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The "Sacred Harp" in the Urban North: 1970-1995.

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THE SACRED HARP
IN
THE URBAN NORTH: 1970-1995

A Monograph

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first heard shape-note singing as a boy, visiting my grandfather's Free Holiness Church in rural Oklahoma. They sang from what I now know was a Stamps-Baxter publication, Heavenly Highway Hymns, and there were seven shapes. I still have my grandfather's copy. Though reared in a gospel tradition in which the seven-shape style was common, I never made serious study of it. Only years later in graduate school, while enrolled in a seminar in American Music, was I introduced to the four-shape style of music practiced by Sacred Harp singers. I was immediately taken with the sound of the music and its historical connections to early America, and I began attending singings.

In typically informal Sacred Harp fashion, the idea for this project arose during a morning break at a Sacred Harp singing at Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in October of 1993. A conversation with Wallace McKenzie, Harry Eskew, and Hugh McGraw became exciting when, with great animation, McGraw began to

describe his observations about the recent growth of the number of singings being founded outside the South, and his interest in the singings and the people who attended them. An analysis of the Directory and Minutes found his impressions to be correct: the majority of new singings founded over the last decades were in urban centers in the North. We were all curious to know more, and so research on the project was begun.

The last two years' study has brought to light new ideas about the people involved with Sacred Harp singing outside the South--especially those in urban centers in the North--and impressions about how they came to hear about the Sacred Harp have been clarified. There is now stronger evidence to indicate that the Sacred Harp tradition continues to experience vigorous growth in its sesquicentennial year, as new singings continue to be founded outside the South. Moreover, it is encouraging to note that in the Directory and Minutes for 1994-95, secretary Nora Parker indicates that only four Southern singings were discontinued in the past year. This is fewer than in years past and may indicate that the tradition is stabilizing at a certain point in the rural South.

My thanks go to the many Sacred Harp singers of the North and South who extended warm hospitality and a helping hand. Northern singers to thank include Ted Johnson, Ted Mercer and Keith Willard. In the South, special thanks goes to Hugh McGraw, Charlene Wallace, and to Mr. and Mrs. Felton Denny, who graciously assisted me during repeated trips to the Sacred Harp archives near their home in Carroll County, Georgia. Finally, the acknowledgments would not be complete without expressing gratitude to Robert Grayson and Steven Austin for their valuable suggestions during preparation of the final version, and to Wallace McKenzie for his thoroughgoing supervision of the project; to Elizabeth Pearson, Director of Library Services at Montreat College, whose skilled use of the interlibrary loan system literally made possible the completion of this work, to Kim McMurtry for review, proof and preparation of the final manuscript, and to my wife, Molly, and my daughter, Sarah Jane, who on a regular basis were willing to do without daddy for considerable lengths of time.

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ABSTRACT

In 1994 The Sacred Harp, a southern, shape-note tunebook, entered its 150th year of continuous use. First compiled in 1844 by B. F. White and E. J. King, and updated numerous times, The Sacred Harp books in the "Denson" tradition, including The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition, are today the most popular and widely used twentieth-century revisions of any nineteenth-century tunebook.

Sacred Harp singing has been a largely rural, Southern tradition and in the years between 1844 and the early 1970s several hundred separate singings were founded, many of which continue to be active. In the early 1990s the Sacred Harp tradition, with approximately 175 annual singings, remains largely rural. While some recent scholarship acknowledges a few urban singings founded during the middle 1970s, including several in the South, documentation of organized urban activity has been lacking. Analysis of data, including founding dates of singings derived from the Directory and Minutes of Sacred Harp Singing, 1991-1992, has confirmed a trend towards an increase in the number of new singings being founded, with the majority being founded

in urban areas in the North; since 1990, most of the new singings have been founded in urban areas in the Midwest or West.

Through the use of methods of social investigation, including informal interviews, surveys and field recordings, and drawing on the historical perspective of the various revisions of The Sacred Harp, the present study further documents the geographic spread of singings in the North, especially the Midwest, and to a lesser degree in other regions outside the South, identifies forces active in the proliferation of urban/urbanized singings, explores the relationship between the spread of Sacred Harp singing in the urban north and the twentieth-century revival of folk music, and further identifies what type of person practices Sacred Harp singing in Northern urban areas.

CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Overview

Shape-note singing first appeared in the United States when a series of books using the system was published in the early nineteenth century.¹ William Little and William Smith's Easy Instructor (1801) and Andrew Law's Art of Singing (1803) are the earliest works published which use this notation.² Both books use a four-shape system but differ in two ways: 1) Law's book made no use of musical staff, while Little and Smith's did; and 2) the four shapes assigned to degrees of the musical scale were in different

¹ "Shape notes" refers to the substitution of different shapes, typically triangle, circle, square and diamond, for conventional round note heads in musical notation. See below p. 18-20 for further exploration of the four-shape shape-note system.

² Richard Stanislav, A Checklist of Four-Shape Shape-Note Tunebooks, (New York: Brooklyn College, I.A.S.M. Monographs: Number 10), 20, 22, 49.

order in each book.³ While Law's notation system met with poor success, that advocated by Little and Smith was widely adopted and became highly influential.⁴ Until 1855 most tunebooks published in the South and West followed a format of four shapes on musical staff.⁵

The most fruitful period of development for shape-note tunebooks using the four-shape system was from 1811 to 1855 in the Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia.⁶ As early as 1787 Lucius Chapin, a Yankee singing-school master, was active in the area and conducted the first singing schools

³ For a description of these early shape-note systems, see Gilbert Chase, America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present, Third Edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 124-5; and Charles Hamm, Music in the New World, (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1983), 262-3.

⁴ Chase, 125, 170ff.

⁵ According to Stanislaw, 49, the last new nineteenth-century tunebook published in the four-shape style of which a copy can be located is John G. McCurry's Social Harp, 1855. Singing traditions based on other books from this era also survive: William Walker's Southern Harmony, 1835, M.L. Swan's New Harp of Columbia, 1849, and Walker's Christian Harmony, 1866, are still in use in some parts of the South; the latter two use a seven-shape system.

⁶ See Harry Eskew, "Shape Note Hymnody in the Shenandoah Valley, 1816-1860" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1967); and Hamm, 262-3.

in the Shenandoah Valley.⁷ Evidence suggests that he may have obtained some of Law's books and led singing schools from around 1787 onward.⁸ In 1791 he was joined by his brother, Amzi. The brothers were responsible for taking singing schools into Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, North Carolina and western Pennsylvania.⁹ Some twenty-five years later, the first shape-note tunebook to be compiled and published in the South appeared. It was Ananias Davisson's Kentucky Harmony, published in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 1816.

While music from one of the most important sociological phenomena of the early nineteenth century, the religious camp meeting,¹⁰ had earlier made its way into

⁷ Eskew, 17.

⁸ Charles Hamm, "The Chapins and Sacred Music in the South and West," Journal of Research in Music Education viii (1960), 91-98.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ It was the "Second Great Awakening," which began in Kentucky around the year 1800, that gave rise to the camp meetings. These mass public religious rallies in which people embraced or reembraced religion spontaneously and publicly, gave rise to new a style of music. Some of the musical elements unique to this style, such as the verse and refrain, can be seen in numerous pieces in The Sacred Harp (e.g. number 53, "Jerusalem" and number 85, "Morning Trumpet") and in most other tunebooks of the era. Ellen Lorenz, Glory, Hallelujah!: The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), 15, 48-52.

tunebooks published in the North,¹¹ Kentucky Harmony was the first Southern tunebook to include songs of this type, and it influenced the whole of shape-note tunebook publishing.¹² Among the most notable subsequent Southern books are William Walker's The Southern Harmony, 1835, and The Sacred Harp, published in 1844 by B. F. White and E. J. King. Both books make use of songs from the camp meeting tradition and both remain in use, but the Sacred Harp tradition has become more widely known and is growing. Now in its one-hundred fiftieth year, The Sacred Harp, in its various editions, is the most popular and widely used of any nineteenth-century tunebook.¹³

See also Hamm, Music in the New World, 126-32.

¹¹ These are Jeremiah Ingall's The Christian Harmony (1805) and John Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second (1813). Lorenz, 71-72. See also David Klocko's introduction to the Da Capo reprint of The Christian Harmony.

¹² Charles Ellington, "The Sacred Harp Tradition of the South: Its Origin and Evolution" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1970), 17-18.

¹³ The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition sold 3,000 to 5,000 copies in 1992 and 1993; in 1994, 9,646 copies had been sold as of 1 November. Books have been shipped to Hawaii, Taiwan, Australia, Switzerland, Germany, England, Canada, Africa, and parts of Russia. Hugh McGraw, interview by author, 5 November 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Sacred Harp Tradition

Most biographical information about the co-compilers of the Sacred Harp is contained in a book titled A Brief History of the Sacred Harp, and Its Author, B. F. White, Sr., and Contributors, published in 1904 by Joe S. James.¹⁴ Its one hundred fifty-nine pages devote only eleven to White's biography and even less to King's. The quality of the document is considered weak by some scholars due to factual inaccuracies, archaic or incorrect writing style or other elements; Jackson is the most openly critical of the work;¹⁵ Ellington mentions the book almost in passing. Recent research by Buell Cobb seems to confirm most of the long-held assertions made by James.¹⁶ Basic biographical

¹⁴ James, J[oseph], S[ummerlin], A Brief History of the Sacred Harp, and Its Author, B. F. White, Sr., and Contributors, (Douglasville, Georgia: New South Book and Job Printing, 1904).

¹⁵ George Pullen Jackson, White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1933). Jackson refers to some of the pages that are badly mixed up and James' use of incorrect English in numerous cases, 82. An examination of the book reveals that, generally speaking, his critique is accurate.

