, and also why it thrived in Alabama even as the state became industrialized. There are several families that have taken on the responsibility as keepers of the shape-note tradition. The Jacksons of southeast Alabama’s Wiregrass region are credited with the preservation of *The Colored Sacred Harp* tradition. Descendants of the Cooper family encouraged others of south Alabama to carry on with the *Cooper Book*. But two families stand out as the most influential in the life of the

Sacred Harp: the Woottens of Sand Mountain, Alabama, and the Densons of Winston County, Alabama.

Thomas and Rhoda Haynes must have brought a songbook with them from Georgia when they moved to Alabama toward the end of the nineteenth century, “first to Randolph County and central Alabama near the Georgia line, and then to Jackson County near Section, in the northeast corner of the state, where they settled” (Cobb, *Wootten Family* 43). One of the Haynes' fourteen children, Beulah, married Jesse Wootten in their community, whose parents had also come from Georgia. Beulah (1884-1967) and Jesse Wootten (1888-1971) had seven children (Gertha, Chester, Postell, Mack, Carnice, Freeman, and Olivia), and “it is these five brothers and two sisters and their numerous descendants whose names have been so prominently linked with Sacred Harp singing in the past few decades” (Cobb, "Wootten Family" 43). The Haynes and Wootten families are important to the history and survival of Sacred Harp singing because of the large number of their relatives that are Sacred Harp participants. Sacred Harp singing is a part of their heritage and a part of their daily lives.

Additionally, the Wootten family is especially important to the Sacred Harp tradition because they were among the first to add an alto line to the standard three-part music. Throughout the nineteenth century, Sacred Harp singing featured three parts: treble, tenor, and bass. Women sang tenor or treble, or doubled the bass. “Newer tunebooks, however, and the increasingly popular seven-shape music, such as *Christian Harmony* (compiled by William Walker, 1873), employed the alto. And alto was a vital part of the new, gospel music sound, which threatened to obliterate the Sacred Harp and

other older shape note singing traditions” (Cobb, "Wootten Family" 46). By guiding the tradition through this evolution, the Woottens helped Sacred Harp music survive amongst seven-shape and gospel music. Eventually, fasola singers yielded to the new part and to the more thickly textured sound that it brought, though not everywhere at once. With the exception of but a few songs, the 1902 *Cooper revision* added the alto part throughout the book, as did the later *White, James* and *Denson* revisions.

In the article “Sand Mountain’s Wootten Family: Sacred Harp Singers,” Buell Cobb tells us it was the *Cooper* and *White* revisions, which had a greater proportion of gospel-style songs than the nineteenth-century editions or the *James* book, that were mainly used where the Haynes and Wootten families lived. This is surprising, since the *Cooper Book* was primarily used in southern Alabama, not northeast Alabama where the Woottens lived. “Family members who grew up in the 1920s and 1930s remember using the two books about evenly, though they occasionally sang out of the *James* book as well. A call for a particularly affecting song would have the singers replacing one book on their laps with another from just under the bench” (Cobb, "Wootten Family" 44). The Woottens were not known to use the “*Denson Book*” until the 1950s and 1960s, “when the supply of *White* and *Cooper* books gradually ran dry in their area and when family members began to venture out to singing sessions in other communities that regularly used the *Denson* book” (Cobb, "Wootten Family" 45).

The story of the Denson relationship with shape-note singing goes back to James S. Denson, a prominent singer of Walton County, Georgia. James Denson composed the song “Christmas Anthem,” which appeared in *The Sacred Harp* of 1844. Two of his

nephews, brothers Seaborn M. Denson and Tom J. Denson, lived in Winston County, Alabama, became “the most influential singing-school teachers the movement had known” (Carnes, “All Day” 4). Historian Jackson writes that in the early 1900s, the Helicon district in Winston County was a very remote district of Alabama which railroad, highways, and schools had not yet found. “Its sparse population was so predominately white during the Civil War times that it sided very definitely with the Union in that conflict. Winston County is the long-time place of song fostering. The Densons have been and are the fosterers” (Jackson, *Uplands* 107).

Seaborn Denson (1865-1936) was born in Cleburne County, Alabama, near a village called Arbacoochee or the "Denson Gold Mines." Beginning in 1874, Seaborn Denson devoted fifty-one years to teaching over ten thousand students in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi the skill of shape-note singing. He wrote 327 alto parts to the songs in the *Old Sacred Harp*, wrote ten original compositions that appeared in *The Sacred Harp*, and composed 15 others which appeared in the *Union Harp* and in *Sacred Hymns and Tunes*. Seaborn Denson was a collaborator on *The Union Harp and History of Songs* (1909) and the James edition of *The Original Sacred Harp* (1911). Surely Denson stands among the most effective Alabama musical educators of that era. The Preface to Joe S. James' 1913 *Sacred Hymns and Tunes* gives special credit to the work of Seaborn Denson:

Not only does [Seaborn M. Denson] deserve the statements above of his high standing, but as a lover of music and the teaching of sacred songs and hymns in Georgia and Alabama, within the last forty years, none have

excelled him. As a composer of real sacred tunes and the training of the voice and instilling the development of sacred music, he stands at the top of the ladder. Thousands of people have been taught the principles of music and probably more of sacred songs than any teacher of his age in the Southern States. Much of the arrangements in this volume are due to him and his watchful care in presenting this song and tunebook and upon which the religious people of the country can rely for religious services for all purposes. (qtd. in Garst)

Thomas J. Denson (1863-1935), Seaborn's brother, has similar credits and admiration attached to his name. One of the most popular of singing school masters, "Uncle Tom" Denson crisscrossed the south attracting families to singing schools in both backwoods communities and cities. At his schools, Denson used a rolled-up cloth painted with clefs and scales as a portable blackboard. Tapping a pointer stick at the shaped notes, he gave students a fair warning: "If some of you don't like this music, all I've got to say to you is you'd better get out. If you stay here, it's going to get a-hold of you and you can't get away" (Jackson, *Uplands* 112).