¹⁶ Buell Cobb, The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 67ff., cites information collected from the Talbot County courthouse, Talbot County, Georgia, by a King descendant. His writing on White and King--especially the section added on the life and activities of E. J. King and his

information about White and King does not seem to be in dispute.

Benjamin Franklin White, like his namesake, was a self-made man. He had little formal education and slight military experience but did show an early and extraordinary talent for music. It is not known whether he received training in music. According to James what "training" White had came from his own observations about the order of nature.¹⁷ From this and from his own native talent, says James, White derived a sense of how music worked.¹⁸ He married Thurza Golightly, and the marriage produced 14 children, many of whom were later active in the Sacred Harp movement. White left the newspaper business several years before the publication of The Sacred Harp and, following the release of the first edition in 1844, devoted the remainder of his life to singing and the teaching of singing until his death in 1879. His influence on the

descendants--is especially clear and thorough.

¹⁷ James, 28-29.

¹⁸ Ibid.

development of shape note singing was profound, second only to that of William Walker, author of Southern Harmony.¹⁹

Until recently, little was known of E. J. King. He is said to have died in 1844 at age 23, only weeks before the publication of the first edition of The Sacred Harp. As a result, information about him had been scarce, and his contributions to the work were traditionally minimized. But facts gleaned from courthouse records by a descendent of King and published by Buell Cobb help bring to life the co-author of the tunebook. This information and King's contribution of songs that have stood the test of the many revisions make clear that E. J. King did give much to the character and quality of the tunebook. Cobb considers King's tunes "The Child of Grace" (77), "Bound for Canaan" (82), and "Gospel Trumpet" (99), "indispensable."²⁰

¹⁹ Walker and White were brothers-in-law having married the Golightly sisters, Amy and Thurza. A dispute arose between the two men when Walker published Southern Harmony with White's assistance, but without giving White any financial or personal recognition; they parted ways soon after the incident. For a full account of this event--now legend among Sacred Harp singers--see the biographical sections of Cobb, Ellington, and Jackson.

²⁰ Cobb, 69. Other King compositions in the 1991 edition include "The Bower of Prayer" (100), "Frozen Heart" (93), "Dull Care" (98), "Reverential Anthem" (234), and "The Dying Christian" (123).

Arrangements and reprintings of his songs appeared also in other tunebooks, including later editions of Southern Harmony, and the Christian Harmony, Hesperian Harp (1848) and the Social Harp.²¹

According to the preface of the 1991 revision of the Original Sacred Harp (Denson Revision), White and King's original edition entitled The Sacred Harp has been revised only four times: 1869, 1911, 1936, and 1991. Appendices were added in 1850, 1859, 1960, 1967, and 1971.²² As if to underscore the longstanding nature of the book and tradition, the music committee says that "the Sacred Harp has been left alone for most of its life," and continues by saying that "each revision and each appendix was done to put new life in the books, each time adding new or present-day authors. This is the main reason it has lasted so long and will continue to survive."²³

²¹ Cobb, 68-70.

²² Title page and preface, The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition (Bremen, Georgia: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1991). No mention is made of the "Cooper" editions or of the Colored Sacred Harp. Information regarding Cooper and Colored Sacred Harp traditions is found below, pages 10-17.

²³ Ibid.

The first edition of The Sacred Harp was published in Philadelphia in 1844, having been compiled in Hamilton, Georgia (Harris County). While appendices were added in 1850 and 1859, the first substantive changes to the original edition were made for the revision of 1869, which was "entirely remodeled." All nineteenth-century revisions were overseen personally by B. F. White as head of a revisions committee appointed by the Southern Musical Convention, an organization that was created by White and others to promote singing and use of The Sacred Harp.²⁴ White's death in 1879 ended plans for a fourth nineteenth-century edition, which had been scheduled for that year.²⁵

For the 1869 revision, the rudiments and the earlier appendices were left largely intact, but some songs were deleted and new songs by living composers were added. In all, fifty-three pieces were removed and seventy new ones added.²⁶ Other notable changes were the inclusion of more

²⁴ Cover and title page The Sacred Harp, Fourth Edition, 1869. Examined by author 4 November 1994, Sacred Harp Archives, Carrollton, Georgia.

²⁵ Cobb, 87.

²⁶ Author's comparison of the 1968 Broadman Press facsimile publication of the 1859 edition with the 1869 edition, 3 November 1994, Sacred Harp Archives, Carrollton, Georgia.

songs in four parts and an increased number of fugal tunes. A debate about whether to maintain the four-shape notation or change to seven shapes was settled when B. F. White decided to keep the four-shape format.²⁷ Following these revisions it was "the judgement of the Committee [that] THE SACRED HARP is now fully suited to the wants of the singing public, and will meet the taste and feelings of the Southern people."²⁸

The years following 1870 were difficult ones for The Sacred Harp. Books using seven-shape systems were making inroads and eventually even the Southern Musical Convention divided over the use of four versus seven shapes. It would be more than thirty years before the tunebook was again edited and revised.

The first important twentieth-century revision of The Sacred Harp was published in 1902 under the direction of W. M. Cooper. Renamed The B. F. White Sacred Harp, and now known as the "Cooper" edition, the book has been revised numerous times, most recently in 1992.²⁹ While he claimed

²⁸ Ibid. See also Ellington, 87 and Cobb, 86.

²⁹ 1869 edition, 430, preface to the "new appendix."

³⁰ Further information about the Cooper and Colored Sacred Harp traditions is found in Cobb, 89-94 and 117-126.

allegiance to the old traditions, Cooper nonetheless made substantial alterations to the 1869 edition.³⁰ Among these were the lowering of keys thought to be too high for some singers, the renaming of some tunes by first line text, the adoption of some "gospel" style songs and--perhaps most importantly--the addition of alto parts to all songs that had been previously without them.³¹ The "Cooper" edition gained immediate acceptance among Sacred Harp singers in certain areas of Georgia, Alabama and north Florida; these

³¹ Comparison of the 1869 edition of The Sacred Harp with the 1902 "Cooper," by the author, 22 November 1995, Sacred Harp Archives, Carrollton, Georgia. Descriptions of the changes made by Cooper and his committee are related by Sacred Harp scholars with a high degree of correlation. See Cobb, 89-94 and Ellington, 93-94.

³² The wholesale addition of the alto part --first in the "Cooper" edition and later in the "James"--to what had been predominantly three-part Sacred Harp singing, must be considered an important development. Wallace McKenzie, "The Alto Parts in the 'True Dispersed Harmony' of The Sacred Harp Revisions," Musical Quarterly 73, no. 2 (1989): 153-171. The court battle between Cooper and the "James" edition revisions committee over ownership rights to the alto parts is legend among modern Sacred Harp singers. The ill feelings that resulted from this incident are thought by some to contribute to the continued separation of the contemporary "Cooper" and "Denson" singing traditions. See also Cobb, 91-93; Ellington, 99-100.

areas, with the addition of some parts of East Texas and Mississippi, remain its greatest area of influence.³²

The immediate success of the "Cooper" edition did cause concern among other singers who considered themselves in part of the Sacred Harp tradition. In 1906 a committee under the direction of Joe S. James--then considered to be the greatest living authority on The Sacred Harp, its founders and its tradition--was given authority to prepare a new revision which closely reflected the nineteenth-century traditions of Sacred Harp singing.³³ After five years of work the committee released the Original Sacred Harp. This book, dubbed the "James" edition, was embraced immediately by traditional Sacred Harp singers, and the years following its release in 1911 saw a tremendous resurgence of singing activity.³⁴ Buell Cobb has called this revision "the heir to the major Sacred Harp" tradition which White's original edition created; the "James"

³² Hugh McGraw, interview by author, 5 June 1994, Tape recording, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Confirmed in conversations with other Sacred Harp singers.

³³ Ibid. See also Cobb, 27, 95.

³⁴ Ellington, 101-2.

revision's 609 songs made the largest number ever included in any edition of The Sacred Harp.³⁵ Nevertheless, according to Cobb, "except for the supplying of the altos and the addition of extra verses to some of the songs and notations of historical or biographical information, the 1869 edition was transferred almost intact . . ." thus in large measure reaffirming and preserving the tradition as handed down by White himself.³⁶ While the supplying of alto parts for the remaining pieces without them was one of the most important developments for the "James" edition, it was by this time taken in stride by traditional Sacred Harp singers, some of whom wondered why it had not been done previously. The 327 new alto parts for this revision are attributed to Seaborn M. Denson.³⁷

The early twentieth-century revisions by Cooper and James can be said to have contributed significantly to the revitalization and preservation of the movement. But the name that has succeeded B. F. White's as the one most

³⁵ Examined by the author, 22 November 1995, Sacred Harp Archives, Carrollton, Georgia. See also Cobb, 94.

³⁶ Cobb, 96.

³⁷ Ellington, 99-100, Cobb, 96, and Jackson, 99, all make this attribution. C.f. also McKenzie, "Alto Parts."

closely associated with the Sacred Harp tradition in the twentieth century is that of the Denson family, whose influence has been present throughout the history of The Sacred Harp. James Denson, an uncle to Thomas and Seaborne, had contributed one piece, "Christmas Anthem," to the first edition, but the family did not rise to prominence in the movement until the two brothers, James' nephews, became active in the Sacred Harp movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s.³⁸ Under their influence Sacred Harp singing was firmly rooted in areas of Alabama and strengthened in other areas of the South. Later, they were responsible for the formation of The Sacred Harp Publishing Company which, beginning with the 1936 edition, has overseen the production of all subsequent Denson-edition tunebooks. T. J. Denson's daughter, Ruth Denson Edwards, was an active singer and continued to influence the Sacred Harp movement until her death in the late 1970s.³⁹ Her niece, Amanda Denson of Haleyville, Alabama, remains active in the Sacred

³⁸ The names of Seaborne and Thomas Denson, along with their photographs, first appear in the front matter of the Original Sacred Harp, 1911, "James" edition.

³⁹ Hugh McGraw, interview with author, 13 September 1995, Handwritten notes, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Harp tradition, extending the reach of the family to a fourth generation.⁴⁰

The two brothers, Seaborne M. and Thomas J., both a major influence in the production of the 1911 "James" edition, later presided over the entire publication of the 1936 Original Sacred Harp (Denson Revision).⁴¹ Revised from the Original Sacred Harp (1911, "James" edition) and first published in 1936 under the auspices of the newly-formed Sacred Harp Publishing Company, the Original Sacred Harp, Denson Revision was not altered significantly from the "James" but was trimmed down in size, and compositions by living composers were added.⁴²

Appendices were added in 1960, 1967 and 1971, but the Original Sacred Harp (Denson Revision) was revised again only in 1991, under the direction of Hugh McGraw. The

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Both were influential in the 1936 edition; however, Thomas died in 1935 and Seaborne in 1936. Work on the book was completed by Paine Denson, son of Thomas Denson. Preface to Original Sacred Harp (1936 Denson revision), examined by the author, 4 November 1994, Sacred Harp Archives, Carrollton, Georgia. See also Ellington, 105; Cobb, 110-17.

⁴² Comparison of the 1911 "James" edition with the 1936 "Denson" revision. Examined by the author, 22 November 1995, Sacred Harp Archives, Carrollton, Georgia.

Sacred Harp books in the "Denson" tradition, including The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition, which some now refer to as the "McGraw" edition,⁴³ are the most popular and widely used twentieth-century revisions of any nineteenth-century tunebook.

Despite the overwhelming popularity of books in the Denson tradition, different editions of the Sacred Harp remain in use. For example, The Colored Sacred Harp, a small volume of songs in four-shape notation,⁴⁴ was compiled by Judge Jackson in 1934 and is used by African-American singers, known as "Wiregrass" singers, in parts of Alabama and Florida.⁴⁵ As indicated previously, the

⁴³ Ron Pen, Book Review of Cobb The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music, in American Music Volume 12, Number 1 (Spring 1994): ". . . the 'McGraw' edition is a reflection of current practice as well. The new compositions by 'traditional' southerners and 'revivalist' northerners, equally represented in this new edition, reflect the tenacity and adaptability that have long preserved this living tradition." 98.

⁴⁴ For this study, the Third Revised Edition of The Colored Sacred Harp, 1992, was examined. This edition included for the first time a biography of the compiler.

⁴⁵ See Doris Jane Dyen, "The Role of Shape-Note Singing in the Musical Culture of Black Communities in Southeast Alabama" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1977). In addition, some of the last few issues of the National Sacred Harp Newsletter carried announcements of "Cooper," "Wiregrass," New Harp of Columbia, and Christian Harmony singings. See the Newsletter 8, Number 8 (April/May

"Cooper" edition is still used in some parts of the South and West. Most Sacred Harp singers follow only one tradition, but there is evidence of increasing interaction between "Cooper," "Wiregrass" and "Denson" singers.⁴⁶

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the name that has risen to prominence in the Sacred Harp movement is Hugh McGraw. McGraw's family has been an important part of Sacred Harp revisions since the 1936 Denson edition, when L. A. McGraw, H. N. McGraw and T. B. McGraw were listed as members of T. J. Denson's committee along with Howard and Paine Denson.⁴⁷ Hugh McGraw's name first appears on the title page of the 1960 Supplement "Original Sacred Harp" Denson Revision as a member of the revision committee. In 1966, only six years after the previous edition, McGraw was selected to chair the committee for a new Sacred Harp edition.⁴⁸ His editing and business skills combined with a

1993), and 8, Number 9 (June 1993).

⁴⁶ Richard DeLong, Hugh McGraw, Jeff Sheppard, interview by author, 4 November 1994, Tape recording, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁴⁷ Original Sacred Harp. (Denson Revision), 1936, title page.

⁴⁸ The generally poor printing and editorial quality of the 1960 edition led to lackluster sales and low enthusiasm. Thus the decision was made to produce a new

new three-page "Introduction and History of the Original Sacred Harp" by Ruth Denson Edwards, and high quality printing resulted in a much more successful Original Sacred Harp. Denson Revision. 1966 Edition.⁴⁹ As a tireless and passionate supporter of the Sacred Harp movement, Hugh McGraw has traveled many thousands of miles to singings in all areas of the United States and Canada. In the 1970s, following a conscious decision by McGraw and Ruth Denson Edwards, they both became more active in Sacred Harp singings outside the South.⁵⁰ His exposure--and that of other prominent Southern singers--has been greatest in

edition quickly. Hugh McGraw, interview by author, June 5 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁴⁹ Five thousand copies of the 1960 and 1967 editions were produced and approximately 5,600 were printed for the 1971 edition. An additional 5,000 were ordered in 1976 after the first run was sold out. According to McGraw more than 10,000 copies of the 1991 edition were sold in 1994, and a new order of 5,000 was recently placed. Hugh McGraw, interview by author, 4 November 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁵⁰ Hugh McGraw, interview by author, 4 June 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

regions of the Midwest, Northwest and, until recently, New England.⁵¹

Hugh McGraw recalls his entry into the Sacred Harp movement and says that, one day, as he walked into a meeting "the sound just got a'hold of me."⁵² Over the last two years, the writer has encountered many different Sacred Harp singers in varied geographic and social settings, including cities and towns in the deep South, the upper Midwest and the far Northwest regions of the United States. Whenever he has posed the question "What is it that attracts you to the Sacred Harp," the most common response he has heard is "the sound of the music." When singers are asked to account for the 150 years of popularity and enthusiasm for the Sacred Harp and to comment on the movement's enduring nature, again the answer is most often "the sound of the music." But what is meant by "the sound of the music" is not easy for singers to define. Many say

⁵¹ Jeff and Shelby Sheppard, Jerry and Ruby Phillips, Lonnie and Vivian Rogers and Mr. and Mrs. Felton Denny. Conversations with the author during and following Sacred Harp singing, 4 and 5 November 1994, No record retained, Bethel Primitive Baptist Church, Carroll County, Georgia.

⁵² Hugh McGraw, interview by author, 5 June 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

the sound produces an almost transcendental spiritual experience for them. Others say that there is something "primal" or "deeply emotional" about the music, and decline to offer further comment. Though unable to clearly describe their feelings, it is worth noting that the idea of the attractiveness of the sound seems an almost universal perception among those Sacred Harp singers the writer has interviewed.

A thorough study of the technical aspects of the sound is beyond the scope of this work, but a brief description of the music and its performance at Sacred Harp singings is in order (see figure 1).

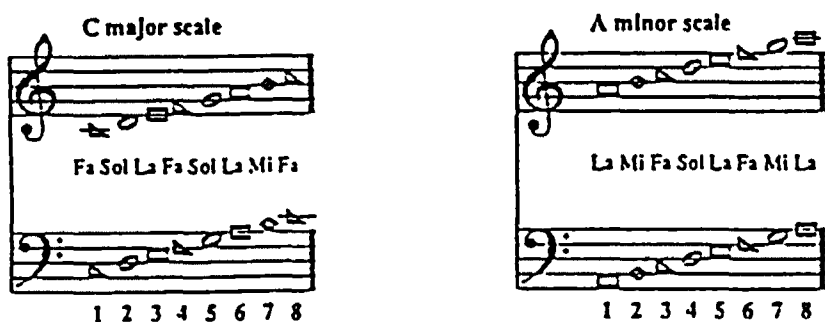


Fig. 1. The major and minor scale in four-shape, shape-note notation.

The four-shape, shape-note system uses four geometric shapes: the triangle, circle, square and diamond, as a

substitute for regular "round" notation. To enable the singer to sing all seven notes of the scale, the first three syllables are repeated. As can be seen, both major and minor scales are used. The major scale begins on "Fa," and the minor scale begins on "La." Each then proceeds in order up the scale. To sing down the scale, the syllables retain their relative position and are simply sung in reverse order.

Men and women both sing all voice parts, with the exception that rarely do women sing the bass, and few men join the women on alto. Leaders of the singing stand in the center of a "hollow square" with the singers seated in sections on four sides; the leader faces the tenor section, which sings the melody, and beats time with a straight up/down motion, unlike conventional patterns used to conduct choral music. No instruments are used to establish the pitch or accompany the singing. After the leader, or a person designated by the leader sets the starting pitch, all parts sound their first pitch using the syllables. To orient themselves to the music, the group sings through the entire piece using only the syllables, then proceeds to sing some or all of the verses as designated by the leader. The vocal quality tends to be straight tone, with no

attention given to refinement of vocal production. The enunciation of words is forceful and quite speech-like in character.

While the above explanation does provide a basic understanding of the Sacred Harp style of singing, the question of why the sound is universally attractive and the question of to whom the sound is attractive--especially when Sacred Harp singers outside the traditional South are considered--remain unexplored.

Contemporary Related Studies

The Sacred Harp Tradition of the South: Its Origin and Evolution is the title of an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Charles Linwood Ellington, copyrighted 1970.⁵³ Ellington's primary sources include all available editions of The Sacred Harp, which he viewed in the collections of Raymond Hamrick, a Sacred Harp singer and composer from Macon, Georgia, and Hugh McGraw, now of Bremen, Georgia. Ellington acknowledges the large number of

⁵³ As reported in Cecil Adkins, Doctoral Dissertations in Musicology, 7th North American Edition, 2nd International Edition. Philadelphia: American Musicology Society; International Musicology Society, 1984, with supplements, there are eight doctoral dissertations on different aspects of shape-note singing. See under "shape notes," 471, and "Sacred Harp, The," 466.

four-shape, shape-note tunebooks of the era and lists the works examined for his study: The Southern Harmony, (1939 reprint of the 1854 edition), The Missouri Harmony, (1846 and 1850 editions), The Christian Harmony, (n.d.), the 1826 edition of Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, (1810), Law's Musical Primer, (1802 edition), and Little and Smith's Easy Instructor, (1817 edition).⁵⁴ Interviews, conversations and correspondence with then-living Sacred Harp singers include Raymond Hamrick, Hugh McGraw, Kelly Beard, A. M. Cagle, and R. D. Beck.⁵⁵ Ellington makes no mention of Sacred Harp activity outside the South,⁵⁶ but does note the lack of young persons participating in

⁵⁴ Ellington, 18.