Together the Denson brothers introduced thousands of people to Sacred Harp music. "Seab" and "Tom," as they were called, had the good sense to select as their wives two sisters from another musical family, the Burdettes (Jackson, *Uplands* 107). They raised large families and all family members participated in advancing the tradition. Under the leadership of Tom Denson and his son Paine, the Sacred Harp Publishing Company acquired legal rights to the *Original Sacred Harp* in 1933 and embarked upon

revising it. Both Seaborn and Thomas died shortly before *The Sacred Harp, Denson Revision* appeared in 1936, yet in its present-day predominance the book bears their indelible stamp, serving still many of their former pupils. The community of singers erected a monument in honor of the two brothers at the Double Springs, Alabama, Courthouse in 1944, the year of the Sacred Harp centennial (Carnes, "All Day" 4).

### Division within the Tradition

Within the state lines of Alabama, the Sacred Harp singing community currently falls into three categories: *1991*, *Cooper*, and *The Colored Sacred Harp*. At times the categorical divisions may seem unclear; there is some crossover and a sentiment of kinship and common origins, but the various singing styles and tunebooks that are used separate the groups.

In the nineteenth century, there had been but one standard version of *The Sacred Harp*, and, when they could get it, singers used the most recent revision (1844, 1850, 1859, 1869). But with the 1902 publication of the *B.F. White Sacred Harp, Cooper Revision* there was now a choice to be made. The *Cooper Book* gained popularity in south Alabama, north Florida, south Mississippi, and east Texas with both white and black singers. Having gone without a new tunebook for over thirty years, the *Cooper Book* is credited for "jumpstarting" the Sacred Harp tradition at a time when interest had started to fade. The Preface to Cooper's edition reads: "The selections are from the old *Sacred Harp*, remodeled and revised, together with additions from the most eminent authors, including new music." The 'remodeling' Cooper referred to was the transposing

of a number of songs into a lower, more easily sung key. The 'revising' was the standardization of the alto part in all selections, a significant change followed by later revisers of the Sacred Harp books. The 'additions' were a number of gospel songs that "were included in response to the surge in popularity, among both whites and African-Americans in southeast Alabama, of seven-shape note music" (Willett, "Voices" 50). The two rival revisions, published in Georgia in 1911, the "White" book and the "James" book divided the rest of the Sacred Harp territory, "the *White book* mainly in north Georgia, most of north Alabama, south Tennessee, and North Mississippi" (Cobb, "Wootten Family" 44).

These lines of division held true until the publication of *The Sacred Harp, Denson Revision* in 1935. The *Denson revision* grew in popularity quickly and was preferred in northern Alabama and parts of Georgia. (The *Cooper Book* maintained its following in southern Alabama.) This new revision of *The Sacred Harp* was readily accepted because of the Denson name that was attached to it. Singers knew that members of the Denson family had been Sacred Harp singers and singing-school teachers for decades in Alabama, not to mention that Seaborn and Thomas had also served on previous Sacred Harp revision committees. Additionally, the Denson revision was well-liked because the tunebook remained in line with the accepted style and technique; it did not try to change the tradition. The latest edition, *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*, continues to be popular.

What is it that causes singers to prefer the *1991 Book* or the *Cooper Book*? Originally, any allegiances to a tunebook arose purely out of geographic location. If *Cooper books* were readily available in a community then that tunebook was used. It was



not a frequent event to travel great distances, as people often do now, to attend a singing in another state or at the opposite end of the state. Beyond the aspect of location, we know that the contents of the books are slightly varied, with the *Cooper book* containing some gospel style tunes. But in general, the dividing lines are in the singing styles employed by each community. Though the differences are subtle, singers in each community adopt specific singing styles that they are generally reluctant to change. The most specific aspect in which the singing styles vary is tempo.

The matter of tempo has been discussed among Sacred Harpers for many years. There are generational differences: “the young often favor faster tempos; the older singers prefer to let the words they sing go a bit slower” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 49). But the root of the matter lies deeper than that.

In general, Alabama singers sing at a faster clip than Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas singers; the black singers in north Mississippi especially prefer a slower pace. But the Sand Mountain area singers of northern Alabama [1991 book singers] have the greatest reputation among the other groups for galloping speed. The *Cooper book* singings are more difficult to compare. This segment performs some tunes as fast as do any of the other groups; other songs they sing as slowly as do their lower-Georgia counterparts. The blacks singers who use the *Cooper book* like a slow, bouncy beat--except on some 3 /4 music, which they sing faster than any of the other groups. Thus uniformity of tempo is yet beyond the grasp of the singing folk, and the largest singing conventions, which bring together

people with varied singing styles, sometimes prove a source of frustration for that very reason (though not enough to make singers stay away).

These vocalists take their music seriously, and most of them like a song the way they are used to hearing it sung. (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 50-1)

The tempo of the song is always at the discretion of the leader. “However, as a rule the hymn tunes are sung rather slowly, while the revival songs and especially the fuguing tunes often proceed at a brisk clip, allowing leaders so equipped and inclined to cue the entrances of successive parts with dance-like precision” (Carnes, “All Day” 4). The correct tempo and rhythm is imperative to the tune’s success. Inspired by the rhythm, many singers keep time with a tapping foot or waving hand. These movements often look choreographed, but they are spontaneous. They are ingrained in the singer’s heart and are part of his participation in the event. The pace and intensity of the singing can seem relentless to the uninitiated, but those conditioned to its demands find it exhilarating. “Face to face around the square, they grin and nod approvingly at one another, and cries of ‘Good singin!’ erupt after an especially vigorous workout” (Carnes, “All Day” 4).