⁵⁵ Cagle and Beck are deceased at this writing. Beard, Hamrick and McGraw were interviewed by the author during singings at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church and Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in June and November of 1994.

⁵⁶ This is to be expected. In 1968 when Ellington would have been compiling his data, that part of the "folk revival" now believed to have contributed Sacred Harp popularity in the 1960s and 1970s was still in a relatively early stage. See below chapter II, "Sacred Harp Singing and the Twentieth Century Folk-music Revival," p. 56.

Southern singings. A portion of his concluding statement, all of which is worded in past tense, sounds bleak:

The Sacred Harp Tradition was a truly indigenous American cultural manifestation. It was particularly suited to the people who participated in it. Throughout its history both the music and singing practices remained faithful to the style espoused by the founder of the movement. The tradition resisted pressures from without--pressures which would tend to rob both music and singing of its particular individual qualities.

The reader is left with the clear impression that Ellington feels the Sacred Harp--while resisting external pressures--is decaying from lack of interest and use within its own region, and may not last long.

Buell Cobb's Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music is probably the most widely known of any recent work published about the Sacred Harp movement. It is one of the ways people outside the South and traditional Sacred Harp circles first encounter the Sacred Harp movement.⁵⁷ The 1978 edition was the first widely-published book about Sacred Harp singing since George Pullen Jackson's landmark

⁵⁷ Based on survey results obtained at the 11th Annual Anniversary Singing in Chicago, 8 and 9 January 1995. In answer to the question "How did you first hear about the Sacred Harp?", 6% of respondents specifically mentioned the book; in addition, a number of others cited it during informal conversations with the author. See also Pen, 93-98.

work White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands, 1933, but Cobb's is devoted entirely to the Sacred Harp tradition. A revised edition was issued in 1989. Like most others who write about the Sacred Harp, Cobb draws heavily on Jackson; several shorter works by Jackson are also cited. The bibliography is notably comprehensive in its coverage of recent periodical literature. In the writer's contact with Cobb, he was impressed by Cobb's passion and personal involvement with the movement. This is made evident further by the freshness of style, vigor of language and general sense of optimism with which Cobb describes the modern Sacred Harp movement. In 1978 there was little clear evidence of solid, growing Sacred Harp activity outside the South, and Cobb makes only passing reference to it. He mentions an increase in the number of some regional singings and trips made by some Southerners to the North, but says "the flush of new success may in a way be illusory."⁵⁸ He cites the failure of the Sacred Harp to attract its own base of support among Southern young people.⁵⁹ In the introduction to the 1989 edition, though,

⁵⁸ Cobb, 158-60.

⁵⁹ An examination of the Directory and Minutes of Sacred Harp Singing: 1993 and 1994 indicates an increase in

Cobb writes enthusiastically about Northern shape-note singing:

A transplanted tradition continues to grow. While the number of shape note singers in the south diminishes each year, the Sacred Harp movement is burgeoning elsewhere. Indeed the establishment and growth of this movement outside the traditional areas . . . is the most striking development in the story of the Sacred Harp over the past quarter century.⁶⁰

The first research work dedicated to Sacred Harp singing in the North was Susan Garber's unpublished thesis The Sacred Harp Revival in New England, 1987. Garber has been active in Sacred Harp singing since her introduction to the style during her college years as a student of Neely Bruce at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut.⁶¹

Southern urban singings while the number of Southern rural singings has remained level or decreased. The author met several younger urban Sacred Harp singers who were attending the Holly Springs singing in June of 1994. They were from suburban Atlanta, about one hour's drive to the east. Most were not native Southerners and had heard of the Sacred Harp before moving to the area. The author met no urban Southern singers at the Bethel Primitive Baptist Church singing in November of 1994, although one singer from Boston was present. Southern Sacred Harp singers with whom the author spoke confirmed this as a normal pattern.

⁶⁰ Cobb, vii.

⁶¹ Neely Bruce, interview by author, 24 November 1993, Handwritten transcript from notes, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The thesis documents her personal experiences which roughly parallel the formation of Norumbega Harmony, directed by Steve Marini, and refers to another group, the Word of Mouth Chorus, directed by Larry Gordon.⁶² The thesis provides a wealth of detailed information from interviews with persons important to the revival of Sacred Harp singing in New England,⁶³ and allows the reader to feel a part of the inner circle as events unfold. Performance practice of New England Sacred Harp singers is treated extensively.⁶⁴ The writing is at times less scholarly and more "testimonial,"⁶⁵ and the bibliography contains few

⁶² Both are groups of semi-professional Sacred Harp singers. They are active primarily in the New England area but travel to other regions. Each has also issued recordings; see Sabol's Resources, June 23, 1995 edition, 26-30.

⁶³ Bruce, Gordon, Marini and Poppy Gregory, a retired Harvard professor who held some of the first New England Sacred Harp singings in her home, are among those interviewed by Garber. See Susan Garber, "The Sacred Harp Revival in New England" (Master's thesis, Wesleyan University, 1987).

⁶⁴ An analysis of performance practice is not an aspect of this paper, though it is worth noting that much of the performance practice among New England groups is considered "non-traditional" by Southern singers. The author has listened to Southern singers discuss this topic at length on several occasions.

⁶⁵ That is to say the author draws rather heavily on her personal experience and feelings about the Sacred Harp. For example, on page 58, Garber drops into first person to

references. Nevertheless, the work should be considered foundational to research on the Sacred Harp outside the South.

Additional Resources

The Internet mailing list called "Fasola" is operated by Keith Willard at the University of Minnesota. It is an open forum for the discussion of all aspects of Sacred Harp singing and tradition. Numerous files that pertain to a very broad range of Sacred Harp interests are available for list subscribers to download and use. Notices of singings and reviews or reports from singings are regularly posted as are requests and replies to requests for information. Fasola is relatively new in operation, having been formed in 1993. According to Willard, traffic on Fasola is growing at an exponential rate as interested persons use the medium to exchange ideas and information.⁶⁶ Sacred

relate a story about a disagreement between herself and Neely Bruce over performance practice and to defend her own point of view.

⁶⁶ Electronic mail from Keith Willard, Minneapolis to Montreat, 27 July 1995, Digital record, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Complete information about Fasola and other Internet resources for shape-note singing appears below in appendix B.

Harp and Shape-Note Music: Resources is a comprehensive booklet that should be considered an indispensable part of research conducted on any aspect of the Sacred Harp movement. Published by Steven Sabol in Washington, D.C., it is available from the author by request. A broad range of topics is included and a list is given of resources available in print and on audio and video recordings.⁶⁷

Materials contained in the Sacred Harp headquarters archives, at the Sacred Harp headquarters building near Carrollton, Georgia, constitute an important source of information for research. Though not specifically organized to benefit formal research, there exists a great deal of material including pamphlets, flyers, photographs, magazine and newspaper articles and all extant back issues of the National Sacred Harp Newsletter.⁶⁸ A virtually complete collection of previous editions of The Sacred Harp is also housed on the premises.

⁶⁷ A copy of the title page of the current edition and further information about the booklet appear below as appendix C.

⁶⁸ Regrettably, the newsletter ceased publication in 1993, without any plans to resume publication. Hugh McGraw and Richard DeLong, separate interviews with author, 6 November 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The writer knows of only two other research works in progress with the Sacred Harp movement as their topic. A graduate student in folklore and mythology at the University of California at Los Angeles, Janet Herman, is researching the anthropological aspects of Sacred Harp singing,⁶⁹ and Alix Baille, a student at Catholic University will survey changes in musical content (tunes and attributed compositions) in the appendices and revisions of the "James," "Denson," and "McGraw" editions of The Original Sacred Harp.⁷⁰ Queries to the Fasola mailing list among the writer's circle of colleagues and a survey of recent periodical literature indicate no additional studies in progress at this writing.

⁶⁹ Janet Herman, interview with author, 5 June 1994, No record retained, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Herman will attempt to describe what emotional and mental processes are part of Sacred Harp singing. Confirmed by two posts to Fasola mailing list, 28 July 1995.

⁷⁰ Electronic mail, Washington, D.C. to Montreat, 1 January, 8 September, and 4 October 1995, Digital record, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

CHAPTER II

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Informal Interviews

Southerners

The field of social science recognizes three broad categories of interview: the standardized, semistandardized, and unstandardized.¹ The informal nature of Sacred Harp singers and singing lends itself to the semistandardized. In this type, the interviewer may have to ask a number of specific major questions but may be free to probe beyond the answers to these questions.² The interviewer attempts to avoid channeling the interview in any certain direction while developing a very permissive atmosphere in which the respondent will feel perfectly free

¹ Peter Mann, Methods of Social Investigation (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1968), 128-30.

² Interview schedules for Northern and Southern interviewees may be found in appendix A.

to express his or her feelings without fear of disapproval.³

To arrange interviews with Southern singers the author contacted Hugh McGraw. Based on the author's description of his project, McGraw suggested appropriate singers for the interviews. Letters were sent to interviewees in advance with a self-addressed, pre-stamped post card enclosed for reply. Upon receipt of the reply card, interviewees were telephoned by the author. In a few cases when the reply card was not received in a timely manner, contact was initiated with the interviewee via telephone. With the exception of Buell Cobb, who spoke with the author by telephone, all interviews with Southern singers were conducted in person. Tape recordings were the only type of electronic media used for the series of interviews with Southern singers.