Although black Sacred Harp singers use the same *Cooper book* as their neighbors in southern Alabama, black and white singing groups have traditionally remained segregated. The different singing styles that have developed through this separation make the prospect of a consolidation even more difficult. “In most respects the black singers follow the discipline of the Sacred Harp less rigorously than do the white segment; they are more improvisational, altering or adding to the musical line—though

for the most part unconsciously” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 43). The practice of adding extra notes is seldom found in white singings. In order to make room for notes, black singers traditionally take a slower tempo on numerous songs. In emotionally-charged songs like the Cooper book’s “My Span of Life,” “Amazing Grace,” and “My Native Land,” the music is transformed by the black singers through ornamentation and exclamation into something considerably different from what is notated. “One specific effect fostered by the black singers in southern Alabama is that of adding an upper neighbor tone between repeated tones at cadence points. Notable examples of tunes performed with this mannerism are “The Old Ship of Zion,” “Morning Trumpet,” “Ragan,” and “Sweet Morning” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 43). Easily fallen into but not consciously produced, this twist at the end of the musical line has become a natural part of the singing style of the black Sacred Harpers in Alabama.

The use of *The Colored Sacred Harp* is another distinctive feature of black Sacred Harp singings. As mentioned earlier, the tunes in *The Colored Sacred Harp* are known for their poor notation and unnatural syncopation. Black singers instinctively alter the text and notation to make these songs more singable. This creates difficulties for a visiting singer, for the adaptations must be learned by rote. This also makes it difficult for white and black singers to participate together in singing from *The Colored Sacred Harp*.

## SACRED HARP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The tradition of Sacred Harp singing has existed in Alabama for almost 150 years. This thesis has examined the tunebooks, conventions, and families that have kept the tradition alive. The Sacred Harp tradition is very strong in Alabama due to its numerous singing conventions. These include not only community singings, but statewide singings and the National Sacred Harp Convention as well. Two major conventions were formed in Alabama in the early 1900s: the Alabama State Sacred Harp Musical Association, and the B.F. White Sacred Harp Musical Society of Alabama. In 1941 these two groups merged to form the Alabama State Sacred Harp Convention—"the most important consolidation of organized bodies in the history of the Sacred Harp songbook" (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 141).

The National Sacred Harp Singing Convention is a popular convention for all Sacred Harp singers, even though the only tunebook used is the *Denson Revision*. The three-day convention is held annually in Birmingham, Alabama the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday before the third Sunday in June. Over 400 singers representing 25 states, the District of Columbia, and England attended the National Convention in 2000. Alabama was represented by 276 singers, while Georgia came in at a distant second place with only 27 singers.

Some community singings across Alabama have attendance of over a hundred people. These singings maintain high attendance rates because they are coordinated with

community or family activities in the area. Often the singing coincides with the “old Southern custom of Decoration Day, in which families return each year to bring flowers to the graves of their parents, grandparents, and other relatives” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 144). There are also singings that are held annually as a memorial to an individual or family. In this case, the event is an opportunity for family reunion as well as Sacred Harp singing. “One such [memorial] singing is the annual Chafin, Harbison, and Hollis Singing and Reunion held at New Prospect Church near Bremen, Alabama, on the third Sunday in July. The descendants of these three families along with the singers and others from the community now return each year for a reunion” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 144). Family, friends and new acquaintances are welcome to these singings, which are known for their great singing and hospitality.

Despite the large number of singings held annually in Alabama, there is no guarantee that the tradition will survive. Traditionally, the most common path to becoming a shape-note singer has been through the family. This was effective in years past when family members were not so inclined to move away from their hometowns. However, modern families are often divided when sons and daughters move to other locations to pursue economic and other opportunities. One family that maintains the custom of having the extended family participate in regular singings is the Woottens of Ider, Alabama. “The music of Sacred Harp was and is part of their daily lives. When the Wootten family gets together—with as many as thirty singers at one time—they form the core of perhaps the strongest community of Sacred Harpers in the land” (Cobb, *Sacred*

*Harp* 157). The Woottens are one of only a handful of such families that have large numbers of people—old and young—participating in Sacred Harp singing.

In the latter half of the twentieth century it became apparent that the number of young people participating in Sacred Harp singing was declining. In an essay entitled “Mississippi's African American Shape Note Tradition,” Chiquita Walls expresses the fears of many for the future of the tradition:

This is the music of [our] parents and grandparents: shape note singings and conventions are part of their heritage. Many fear that if nothing is done to preserve and document the music, their descendants will not know their cultural heritage. A universal complaint among shape note singers is the lack of interest and participation of young people. Efforts to attract younger participants have failed, and convention members fear that they are indeed the last generation of the black "note singing" tradition in the area (2).

For Cobb, the situation is not so dire. In his experience, “The attendance at the singings has always leaned proportionately to the older folk... the young people in the tradition have often not responded to it until later in life... they can see the beauty, feel the power in it” (*Sacred Harp* 156).

The Alabama Sacred Harp community does make an effort to share the tradition with others by singing at events other than traditional singings. Singers often sing from the Sacred Harp for funeral services, either to honor the deceased or to act out rural custom. “Singers in a locality are apt to regard this as civic duty, and they try, whenever

possible, to help to ‘make a class’” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 147). One of the most visible events is the Alabama Folk Life Festival’s *City Stages*, held annually in Birmingham the third weekend of June. This coincides with the National Sacred Harp Convention. Following the Saturday singing at the convention, Sacred Harp singers travel *en masse* to the City Stages to present Sacred Harp singing.

Attracting new people to Sacred Harp singing is a difficult process. The Sacred Harp tradition is based on active participation rather than passive listening. The physical and spiritual exhilaration reported by participants at the singings cannot be duplicated on a recording (though specially recorded cassette tapes, compact discs, and videotapes of conventions are available). The traditional experience is a full day of singing, not a short concert or recital. Furthermore, new singers must be willing to learn the shape notes. And while there are still singing schools held in many places across America, attendance at the actual singings is essential for learning the tradition.

Sacred Harp singers learn of upcoming singings from one of three sources. First, singers may know of a singing that happens annually on an established weekend in an established location. This could be known by having attended the singing before, or the information may be passed around by word of mouth. Verbal announcements of upcoming singings are generally made at conventions or community singings. Another source of information is the annual *Minutes of Sacred Harp Singings*, which is published both in printed form and on the Internet. Finally, a singer may receive e-mail announcements through “Fasola” e-mail communities.

The Sacred Harp community has benefited greatly from the presence of the website [www.fasola.org](http://www.fasola.org). While it may seem ironic that such an old-fashioned tradition makes use of advanced technology, the Fasola website provides singers old and new with information ranging from historical background to maps for upcoming singings. The website offers detailed information about tunes, links to related websites, names of tunebooks and recordings that are for sale, and e-mail discussion groups. Members of the discussion groups may offer comments on past singings, give news on singers who are in poor health, and request information on related subjects. The existence of the website and the discussion groups has played an important role in preserving the Sacred Harp tradition because it keeps singers connected even though they may be miles apart physically. The website is frequently updated and a newcomer can contact individuals to answer questions regarding upcoming singings and ordering tunebooks. Additionally, the website has brief excerpts of Sacred Harp recordings.

Sacred Harp singers are loyal to the tradition as a whole, but they are even more loyal to the singings they attend and the tunebook they prefer to use. Family and regional traditions play the largest role in determining how and when one participates in a singing. The average singer normally attends only singings that are in nearby counties and that use the tunebook they are used to. Although there are those who enjoy singing from more than one tunebook, there are many others who are resistant to change. They equate this resistance with being loyal to their own tradition. The majority of singers in central and northern Alabama use the *1991 Book*, while singers in south and southeastern Alabama



use the *Cooper Book*. *The Colored Sacred Harp* is used as a supplement to the *Cooper Book* at Black Sacred Harp singings in southeastern Alabama.

The lines of division between adherents of the *1991 Book*, the *Cooper Book*, and the *Colored Sacred Harp* are geographical and racial, and they are decades old. Regional differences in performance practice have become entrenched as a result of the separation. Nevertheless, the three groups have the same goal of preserving the Sacred Harp tradition. Singers are becoming more willing to use competing tunebooks and performance styles. Cobb has noticed that “as far apart as the varying revisions have carried the Sacred Harp followers, there are evidences that they may yet again belong to one band. When it was apparent that the James book would not go through another printing, the Denson revisionists had already accommodated the James singers by making room for some of their choicest tunes in the Denson book” (*Sacred Harp* 126). Cooper-book singers and Denson-book singers are now reasonably familiar with the each other’s tunebooks. At large singings, they often have the other tunebook available out in the car, just in case. “At many Alabama Cooper-book sessions, singers who are fond of some of the Denson-book tunes assemble after lunch before the singing officially reopens and harmonize on favorite songs from the other book” (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 126). Cobb reflects on the possibility of a merger:

The Denson and Cooper book songs and singing styles are still far enough apart (the singing from the Cooper book by the segment of black singers draws the segment even further) to prevent a merging of the two in the immediate future. But some visiting and exchange goes on between all

the different groups—more today than ever before. If this trend continues, a single broad-minded revision might again tie all of these singing adherents together, as they have not been since the days of B.F. White and his sturdy, community-approved editions. (*Sacred Harp* 126)

With the original publication of the *Cooper Book* in 1902 (thirty years after B.F. White offered his last edition) came revived interest in Sacred Harp singing. Although the *Cooper Book*, which included some gospel tunes, was of a slightly different character than White's tunebooks, it preserved the Sacred Harp tradition. Additionally, while there was pressure to print a Sacred Harp book with seven note-shapes instead of four, the *Cooper Book*, and those that followed, remained faithful to the four shapes used by White (Cobb, *Sacred Harp* 150).

The printing of a new tunebook that would serve to merge the *1991 Book*, the *Cooper Book*, and *The Colored Sacred Harp* might give new life and strength to the Sacred Harp tradition. A merger between the Alabama groups, embodied in a unified tunebook, might encourage everyone to work toward the common goal of preserving the tradition. Some crossover between the *Alabama Sacred Harp* groups already exists. The *1991 Book* and the *Cooper Book* contain many songs in common. The most difficult task would be to include songs from *The Colored Sacred Harp*. It is known that these tunes require creative interpretation in performance because they generally do not use the same notational style as the other two books.

One attempt at a universal tunebook, published in 1999 in Atlanta, Georgia, is *An Eclectic Harmony*, subtitled "A collection of four-shape tunes, old and new, in a great

variety of styles and meters from sources additional to the Denson Revision of The Sacred Harp, submitted for the spiritual upliftment and enjoyment of the discerning public" (Steel, *Tunebooks 2*).

This tunebook contains "100 worthy and often popular tunes compiled from the *Missouri Harmony* (14 tunes), *The Southern Harmony* (14 tunes), *The Social Harp* (12 tunes), *The Cooper Revision of The Sacred Harp* (23 tunes), *The White Revision of The Sacred Harp* (11 tunes), *Northern Harmony* (eight tunes), *An American Christmas Harp* (eight tunes), contributions from the Lee Family of Hoboken, Georgia (five tunes), and three additional contemporary tunes. The book offers a tantalizing glimpse of the broader world of shape-note music and hopefully will encourage singers to purchase and sing from those tunebooks which are still available. (Steel, *Tunebooks 2*)

*An Eclectic Harmony* is used at some of the larger singings in Alabama as a supplement to the established books. It is used during a recess, lunch hour, or an after-supper singing. The fact that it contains tunes that are "tried and true" in other tunebooks helps with the acceptance of *An Eclectic Harmony*, but it is at this point used in Alabama only as a supplement, rather than as the basis for a day of singing.

A unified tunebook for the Alabama Sacred Harp groups might unite the traditions under one title, but it would not eliminate the stylistic differences in performance practice. Tempos in southeastern Alabama would probably remain slower than the faster pace used in northern Alabama, for example. Nevertheless, a unified

tunebook would exert pressure to sing in a unified style. This would create the danger of a “watering down” of the three distinctive traditions in Alabama. *The Colored Sacred Harp* might get left behind due to its unfamiliarity, and the unique regional and family styles might eventually be lost completely.

Bealle maintains that it is the intricate combination of “musical and religious ideas, the resistance [to conform] to progressive ideas, and the extraordinary will to persevere” that has given the Sacred Harp tradition its strength (243). Each of the Sacred Harp tunebooks used in Alabama has a following of singers that could support their tradition on their own. But joined together under the Sacred Harp tradition and history, they are even stronger.