Field observations of Southern Sacred Harp singers were made by attending singings and conventions. Tape recordings were made of Southern singing, and notes on performance practice were kept.⁴ Interviews with Southern

³ Mann, 129.

⁴ For this project, the term "southern tradition" refers to Sacred Harp singing as it is regularly practiced

Sacred Harp singers were conducted prior to these singings, over the mid-day meal, or in the evening following singings.⁵ Field observations and interviews took place at the Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church near Bremen, Georgia, on 4, 5 and 6 June 1994, and at the Bethel Primitive Baptist Church and Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church on 7, 8 and 9 November 1994; the interview with Mr. and Mrs. Felton Denny was conducted in their home near the Sacred Harp Headquarters building. The response of Southern Sacred Harp singers to the informal interview situation was universally positive.⁶

Northerners

For comparison, the Chicago Sacred Harp group was selected for interviews and a survey based on the unanimous recommendation of Southern singers interviewed by the author. Reasons cited by Southerners were the Chicago

by Southerners in the South, as established by the author via interviews, field observations and tape recordings.

⁵ See Mann, Chapter 8, "Observation" for a description of techniques employed for this study.

⁶ A high degree of cordiality was present even when interview topics held the potential for high emotion (e.g., the disagreement between Richard DeLong and McGraw which led to the cessation of the National Sacred Harp Newsletter).

singers' enthusiasm and attention to Southern tradition. In addition, more Northern singers from Chicago and fewer from New England had been attending Southern singings recently, and the Chicago-area singers are now better known by Southerners.⁷ In preparation for his travel to Chicago, two important leaders of Sacred Harp singing in Chicago, Ted Johnson and Ted Mercer, were introduced to the author by Hugh McGraw at the Holly Springs singing in June of 1994.

To arrange interviews with Northern singers, the author contacted Ted Johnson. Based on a description of the project, Johnson suggested appropriate singers for the interviews and contacted local-area singers in advance. With the exception of Judy Houff and Kathleen Kuiper, who were interviewed by telephone, all interviews with Northern singers were conducted in person. Follow-up correspondence with Northern singers has been accomplished via electronic mail.

Interviews with Northern Sacred Harp singers took place on 6, 7, and 8 January 1995, at locations in and near metropolitan Chicago. At the specific request of all Northern interviewees, and in contrast to those in the

⁷ Buell Cobb describes the Chicago Sacred Harp group as "the most vigorous" outside the South. Cobb, vii.

South, interviews with Northern Sacred Harp singers were conducted in private homes or restaurants; no interviews were conducted by the author at the 11th Annual Anniversary singing itself, which was held at the Irish-American Cultural Center in Chicago. The response of Northern Sacred Harp singers to the informal interview situation was positive but generally more reserved than that of Southern singers.

Survey of Northern Singers

Prior to the construction of interview and survey instruments, a comprehensive survey of methodological works in the social sciences field was conducted. Based on this survey and the recommendation of Dr. Frank de Caro, Professor of Folklore Studies at Louisiana State University, Peter Mann's classic primer Methods of Social Investigation was selected for use as a source work.

According to Mann, the survey is a useful tool for "the reconstruction of processes that occurred prior to the investigation."⁸ Coupled with the informal interview, survey data "can be used to put together a great deal of the information about an individual's values, expectations,

⁸ Mann, 125.

and social relationships needed to investigate his behavior."⁹ The survey seemed particularly suited to an attempt to reconstruct and describe events surrounding the spread of Sacred Harp singing to Chicago, and to assist in determining what type of person practices Sacred Harp singing in Northern urban areas.

Surveys are broadly distinguished between those using open or open-ended questions and closed or fixed-alternative questions.¹⁰ Open or open-ended questions do not provide a list of alternative answers. For example:

Sacred Harp singings vary widely from region to region, but each singing includes some elements that are similar to others and some that are different. In each category below, write several things you have noticed that are similar or different from region to region.¹¹

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mann, 137.

¹¹ A copy of the survey schedule administered to Northern Sacred Harp singers may be found below in appendix A.

Closed or fixed-alternative questions limit the respondent to a choice among specific alternatives. For example:

How did you first hear about the Sacred Harp?

- ☐ Folk Festival
- ☐ Friend or Family Member
- ☐ College or University Group
- ☐ Media Advertisement
- ☐ Other (specify)

Each type of question has its advantages.

The fixed-alternative or closed question produces greater uniformity among respondents along the specific dimensions in which the investigator is interested . . . [and] . . . the investigator is assured that he will be able to obtain relatively complete information . . . about the specific phenomena with which he is concerned.¹²

Since there is no question that Sacred Harp singing has in fact spread to the North, the fixed-alternative question seemed best suited to collect data that could be used to define and describe the spread. Only one open-ended type of question, quoted above, was used in the survey. Other important elements of survey construction include question order, question wording, the use of GAST, and the pretest.¹³

¹² Mann, 138.

¹³ See Mann, Chapter 7. GAST (Group Attitudinal Sampling Technique) uses advanced contact by a "lead" individual among the survey group (in the case of the Chicago group, Ted Johnson) who explains the purpose of the survey prior to its administration. Following

A pretest is a trial run of a data-collection procedure such as a questionnaire or interview schedule.

The pretesting of an interview schedule or questionnaire on only a few individuals can yield important returns in increased clarity of questions and, more generally, an improved instrument for data collection. No advice on how to construct survey instruments can substitute for the specific knowledge that can result from a pretest.¹⁴

The use of a pretest can reveal inadequacies in the survey instrument and make it possible to revise the instrument before collecting data. For example, a question that appeared in the pretest of the Sacred Harp survey was "How did you first hear about the Sacred Harp?" Based on replies received, this open-ended question was changed to the fixed-alternative version cited above.

The pretest for the Sacred Harp survey was conducted from 19 December 1994 to 5 January 1995, using the Fasola

administration, the survey group meets with the administrator for followup. By arranging for two meetings, one to administer and one for followup, the researcher creates "an ongoing, though temporary, social structure . . . making up for some of the limitations of the survey procedure as it is ordinarily used: dealing with isolated individuals and thus not dealing with the context of group structures. The survey is, then, converted into a device for triangulation. It is used to achieve what procedures such as observation normally achieve."

¹⁴ Mann, 226.

mailing list. According to the list owner, Keith Willard, the membership of the list is predominately urban singers outside the South. Thus, the use of the Fasola mailing list was thought to be a valid method of conducting the pretest. The pool of respondents was further controlled by asking only those from the North or Midwest to respond. On 19 December, a query containing a list of open-ended questions was posted on the Fasola mailing list. Over the next two weeks 18 replies were received. Replies were used to refine and restructure the survey into its final form.¹⁵ Five posts received after the administration of the survey were similar in nature to those received earlier.

A preliminary analysis of data collected from the survey of northern urban singers suggests it is possible to construct a general "type" of northern urban Sacred Harp singer and to describe the general process by which Sacred Harp singing became known to individuals of that type. The author acknowledges that the type and processes are general

¹⁵ Electronic mail posts received by the author, 19 December 1994 to 5 January 1995, Digital record, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

and do not apply in every case.¹⁶ Analysis of survey data may be found in chapter III and a copy of the survey in appendix A.

Anatomy of a Southern Singing

Sacred Harp singers typically gather at an event termed a "singing" or a "convention."¹⁷ As explained by Hugh McGraw, a "singing" is a one-day event.¹⁸ The participants gather and begin the singing "class" in the morning, usually at 9:00 a.m. A fifteen-minute "recess" is called by the leader mid-morning and lunch is called at noon. The tradition of dining together on food brought by the singers, called "dinner-on-the-ground," is a vital part of Southern Sacred Harp tradition. Singing resumes at 1:00

¹⁶ Northern urban Sacred Harp singers were adamant about the avoidance of "stereotypes." They insisted all Northern singers were different and the identification of a "type" would prove impossible.

¹⁷ Singings and conventions are nineteenth-century derivations of eighteenth-century "singing schools," which were conducted by itinerant "singing masters." In those days, the singing schools sometimes lasted up to twenty days and included considerable instruction in music fundamentals. See Chase, 31-34 and Hitchcock, 7-9. For an explanation of twentieth-century singing school customs and techniques, see Cobb, 8ff.

¹⁸ Verbal explanation given by McGraw to singers at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, 5 June 1994.

p.m. and usually lasts until 3:00 or 3:30 p.m., when the tune "Parting Hand" (62) is sung as the last song of the day.

A "convention" or "singing convention" is any "singing" that lasts for two or more days.¹⁹ Thus the event attended by the author on 4 and 5 June 1994, at Holly Springs Church was a "convention," while the event he attended at Bethel Primitive Baptist Church on 8 November was a "singing." Despite McGraw's clear explanation, printed advertisements of Sacred Harp singings indicate the use of the terms varies widely on a national basis; many groups appear to use the terms interchangeably.²⁰

Since the 1890s, perhaps even earlier, the Primitive Baptist Church of Christ at Holly Springs, organized 1848, has been a focal point for Sacred Harp singing. While the church is no longer active on a continual basis, each year on the first Sunday and the Saturday before in June, and on the first Sunday in November, Sacred Harp singers from

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Information from numerous printed flyers in the Sacred Harp archives, Sacred Harp Headquarters Building, Carrollton, Georgia.

throughout the United States gather to sing shape-note music from the Original Sacred Harp (Denson Revision).

The minutes of the church do not indicate when the present structure was erected. The all-wood, white clapboard church sits in a clearing near the intersection of I-20 and Georgia State Road 29, near Bremen, Georgia.²¹ There is no running water on the property, nor are there kitchen facilities; all drink and food are carried in and the dinner-on-the-ground is spread on large concrete tables beneath a tabernacle-like shelter next to the church.