It is remarkable that the singing tradition established by Benjamin White’s tunebook *The Sacred Harp*, compiled over a century and a half ago, continues with only minimal changes. Singers have heeded the advice given by White in the preface of the 1844 *The Sacred Harp*: “Seek the old paths and walk therein.” The structure of conventions and singings remains the same; people meet weekly in the hollow square to sing for the glory of God. The songs they sing are the same that their ancestors sang.

The Sacred Harp might have faded from use after Benjamin White’s death had it not been for William Cooper and *The B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition* in the early 1900s. It sparked a revival in interest in singing Sacred Harp and encouraged James L. White and Joe S. James to publish their own tunebook compilations. The James book was eventually replaced in northern Alabama by the *Original Sacred Harp* (Denson

*Revision*), compiled and published by the Denson family in 1936. In the same decade, *The Colored Sacred Harp* was published for use in Black Sacred Harp communities.

Three four-shape tunebooks are currently used in Alabama: the *1991 Book*, the *Cooper Book*, and *The Colored Sacred Harp*. Though they have each enjoyed new printings and editions, they retain the format and contents laid out by Benjamin White in 1844. Alabama Sacred Harp singers are true to the intent of the nineteenth-century singers in song and practice. And while each of the three tunebooks has separate followings and slightly different singing styles, the singers consider themselves as part of the same band. Their history ties them together. The Sacred Harp tradition will thrive in Alabama for another century because of the strength of the three groups.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Calendar List of Annual Sacred Harp Singings in Alabama

using *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition* tunebook

(Source: [www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~mudws/annual.html](http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~mudws/annual.html), retrieved 2 July 2001.)

#### *January*

First Sunday--Dutch Treat Singing--Shady Grove Church, 3 miles north of Double Springs, AL.

Saturday Night before Second Sunday--Alvin Keeton, Irene Jackson and Robert Harper Memorial, Shady Grove (Keeton Cemetery), 1.5 miles east of New Flatwoods Church on Hwy 11, Nauvoo to Carbon Hill, AL.

Saturday Night before Second Sunday--Mrs. Luther Calvert and Mrs. Jim Woodley Memorial, Pleasant Grove Church, Boldo, Hwy 69, 6 miles east of Jasper, AL.

Second Sunday--Uncle Jack Kerr and Henry Kerr Memorial, Camp Ground Methodist Church, CR 49 north of Fruithurst, AL. Dutch Treat Singing.

Fourth Sunday--Friendship Primitive Baptist Church, 8 miles southeast of Haleyville, AL on Hwy 195, Info: Parnell Berry (205) 486-5853.

#### *February*

Saturday before First Sunday--Rotunda Singing, Capitol Building, Bainbridge St. at Dexter Ave., Montgomery, AL (*Sacred Harp 1991* and *Cooper* revisions, *Christian Harmony, Colored Sacred Harp*). (Bring a sack lunch.)

First Sunday--Uncle Bob Burnham Memorial, Recreation Center, Jacksonville, AL.

Info: Ruth Brown (256) 831-2227.

First Sunday--Mount Hope Baptist Church, 4 miles northeast of Sipsey on highway from Sipsey to Wilburn (Bug Tussle), AL. .

Saturday Night before Second Sunday--Oralee Burns Memorial, Shady Grove (Keeton Cemetery), 1 1/2 miles east of New Flatwoods Church on Hwy 11, Nauvoo to Carbon Hill, AL.

Second Sunday--Roy Avery Memorial, Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church, 3 miles southwest of Daviston, AL. Preaching at 11:00.

Saturday before Third Sunday--Alabama Collegiate Singing--Wesley Foundation Student Center, Tuscaloosa, AL. Info: Tim Cook, (205) 344-5376.

Third Sunday--Sanders Memorial, Cordova Senior Citizens Center, Cordova, AL.

### *March*

First Sunday--Martha Harper Nix and Lewis Keeton Memorial--New Flatwoods Church, 3 miles south of Nauvoo, AL, just east of Hwy 11 (Nauvoo to Carbon Hill).

Saturday before Second Sunday--Gilliland-Brothers Memorial--Old Clear Creek Church, near Boaz, AL.

Saturday Night before Third Sunday--Stephenson-Wall Memorial, Pleasant Grove Baptist Primitive Baptist Church, Boldo AL, 6 miles northeast of Jasper, AL.

Third Sunday--Wall Memorial--George Wallace Senior Citizens Center, Hollingsworth Drive, Glencoe, AL.

Third Sunday Night--Godsey Sisters Memorial, Shady Grove Primitive Baptist Church,



Hwy 195, 3 miles north of Double Springs, AL.

*April*

First Sunday--Old Enon Church, north of Lynn, AL.

First Sunday--Edwardsville Baptist Church, Edwardsville, AL, 6 miles east of Heflin just off Hwy 78.

First Sunday--Providence Primitive Baptist Church, six miles southeast of Ashland, AL.  
Preaching at 11:00.

First Sunday Night--Berry Memorial, Friendship Primitive Baptist Church, near Haleyville, AL.

Saturday before Second Sunday--State Line Baptist Church, Cleburne County, AL. From the west, take Hwy 78, go to the GA State Line, immediately turn around and come back to first road to the right, go to the next road which will be dirt and turn right; go approx. 500 yards and church will be on left.

Second Sunday--Old County Line Church, 9 miles west of Warrior, AL near Corner, off Miller Road.

Second Sunday--Antioch Baptist Church, near Ider, AL. Take Hwy 75, go north approx. 5 miles north of Ider, turn left onto County Road 141, church will be on left.

Saturday before Third Sunday--Leach Memorial--Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church, 3 miles east of Arab, AL on Hwy 69 (Arab to Guntersville).

Third Sunday--Old Harmony Church, approx. 10 miles east of Heflin AL. Take Abernathy exit off I-20, take first road on right and go 1 mile, church on right.

Third Sunday--Pine Grove Church, Lookout Mountain, near Collinsville, Dekalb County,

AL. Take I-59 and turn east on AL 68 (exit 205); follow signs to US 11, go south on 11, look for sign to church between mile marker 212 and 213.

Third Sunday--Smyrna Primitive Baptist Church, 2 miles east of Goodwater, AL, south of Hwy 86. Preaching at 11:00.

Fourth Sunday--Friendship Primitive Baptist Church, 8 miles southeast of Haleyville, AL on Hwy 195, turn south at church sign; two miles, church on left.

Fourth Sunday--Alewine Memorial--St. Michael's Church, Fruithurst, AL. Take US 78 to Fruithurst, turn north at Post Office, go to County Rd. 49, go approx. 3 miles, turn right and follow signs to Mt. Paran Church, pass church to dead end, turn right.

[First Fifth Sunday] Fifth Sunday--Parker-Hollis-Putnam Memorial, Liberty

(McCormick), 2 1/2 miles southwest of Sumiton, AL. North of New Hwy 78 or South of Old Hwy 78. Info: Velton Chafin (205) 387-7380

Fifth Sunday--Liberty Church, 2 miles north of Henagar, AL on Liberty Road; from Henagar Crossing, take Hwy 40 west to the Farmers Telephone Cooperative. Turn right and go to dead end. Turn right, take first left past Henagar Methodist Church (Liberty Rd.). Church is on right, approximately 1.5 miles. Info: David Ivey.

### *May*

Saturday before First Sunday--Burrirt Museum, 3101 Burrirt Drive on Monte Sano, Huntsville, AL. Take US 431 south (Governors Drive) to top of Monte Sano; turn north onto Monte Sano Blvd. Turn left onto Burrirt Drive.

First Sunday--Shady Grove (Keeton Cemetery), near Nauvoo, AL, 1 1/2 miles east of New Flatwoods Church off Hwy 11 (Nauvoo to Carbon Hill).

First Sunday--Old Shady Grove Church, 3 miles south of Dutton, AL just off Hwy 71 between Section and Dutton.

First Sunday--Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church, 6 miles southeast of Ashland, AL, on CR 5. Preaching at 11:00.

Second Sunday--Old Flatwoods Primitive Baptist Church, 3 miles south of Nauvoo, AL, and just west of Hwy 11, Nauvoo to Carbon Hill.

Third Sunday--Cane Creek Church, 3 1/2 miles east of Heflin, AL on Hwy 78.

Third Sunday--Rocky Mount Homecoming--Primitive Baptist Church, 6 miles southwest of Daviston, AL.

Fourth Sunday--Gum Pond Church, near Eva, AL, 18 miles northeast of Cullman.

Fourth Sunday--Doss Memorial, Sardis Church, 3 miles west of Hwy 31 at Morris, AL.

Fourth Sunday--Sullins School House, 8 miles northeast of Hamilton, AL, Hwy 49.

### *June*

First Sunday and Saturday before--Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, 2 miles south of Bremen off Hwy 27. Exit 3 off I-20; turn south on Hwy 27, go to top of hill at Amoco service station and turn left, go to dead end and turn left.

First Sunday--Liberty Church, 2 miles north of Henagar, AL on Liberty Road; from Henagar Crossing, take Hwy 40 west to the Farmers Telephone Cooperative. Turn right and go to dead end. Turn right, take first left past Henagar Methodist Church (Liberty Rd.). Church is on right, approximately 1.5 miles.

First Sunday--Pine Tucky Church, 5 miles south of Double Springs, AL and 1 mile east of Hwy 195.

First Sunday--Memorial Singing, Fellowship Church, 8 to 10 miles west of Cullman, AL just off US 278.

Second Sunday and Saturday before--Hopewell Homecoming, Hopewell Primitive Baptist Church, 6 miles east of Oneonta, AL, 1 mile east of Oneonta airport.

Second Sunday--Mount Vernon Primitive Baptist Church, 13 miles northeast of Cullman, AL on Hwy 69 (Cullman to Arab).

Second Sunday--Aldridge Memorial, Pleasant Hill Church (Johnson School House), Fayette County, AL, on Hwy 44, Old Fayette Road.

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday before Third Sunday (June 15-17)--National Sacred Harp Convention, Trinity United Methodist Church, 1400 Oxmoor Road, Homewood, Birmingham, AL, near I-65 and Hwy 31.

Saturday before Third Sunday--Moore, Graves, and Calvert Memorial--Addington Chapel, 15 miles southwest of Cullman, AL, 4 miles off Hwy 69 at Wilburn AL (Bug Tussle).

Third Sunday--Clifford Wakefield Memorial--King School House, 3 miles northwest of Lynn, AL, just off Hwy 278.

Third Sunday--Little Vine Primitive Baptist Church, Oaky Hollow Rd. near Empire, AL.

Third Sunday--Macedonia Church, 4 miles south of Section, AL, 7 miles northwest of Fyffe on Hwy to Section.

Fourth Sunday and Saturday Before--Shady Grove Primitive Baptist Church, 3 miles north of Double Springs, AL on Hwy 195.

Fourth Sunday--Mount Lebanon Baptist Church, 8 miles northwest of Fayette, AL, just

off Hwy 107.

Fourth Sunday--New Hope Church, 5 miles south of Jones Chapel, AL on Hwy 278,  
county road from Jones Chapel to Crane Hill.

*July*

First Sunday and Saturday Before--Henagar Union Convention, Liberty Church.

First Sunday--Dutton-Green Memorial, New Flatwoods Church, 3 miles south of  
Nauvoo, AL, just east of Hwy 11 (Nauvoo to Carbon Hill).

July 4--Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church, 6 miles southeast of Ashland, AL, on CR  
5.

July 4--Independence Day Singing, Muscadine Methodist Church, Muscadine, AL, Take  
Hwy 78 to Muscadine, turn south on County Rd. 49, go 1 mile, church on right.

July 4--Jones Chapel Senior Citizens Center, Jones Chapel, AL. From Hwy 278, turn  
south at light, one block. (First Wednesday in July).

Second Sunday and Saturday before--Cullman County Courthouse, Cullman, AL.