On a summer day in June as one enters the church, the scent of seasoned pine is evident. A few ceiling fans turn lazily overhead, stirring the already very warm air, and large wooden shutters are thrown open to try to catch the breeze. As hand-held fans from the local funeral parlor are distributed and one singer remarks about the generosity of the owner, McGraw is heard to say: "Remember, folks, *nothing* is ever free." The singers respond with a knowing laugh and continue with their visiting.

²¹ A first-time visitor to the church is struck by a curious incongruity: despite feeling as if one has stepped back in time, between songs it is possible to hear both the roar of traffic from the interstate and aircraft on approach to Atlanta's Hartsfield Airport.

Everyone at the convention seems to know everyone else. Snippets of news and information--primarily about people--are freely traded. Old acquaintances are renewed and hearty greetings exchanged. McGraw and his assistant, Charlene Wallace, take their places on what could be called a pulpit, located behind the alto section. From this vantage point McGraw calls out the successive leaders of the songs, and he and Mrs. Wallace attend to other business of the convention.

The morning session begins with older, experienced singers leading. Kelly Beard, Raymond Hamrick, Charlene Wallace, Jeff and Shelbie Sheppard, and other local singers make up the first group of "leaders" for the day.²² All leading takes place in the center of the "hollow square," an arrangement with singers divided by parts on four sides of the leader. The leader faces the tenor section, for in Sacred Harp singing the melody line is in the tenor part. "Keying"²³ of the songs seems to be close to actual notated

²² The Sacred Harp is a decidedly "democratic" movement; that is to say, men and women alike lead, and men and women alike sing all parts except the bass, which is normally sung by men.

²³ The process by which the leader or a singer designated by the leader provides the first pitch, usually without the aid of any pitch-producing instrument.

pitch or perhaps slightly lower. Several songs are begun too high, though, and after a first difficult attempt, the songs are re-keyed somewhat lower.²⁴

In the late morning session McGraw begins to call out-of-towners to lead, including the author. Some are visibly nervous but are helped along by the Southern singers' foot stomping to set or maintain the tempo and sometimes by the snapping of their fingers to designate entrances of parts in fuging tunes. Attempts by outsiders to adjust the singing to suit their tastes, either by speeding up or slowing down the tempo or by otherwise altering the performance practice, are universally ignored by the locals. Following lunch, the day's session ends with McGraw's invitation for all to reconvene the next morning.

Sunday is much like Saturday, with the exception of a very full house for the singing. There are obviously more spectators, although "fence sitting," as McGraw calls it, is discouraged. "This Sacred Harp music has to be sung to be experienced," is his friendly summons to the visitors. A

²⁴ Southern Sacred Harp singers--and those elsewhere who follow Southern tradition--always sing through the songs using the "fa, so, la, mi" syllables before the words are sung.

few respond and move closer to the center of the square, but most remain passive observers.

Another notable difference between Saturday and Sunday is the presence of more younger people on Sunday. By the author's estimate, those over fifty years of age and those under fifty years of age are present in roughly equal numbers and there are quite a few children. As the singing progresses, a young girl is called upon to lead. She stands, calls out "one forty-two" in a firm voice and proceeds to the center of the square to lead "Stratfield" by memory. A boy of perhaps 12 years of age is called on. To encourage the young leader, his grandmother stands with him, but it is mostly the boy who leads number 401 "Cuba." Later in the morning a high school-age boy is called and leads number 67, "Columbus"; he scarcely glances at the book he holds in one hand. While some authors lament the lack of participation of Southern young people in the Sacred Harp tradition, the events at Holly Springs and Bethel churches included their active and expert participation. The same was true for the Holly Springs singing attended in November of 1994. Southern Sacred Harp singers are encouraged to note that as the Sacred Harp

experiences growth in other regions, Southern young people carry on the tradition as well.

The "memorial lesson," a period of time in which songs are sung in memory of deceased friends, relatives, and especially other Sacred Harp singers, is included in the final session on Sunday afternoon. Announcements are made of other singings or conventions in the area, and the session closes with number 62 "Parting Hand," sung as participants move around the room to shake hands. A closing prayer is offered. After benediction many singers stay and visit. In addition to being an important expression of their religious way of life, this is community time for the Southerners. The depth of feeling for friends and for the common bond shared in Sacred Harp music is evident in their faces and demeanor. When all is done, McGraw closes and locks the door and is among the last to leave. Until the first weekend in November, when the bright sounds of Sacred Harp singing will again fill the old wooden building, the Holly Springs church is silent.

Anatomy of a Northern Singing

Although the rural Southern Sacred Harp tradition continues in the late twentieth century, the greatest growth in the movement is now taking place in regions outside the South.²⁵ Since 1980, the most significant growth in terms of the numbers of new singings being founded has been New England.²⁶ Nevertheless, the region identified by Hugh McGraw, Richard DeLong and all Southern singers interviewed by the author as being the most vigorous and continually active outside the South is that

²⁵ Directory and Minutes of Sacred Harp Singing: 1993 and 1994.

²⁶ Analysis of data, including founding dates of singings derived from the Directory and Minutes of Sacred Harp Singing, 1991-1992, indicates a trend towards an increase in the number of new singings being founded. Between 1971 and 1980 records indicate the founding of seven new singings, an average number by decade throughout the recorded tradition. However, twenty-five newly-founded singings were recorded in the decade between 1981 and 1990. Twenty-one of the twenty-five new singings, or 84%, were in urban or urbanized areas outside the South; fourteen in the Northeast, and seven in the Midwest. During the same period only a handful of new singings, mostly urban, were founded in the South and more than seventy-five Southern singings were discontinued (Directory and Minutes, 1993-1994). Early indications are that the pace of growth in the number of new singings being founded in the 1990s exceeds that of the 1980s and is shifting westward. Seven new singings were recorded in the first two years of the decade, six in 1992 alone. Six of the new singings, or 85%, are in urban or urbanized areas in the Midwest or West.

of the upper Midwest, specifically, the Sacred Harp group of Chicago. Data for this project was collected by the author at the 11th Annual Anniversary Singing on 8 January 1995, and during interviews the two days prior.

The singing took place at the Irish-American Cultural Center, which was formerly a public school. Though an unusual location in the sense of Sacred Harp tradition, reasons given by Chicago singers for use of this facility made practical sense: low cost, easy access from many areas of Chicago, the absence of religious association and the right type of room. The room was large (about the size of many smaller Southern churches), and had wood floors, plaster walls and a fairly low ceiling--also of a hardened material.²⁷ A large bank of windows provided bright natural light; from the windows the view of neighborhood row houses beside the Center was starkly urban.

In addition to Sacred Harp singers, other cultural groups used the Center that day. A group of Irish dancers

²⁷ These elements of a room are considered important by many Northern urban singers, which are sometimes known to go to extraordinary lengths to find just the right location. Electronic mail posting "How to Organize a Sacred Harp Convention" by Ginnie Ely, 2 August 1995, Digital record, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

was in one classroom and instrumentalists played Irish folk music in another. During the day curious spectators wandered in and out of the Sacred Harp singing, and a few paused to listen.²⁸

In almost all respects the processes and procedures of the singing resembled those attended by the author in the South. As singers arrived they visited with one another, the meeting was called to order, an opening prayer was read, and the singing was begun. The day proceeded according to traditional schedule with a morning break, lunch and an afternoon session, which included the traditional "memorial lesson." The "dinner-on-the-ground" luncheon was held in the kitchen of the facility; outside temperature of 11° Fahrenheit and a foot of new-fallen snow prevented dining out-of-doors.

No significant variances from Southern musical performance practice were noted. The presence of Richard DeLong and Kelly Beard, both prominent Southern singers, helped to assure that the keying of the songs and the tempi were authentic. Despite the high degree of outward

²⁸ Through all of the activity in the Irish-American Cultural Center, its cash bar--located directly across the hall from the Sacred Harp singing--hosted a formal wedding reception and otherwise did a brisk business.

similarity between this Northern urban singing and many Southern ones, differences were evident.

While its "democratic" nature has always been a strong point for the Sacred Harp, and in the South women do lead frequently, the Chicagoans practice democracy to a further degree. Deliberate effort was made to call female leaders as often as, or perhaps even more often than male leaders. Furthermore, several women leaders took time to express themselves to the group before beginning the song. Women also assumed a substantial role in the organization and operation of the singing and were vocal and visible in this role.

Trebles (soprano part) consisted almost entirely of women and no males sang counter (alto part) at this singing. There was one female singing bass part, a rare occurrence at Southern singings. As is traditional in the South, though, the tenor section was larger than the others and consisted of an approximately equal number of male and female singers.

Approximately 75 people attended the singing; of these, there were about fifteen children. Some children sat with parents and shared their book for singing. Others played quietly in the room or outside the room in the large

hallways of the old school. No children were called to lead songs, although children sometimes stood with parents when they led.²⁹ During lunch, family groups sat together, and following lunch all of the children went off to play together. The children seemed to know each other well. In contrast to the number of children present, Kelly Beard, a Southern singer, was one of only two adults over 65 who were present. The author estimates almost all other singers to have been between the ages of 35 and 65.

The ecstatic emotional responses of some female members of the Chicago Sacred Harp group was extraordinary and unlike anything witnessed at singings in the South. In general among the Chicago group, members tended to use deliberate body motion as part of their singing style.³⁰ Moreover, several members were observed to dance and whirl

²⁹ Among survey respondents at the Chicago singing, "the community aspect of singing together" was cited as the second most important aspect of Sacred Harp singing. "The sound of the music" was listed as first.

³⁰ Swaying of the upper body and hands beating time with the leader were the two most frequent motions among these singers. Similar motions are used by Southern singers, but are much more subtle in their manifestation. Some of the Northern singers' movements seemed quite self-conscious--almost affected--as if it were something they felt they had to do if they were to sing Sacred Harp music properly.

as they led. Two or three lifted the free hand normally used for beating time and led with eyes closed and hands lifted while dancing and whirling about the center of the square; they seemed to be caught up in a type of rapturous joy.³¹ Aside from the visible display of emotion, a feeling of pure exhilaration from the joy of singing permeated the room.