Second Sunday--Lamar-Pickens Convention, Zion Church, 8 miles north of Gordo, AL,  
1/4 miles west of Hwy 159.

Second Sunday--Oak Grove Primitive Baptist Church, Oak Grove Community, between  
Childersburg and Sylacauga, AL on Hwy 280.

Saturday before Third Sunday--Walker County Convention, Zion Rest Primitive Baptist  
Church, Jasper, AL.

Saturday before Third Sunday--Mount Oak Church, 5 miles northwest of Arab, AL.

Third Sunday--Chafin-Harbison-Hollis Singing, New Prospect Church. From Cullman,

AL, take Hwy 69 south, go past landfill, take County Road 8 south, go one mile (first paved road), take left and go 0.6 miles.

Third Sunday--Hillabee Convention, Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church, 3 miles southwest of Daviston, AL.

Thursday, July 19--Capital City Singing, Grange Hall, Old Alabama Town, Montgomery, AL (*Sacred Harp 1991* and *Cooper* revisions, *Christian Harmony*, *Colored Sacred Harp*). (Bring a sack lunch.)

Saturday before Fourth Sunday--Cotaco Convention, Gum Pond Church, near Eva, AL, 18 miles northeast of Cullman.

[Second Fifth Sunday]

Saturday before Fifth Sunday--Young Peoples United Singing, Zion Hill Primitive Baptist Church, near Snead Cross Roads, AL.

Fifth Sunday--Lacy's Chapel, 2 1/2 miles west of Henagar, AL on Hwy 40.

*August*

Saturday before First Sunday--Warrior River-Clear Creek Convention, Old Clear Creek Primitive Baptist Church, CR 93, s. of Hwy 168, between Douglas & Boaz, AL.

First Sunday--Fayette County Convention, Bevill Junior College, Fayette, AL.

Second Sunday--Friendship Primitive Baptist Church, 8 miles southeast of Haleyville, AL on Hwy 195, turn south at church sign; two miles, church on left. Going north, look for church sign, south 2 miles.

Wednesday after Second Sunday (August 11)--Elmore Center, 3 miles south of Gordo, AL on CR 9 and 21. (This singing is reputed to have begun in 1845.)

Saturday before Third Sunday--Rock Creek-Mountain Home and Ryan's Creek

Convention, Masonic Hall, Crane Hill, AL, 10 miles south of Jones Chapel on Hwy 22.

Third Sunday--Emma and Belton Beasley and Philip Lee III Memorial, Concord

Primitive Baptist Church, south of CR 14, Winfield, AL. From Hwy 78 in Winfield, take Hwy 129. Turn west on CR 14 then left at Church sign.

Third Sunday--Cleburne County Convention, Cane Creek Church, 3 1/2 miles east of

Heflin, AL on Hwy 78.

Saturday before Fourth Sunday--Bear Creek Convention, Shady Grove Primitive Baptist

Church, 3 miles north of Double Springs, AL on Hwy 195.

Fourth Sunday and Saturday Before--Lookout Mountain Convention, Pine Grove Church,

near Collinsville, AL. Take I-59 and turn east on Hwy 68 (exit 205); follow signs to US 11, go south on 11 and look for sign to church.

### *September*

Saturday before First Sunday--Mulberry River Convention, Liberty Primitive Baptist

Church (McCormick), 2 1/2 miles southwest of Sumiton, AL, north of new Hwy 78 or south of old Hwy 78.

First Sunday--Clear Creek (West) Convention, Pleasant Hill Church (Johnson School

House), Fayette County, AL, on Hwy 44, old Fayette Road.

September 3--Labor Day Singing, Shoal Creek Church, Talladega National Forest. Take

Hwy 78 east to Heflin, AL, go past Edwardsville and watch for

signs to enter the Forest, turn left and follow signs in the Forest to church.

Second Sunday and Saturday before--United Sacred Harp Musical Association, Old

County Line Church, 9 miles west of Warrior, AL near Corner, off

Miller Road. Info: David Ivey (256) 881-5291, Harrison Creel (205)648-9750.

Third Sunday and Saturday Before--Calhoun County Convention, Four Mile Mount

Moriah Primitive Baptist Church, Four Mile Community, near Anniston,

AL. Take Hwy 21 from Anniston to Jacksonville, go to mile marker 215 and turn right, church is at the bottom of hill.

Third Sunday--Bennie Keeton Memorial--Shady Grove (Keeton Cemetery), 1.5 miles

east of New Flatwoods Church on Hwy 11, Nauvoo to Carbon Hill, AL.

Third Sunday--Smyrna Primitive Baptist Church, 2 miles east of Goodwater, AL, south

of Hwy 86. Preaching at 11:00.

Fourth Sunday--Winston County Convention, Shady Grove Primitive Baptist Church, 3

miles north of Double Springs, AL on Hwy 195.

Fourth Sunday--Gum Pond Primitive Baptist Church, near Eva, AL, 18 miles northeast of

Cullman.

Fifth Sunday--Moon-Guthrie Memorial, Liberty (McCormick) Church, 2 1/2 miles

southeast of Sumiton, AL, north of new Hwy 78 or south of old Hwy 78.

### *October*

First Sunday--Alexander-Hullett-Lowe-Brothers Memorial, Hopewell Primitive Baptist

Church, 6 miles east of Oneonta, AL, and 1 mile east of Oneonta airport.

First Sunday--Old Sardis Church No. 1--3 miles north of Lynn, AL.

Second Sunday--Chestnut Grove Baptist Church, 3 miles south of Ider, AL, junction



Hwy 117.

Second Sunday--Harper Memorial--Old Flatwoods Church, Nauvoo, AL. Info: Pam Keeton (205) 221-4465.

Second Sunday--Walker Cates and H.H. Brown Singing, Muscadine Methodist Church, Muscadine, AL. Take Hwy 78 east to County Road 49, take right, go 1 mile,

Saturday before Third Sunday--McWhorter Memorial, Mars Hill Primitive Baptist Church, CR 65 near Fruithurst, AL.

Third Sunday--Reid Memorial, Old County Line Church, 9 miles west of Warrior, AL near Corner, off Miller Road.

Saturday before Fourth Sunday--Coy Putman Memorial, Rocky Mount Church, 3 miles east of Arab, AL on Hwy 69 (Arab/Guntersville).

Fourth Sunday--Jordan's Chapel, Newell, AL, Hwy 431 to Hwy 82, Morrison Cross Road, 2 miles, turn left to church.

*November*

Saturday before First Sunday--Brothers and Wood Memorial--Pilgrims Rest Primitive Baptist Church, south of Attalla, AL, Hwy 11.

First Sunday--Memorial Singing--Mount Ebron Missionary Baptist Church, 3 miles west of Double Springs, AL on Hwy 25, Double Springs to Lynn.

First Sunday--Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, 2 miles south of Bremen off Hwy 27. Exit 3 off I-20; turn south on Hwy 27, go to top of hill at Amoco service station and turn left, go to dead end and turn left.

Second Sunday--Oak Hill Baptist Church, 2 miles south of Oxford, AL.

Third Sunday--Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church, 3 miles southwest of Daviston,  
AL.

Fourth Sunday and Saturday Before--Alabama State Sacred Harp Musical Convention,  
Mount Pleasant Home Primitive Baptist Church, north of Birmingham, AL, I-65  
Fultondale Exit, then Hwy 31 north. Turn east to 57th Ave., 1/4 mile, look for  
signs.

Fourth Sunday--Wakefield Memorial, King's School House (Mt. Vernon), just off Hwy  
278, 3 miles north of Lynn, AL.

*December*

Second Sunday and Saturday Before--Joe Beasley Memorial, Concord Primitive Baptist  
Church, south of CR 14, Winfield, AL. From Hwy 78 in Winfield, take Hwy 129.  
Turn west on CR 14 then left at Church sign. Church is 0.7 mile on right.

Second Sunday--Rocky Mount Primitive Baptist Church, 3 miles southwest of Daviston,  
AL. Preaching at 11:00.

Third Sunday and Saturday Before--Zion Hill Primitive Baptist Church, near Snead Cross  
Roads, AL. [Fourth Fifth Sunday]

Monday, December 31--New Years Eve Singing--Antioch Primitive Baptist Church, Ider,  
AL.

## APPENDIX B

### Calendar List of Annual Sacred Harp Singings in Alabama using the *B.F. White Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition* (2000) tunebook

(Source: [www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~mudws/annual.html](http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~mudws/annual.html), retrieved 2 July 2001.)

#### *January*

Second Sunday--Helms/Bayne Memorial, Carroll Church, Ozark, AL.

Fourth Sunday and Saturday Before--Baldwin County Convention, Church of Christ  
Fellowship Hall, Bay Minette, AL. Contact Bill Hogan, 334-342-4137.

#### *February*

Saturday before First Sunday--Rotunda Singing, Capitol Building, Bainbridge St. at  
Dexter Ave., Montgomery, AL (*Sacred Harp 1991* and *Cooper* revisions,  
*Christian Harmony, Colored Sacred Harp*). (Bring a sack lunch.)

Info: Jim Carnes (334)264-0286 (days).

First Sunday--Central Music Convention, Traveler's Rest Church, Samson, AL.

Second Sunday--Bethany Church (Blair School House), near Opp, AL.

#### *March*

First Sunday--Arie and Mona Galloway Memorial--Traveler's Rest Church, Samson, AL.

First Sunday--Dewey P. Williams Memorial--Church of God by Faith, Ozark, AL.

Second Sunday--Emmon Church, near Red Oak, AL.

Third Sunday--Robbins Memorial, near Opp, AL.

*April*

Saturday before First Sunday--Jones Memorial, Cool Springs Church, Opp, AL.

Third Sunday--Jackson Memorial, Union Grove Baptist Church, Ozark, AL.

*Cooper revision and Colored Sacred Harp.*

Fourth Sunday--State of Alabama Convention (Semi-Annual Session), Elam Church,  
Goshen, AL.

*May*

First Sunday and Saturday before--Heath Memorial/Middle Creek Convention (Semi-Annual Session), Mabson Church, near Ozark, AL.

Saturday before Second Sunday--Bassett Memorial and Stockholders Meeting, Traveler's  
Rest Church, Samson, AL.

Third Sunday--Ramah Church, Josie, near Troy, AL.

Saturday before Fourth Sunday--Mount Pisgah Church, near Roanoke, AL.

Fourth Sunday--Beda Church, near Wing, AL.

*June*

Third Sunday--Pleasant Home Church, near Andalusia, AL.

Fourth Sunday--Jones/Aplin/Bowers Memorial, Eight Mile Church, near Samson, AL.

*July*

Thursday, July 12--Capital City Singing, Grange Hall, Old Alabama Town, Montgomery,

AL (*Sacred Harp 1991* and *Cooper revisions, Christian Harmony,*

*Colored Sacred Harp*). (Bring a sack lunch.)

Saturday Night before Third Sunday--Moon Memorial, Doss Creek, Cullman Cty, AL.

Fourth Sunday--Valley Grove Church, near Opp, AL.

Fifth Sunday--Zion Rest Church, Excel, AL.

*August*

First Sunday--Cockcroft Memorial, Red Oak Church, near Florala, AL.

Third Sunday--Ramah Church, Lenox, AL.

Fourth Sunday--Hopeful Church, near Ozark, AL.

*September*

First Sunday--Covington County Convention, Shady Hill Church, south of Andalusia,  
AL.

Second Sunday--Southeast Alabama Convention, Carroll Church, Ozark, AL.

Saturday before Third Sunday--Middle Creek Convention, Mabson Church, Ozark, AL.

*October*

Saturday before First Sunday--Shady Grove Church, near Section, AL.

Third Sunday--Rhodes Memorial, Darien Church, near Luverne, AL.

*November*

Second Sunday--State of Alabama Convention, Traveler's Rest Church, Samson, AL.

Third Sunday--Campbell Memorial, New Providence Church, Greenville, AL.

*December*

Fifth Sunday--Zion Rest Church, Excel, AL.

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