The Chicago singing concluded in the traditional manner. "Parting Hand" was called and singers moved around the room shaking hands. A benediction was read. Many singers stayed to visit, but many more hurriedly scooped up belongings and exited. "The pace of the city is relentless," one called out over her shoulder. In the hallway, attendants impatiently waited for the remaining singers to leave; it appeared that another group had reserved the room for later that day.

In addition to informal interviews and the survey, unsolicited data was also received from a number of Chicagoans. The most frequent comment about the Sacred Harp

³¹ The author has seen this type of emotional display in the South only at meetings held by Pentecostal sects and never in a Southern Sacred Harp singing.

had to do with "the sound of the music."³² Whether young, middle aged or old, all singers with whom the author spoke on this occasion made mention of "the sound." When asked to explain what she meant by "the sound," Judy Houff, one of the early organizers of Chicago Sacred Harp singing said:

There is a sense of communion and spiritual dimension to this singing. It is a transcendent, moving experience for atheists, Jews--all denominations . . . intellectuals, everyone, just tears [sic] up. It's as if something says: 'This is fact.' Even though we may not know what it is.³³

That a sense of community is felt by Northern urban singers in the Sacred Harp tradition is further confirmed by survey data indicating that more than one-third of currently active Northern urban Sacred Harp singers were invited by friends or family members to a demonstration of

³² Among survey respondents at the Chicago singing, "the sound of the music" was cited as the most important aspect of Sacred Harp singing by an almost 2-to-1 ratio.

³³ Judy Houff, interview by author, 6 January 1995, Handwritten notes, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Sacred Harp singing.³⁴ Another common sentiment was expressed by Kathleen Kuiper:

We all love to eat and socialize, but the real point is that we are engaged in making life more meaningful; there is a profound yearning for the kinds of contact people use to have. [The Sacred Harp tradition] is one way to do that.³⁵

Among Northern singers interviewed, several alluded to, but could not really explain, a relationship they felt to exist between urban church music and their experience with Sacred Harp tradition.³⁶ Many were trained in church music education programs, read music well and sing in their own church choir every week--but they rarely discuss their Sacred Harp singing activity with other church choir members. Refined urban church music is musically and intellectually stimulating to them and they are committed to their church choirs (several came late to the Sunday singing because of these commitments), but Sacred Harp

³⁴ Among survey respondents at the Chicago singing, 40% indicated they had first heard about the Sacred Harp from family or friends.

³⁵ Kathleen Kuiper, interview by author, 7 January 1995, Handwritten notes, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

³⁶ The association with urban church music may account for the clearer gender division of soprano and alto singers at the Chicago singing.

singing offers a dimension not experienced in urban church music. This missing dimension seems to be filled by contact with the Sacred Harp tradition. They sing Sacred Harp because they want to and because the "ruggedness" of shape note music seems to satisfy some deep unspoken emotional need.³⁷ When pressed about the meaning of the term "rugged," or asked to explain the dualistic nature of their church music experience, Northern singers were either reluctant or declined to offer further explanation. Most simply said, "Well, it's kind of a two-sided thing that's hard to describe."

Sacred Harp Singing and the Twentieth Century Folk-music Revival

All Chicago singers who took a prominent and active role in establishing shape-note singing in their area first came in contact with the Sacred Harp as folk music in the

³⁷ When singers used the word "rugged" to describe Sacred Harp music, they also frequently referred to the dispersed harmonies and independent melodic style of the voices in Sacred Harp music as compared to that of refined urban church music "anthems." These references were common in interviews and answers to follow-up questions with Northern urban singers.

mid-1960s.³⁸ Ted Mercer's description of himself as "a sixties folkie who was at first fascinated by the sound of the music, but over time was drawn into a genuine folk tradition," is typical of those interviewed and is consistent with experiences related by others.³⁹ After the initial contact, "folkies" as they called themselves, became what they now describe as "harpers." The Sacred Harp tradition seemed to provide them with a sense of belonging that nothing else offered; and while the music of the Sacred Harp began as nothing more than an alternative to mass culture music, it has become something more. They not only sing, they are active participants in a living tradition. Being part of the living tradition is an important reason cited by harpers to explain why they continue to sing Sacred Harp music.⁴⁰

³⁸ These connections are described in greater detail in chapter III, "Results and Discussion."

³⁹ Ted Mercer, interview by author, 6 January 1995, Tape recording, Chicago, Il.; electronic mail posts, 2 August 1995, Digital record, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁴⁰ Among survey respondents at the Chicago singing, "connection with living historic tradition" was cited as the third most important aspect of Sacred Harp singing following "the sound of the music" (1), and "the community aspect of singing together" (2).

In describing the twentieth-century folk music revival, Neil V. Rosenberg begins his introduction to Transforming Traditions, a group of essays by folk music specialists, by saying:

. . . a strong consensus holds that in the late 1950s and early 1960s there was, centered in North America, a or the revival. Unusual in its diversity and its extensive social and economic dimensions, in retrospect it can be seen to have been a broad cultural movement. I call it the "great boom" . . .⁴¹

Citing the transplantation of nineteenth-century rural folk culture to the urban stage (e.g. 1840s blackface minstrelsy) as an example of the ongoing North American "fascination with folk music,"⁴² Rosenberg says the twentieth-century boom resulted from "a century of feeding music from the margins into the center," his description of

⁴¹ Rosenberg, Neil V., ed. Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 2. The term "revival" has been in use since 1651 (New Oxford Dictionary, Unabridged, 1993) to refer metaphorically to the reinvigoration of aspects of culture and society, following a period of disuse. Rosenberg's meaning as applied to folk music is taken from Charles Seeger (Sing Out!, 1953) and Jan Brunvand (Folklore: A Study and Research Guide) and refers specifically to the rediscovery or use of the texts and music of people in a specific cultural and social context. See Rosenberg, 17-18.

⁴² Rosenberg, 4.

the combination of the fascination with and search for authentic American folk styles.⁴³ He believes that this culminated in the establishment of folk music festivals in Canada and the U.S. in the late 1920s and 1930s, which made use of music, song, dance and craft of various ethnic groups.⁴⁴

Coincident with these events was the establishment of the Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song, by Robert W. Gordon in 1928. The team of father and son, John and Alan Lomax, took over from Gordon in 1933 and published their first large collection of folk songs the following year. The folksong movement gained strength from the combination of social program emphasis of the Great Depression and the increasing availability of good quality recordings. In the 1930s

. . . interest in folksong surged as three streams converged: the older work of various collector/lecturer/author types active for some time, the then-new political left, and the Americanists. A middle-class, popular-culture youth market for folk music emerged.⁴⁵

⁴³ Rosenberg, 5.

⁴⁴ Rosenberg, 6.

⁴⁵ Rosenberg, 8.

The folksong revival continued to develop through the 1940s as "a professionalized music with an ethos of nonprofessionalism."⁴⁶ Singers and performers attempted to sell themselves as preindustrial artisans unsullied by the demands of commercialism.

The formula proved successful. Hit records by groups such as the Weavers in the early fifties, the Kingston trio in the middle and late fifties, and folksingers such as Burl Ives, are cited as examples of success which led to an increase in demand for all types of folk music.⁴⁷ Albums of Library of Congress field recordings were released, scores of new folk music albums were produced and a host of print-media sources helped sustain the trend.

Other recent scholarship has linked the Sacred Harp tradition with the folk-music revival. In a paper presented to the Sonneck Society for American Music, Ron Pen said: "If shape-note hymnody is to survive in the future, it appears as though the current folk revival may be the key to its preservation."⁴⁸ Using definitions by Brunvand⁴⁹ and

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Charles Hamm, Music in the New World, 633.

⁴⁸ Ron Pen, "Squares, Triangles, Circles, and Diamonds: An Examination of the Transformational Role of

Greenway⁵⁰ as a basis, Pen describes the Sacred Harp as a tradition that ". . . despite the intrusion of modern culture, despite the loss of the original guiding purpose, [has] actually increased and spread throughout the United States."⁵¹

Similar to the way in which the print media sustained the folk-music revival in the 1950s, Pen says that current

Folk Revivalism in Shape Note Preservation," unpublished manuscript, 10 April 1994.

⁴⁹ Jan Harold Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 7-9. Brunvand defines folklore as "those materials in culture that circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions, whether in oral form, or by means of customary example, as well as the process of traditional performance and communication." He posits five qualities that are associated with true folklore: oral content or custom-related material; traditional form and transmission; different extant versions; anonymity of authorship; and formulization. Pen says that all of these relate to the Sacred Harp "revival."

⁵⁰ John Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1953), 14. He defines folksong as "any song concerned with the interests of the folk and in complete possession of the folk who, in turn, are members of a homogeneous unsophisticated enclave living in, but isolated from, a surrounding sophisticated society by such features as geography, topography, race, religion, economic, and educational deprivation, social inferiority, or even choice." Pen agrees with this but cites recent trends in the use of media which have served to break down the isolation of the Southern Sacred Harp "enclave." Pen, 8.

⁵¹ Pen, 7.

uses of media, such as Bill Moyers' television special Amazing Grace, National Public Radio's "American Radio Company," (Garrison Keillor), and articles in popular print media, such as the 1987 New Yorker article on Big Singing Day in Benton, Kentucky, (a Southern Harmony singing) have "dislocated folk performance from folk context and made this culture readily available."⁵² That the media plays a role in the spread of the Sacred Harp outside the South can be seen in survey data indicating that 15% of Northern urban singers had first heard of the Sacred Harp from radio, television, or newspaper sources.

Pen concludes his remarks about the future of the Sacred Harp tradition by saying:

While the "bred in the bone" folk base of the culture preserved in rural southern enclaves continues to decline, the infusion of new participants who have chosen to become part of the tradition continues to expand rapidly.⁵³

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Spread of Sacred Harp To the North

New England

Evidence suggests that in the mid-1960s, informal Sacred Harp singing preceded organized attempts to spread the singing tradition to the North.¹ During the late 1960s Sacred Harp music was heard as part of folk festivals in Newport, Rhode Island, the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, D.C.², at the Old Town School of Folk Music (Chicago)³ and Highlander Folk School, New York,

¹ Garber, 1ff.

² Dick Hulan, Steven Levine, John Garst, Ginny Ely, and Ted Johnson, electronic mail posts, 1-5 August 1995, Digital record, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

³ Among Chicago-area Sacred Harp singers, there is unanimous agreement as to the genesis of the group. All cite early contact through the Old Town School of Folk Music, which became active beginning in the early 1960s.

among others. Early organized Sacred Harp singing in New England was present from 1970 onwards but was sporadic.⁴

One of the first persons to encourage regular Sacred Harp singing in New England was Neely Bruce, who began teaching at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, in 1974.⁵ Through his activities at the University, including programming Sacred Harp music as part of choral concerts, the adoption of the book as a text for special courses, and later, the hosting of several New England Singing Conventions on campus, Sacred Harp singing began to become more widely known in the region. Before moving to the New England area, Bruce had taught at the University of Illinois. Despite the activities of his American Music Group at that university and the organization of the Annual Champaign-Urbana All Day Sacred Harp Singing, Sacred Harp singing failed to take root in the Midwest in the early 1970s. While teaching at the University of Illinois, Bruce had presented numerous concerts in as many as ten cities across the North and Midwest between 1968 and 1973. The concerts ended with a demonstration of the Sacred Harp

⁴ Garber, 1ff.

⁵ Garber, 17.

singing (hollow square, keying of pitch, singing of syllables), and Bruce reports that in many cities people would recognize the style or sound of the music and come to talk afterwards. Bruce said that some of the persons who heard Sacred Harp at his concerts are now active Sacred Harp singers;⁶ however, no Chicago-area singers with whom the author spoke were familiar with Bruce and his earlier activities in Illinois.

By 1976 what had been sporadic Sacred harp singing in New England became somewhat more organized. Bruce, along with Steve Marini, Larry Gordon and others with keen interest in Sacred Harp singing, chartered a bus and attended the Holly Springs singing in April of that year. Bruce says the Southern singers' fascination with the Northerners was such that the Southerners chartered a bus to travel to New England. Later that year the New England Sacred Harp singing was inaugurated, hosted by Wesleyan College in Middletown, Connecticut. While no longer hosted exclusively by Wesleyan, the annual New England Sacred Harp singing has since been continually active and represents a

⁶ Neely Bruce, interview by author, 23 November 1993, Handwritten notes, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

genesis of and focal point for Sacred Harp singing in the Northeast.⁷

According to Hugh McGraw, serious efforts to preserve the Sacred Harp tradition--specifically by transplanting it to cities and to the North--were begun by him and Ruth Denson Edwards in the middle to late 1970s:

. . . I talked to her and said, 'Aunt Ruthie, we're going to have to move the singings out of the rural sections and into the cities, because the singings are drying up in the rural sections.' And she said, 'Hon, I'm afraid that if we take it out of the country, we'll destroy it.' And I said, 'We won't in my lifetime. I'm going to teach these people to do it in the same tradition that we do it in the country.' And I started. . . and since then I have organized 23 state conventions in Illinois, California, Washington, D.C. and a host of others, . . . trying to teach them, and instill in them how important it is to carry on our tradition, . . . to do it just like our forefathers did when they started over a hundred years ago. . . .⁸

McGraw's efforts clearly have been successful. Many groups learned and followed the old Southern traditions and continue to do so. Groups cited by McGraw and other Southerners as following Southern tradition include St.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hugh McGraw, interview by author, 4 June 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Louis, Missouri, one group in Portland, Oregon, one very new group in Los Angeles, California, and the Chicago group.⁹

Chicago Sacred Harp singers make a conscious effort to practice the Southern Sacred Harp tradition. Moreover, according to Ted Mercer, the group has a low tolerance for the non-traditional performance practices of some other regional groups. He explains:

. . . when Chicago people hear somebody from [another region] sing 'Loving Cheese Whiz, I have bought a ranch home,'¹⁰ for 361 ("Loving Jesus"), they get really disgusted . . . or in other places in the country where they might do all these hand motions . . . in general, everybody in [our] group would raise their eyebrows and say 'What are these people up to?' . . . Once you've sung a lot of the songs, and seen the people that have done this all their lives, and you associate the songs with people living and dead, you don't do that kind of thing because it's all so disrespectful to the people that sang it. We want to carry the [Southern] tradition on.

Other Chicago singers echoed Mercer's sentiments

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Actual text is: "Loving Jesus, Thou hast bought a ransom." Mercer was referring specifically to textual parody he had heard at Sacred Harp singings in other regions. According to Mercer, exaggerated hand motions were also used by these groups. Textual parody, exaggerated hand and body motion, and "humor" (Garber's term for word play using song texts) is also found in some New England groups (e.g. Connecticut Valley Harmony). See Garber, 64.

about performance practices in other regions. They felt that regional singing groups who maintain contact with the South would sing Sacred Harp more like the Southerners, that the singing would be more authentic, was worth preserving for its own sake, and needed no revision.¹¹ Mercer further explains about following the Southern tradition:

Consciously or subconsciously, depending on who you talk with, we pretty much sing the Southern way. But, it's interesting. One of the things we've found is that we're not just doing it because it's Southern, but really because a lot of the processes and procedures are very practical. . . . It's almost like an evolutionary product, . . . with procedures that have been honed for a hundred years, and they've worked in thousands of singings. They work so well, there's just no reason not to do it that way.¹²

¹¹ Several Chicago-area singers mentioned the New England region as an example of what they termed "isolationist" Sacred Harp singing. The term "isolationist" seems to explain a withdrawal from Southern tradition into specific regional styles and mannerisms. In addition, as did the Southern singers, the Chicago singers noted fewer New England singers in attendance at Southern singings, over the last three to five years, and, recently, fewer coming to Chicago. They attributed this directly to the Chicago group's adherence to Southern tradition.

¹² Ted Mercer, interview by author, 7 January 1995, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

In addition to being active in all Chicago-area singings, Mercer--and many of the other Chicago singers--have travelled to nearly all other Midwestern regional conventions and singings and to many Southern ones.¹³

Chicago

For this project, leaders and those active in the formation of the Chicago group, including Jerry Enright, Judy Houff, Kathleen Kuiper, Ted Johnson, Ted Mercer and Herb Schroeder were interviewed. The series of events that led to the foundation of the group were stated with a high degree of correlation among all interviewees. There are now four annual singings in the Chicago area: the Midwest Regional Convention; the Lincoln's Birthday Singing, held in conjunction with the University of Chicago Folk Festival; the Fox Valley Singing, held in conjunction with the Fox Valley Folk Festival; and the Illinois State Convention at Charleston, Illinois.

¹³ Among survey respondents at the 11th Annual Anniversary singing, 74% indicated they had attended a singing outside the region in which they now live.

Ted Johnson's account of how Sacred Harp singing began in Chicago is similar to those told by all interviewees:

Some of us Chicago "folkies" (Judy Houff et al.) had stumbled on [Sacred Harp singing] independently; then composer and choir director Phil Trier, who had been to Fox Hollow [folk festival] when Sacred Harp was being done there, got some of us organized away from our living rooms around 1983--until we went south, and the jig was up, and we rebelled and wouldn't do it his way any more.¹⁴ But back in, maybe, the early sixties at the Old Town School of Folk Music, where I was teaching guitar, we used to have "Sunday sings," with our own little self-printed book of different things to sing, which included, of course, "Wondrous Love" (in three parts), and, I think, "Babylon is Fallen." I think the first time I ever sang a Sacred Harp song--again, "Wondrous Love," of course--was with George and Gerry Armstrong (whom you hear on the Golden Ring albums) and possibly Joe Hickerson. . . . It was back in the late fifties or early sixties . . .¹⁵

¹⁴ Johnson is referring to the difference in leading style between Trier and traditional Southern practice. Sacred Harp singers who were active early in the group's history describe Trier's style of directing as being that of a trained church musician conducting anthems. Once Chicago singers attended Southern singings, invited Southerners to Chicago and began closely following Southern tradition, Trier took issue with these practices and became inactive. Although he does still attend some singings (the author met and spoke informally with Trier at the Anniversary singing), no Chicago singers credited Trier with the founding of the group. He is not now active in the group's leadership, but many cited him as one of their first points of contact with Sacred Harp music and all Chicago Sacred Harp singers spoke of him with affection and respect.

¹⁵ Ted Johnson, interview by author and electronic mail, Chicago to Montreat, 2 August 1995, Digital record,

Survey data from participants at the 11th Annual Anniversary singing confirmed assertions made by Chicago-area singers about the history of Sacred Harp activities in Chicago specifically and, by extension, the Urban North. While the founding leaders may have first heard about Sacred Harp singing as a Folk Music idiom, the data reveals that the movement now seems to have taken root and has become self-sustaining. Most active singers at the Chicago singing had heard of the Sacred Harp from either family or friends (40%), or by other means such as church, choral group, books or records (26%). The percentage of those who had first heard of the Sacred Harp in connection with a Folk Festival was smaller (16%), as was the percentage of those who had heard via some type of media advertisement (15%). In contrast to the length of participation by many Southern singers who have sung shape-note music for some time (many since early childhood),¹⁶ 71% of Northern singers surveyed have been singing Sacred Harp music for ten years or less.

Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection,
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

¹⁶ The author has met several Southerners who say they have attended singings for more than 80 years.

A majority of survey respondents indicated the religious or spiritual aspect of the Sacred Harp was meaningful. When asked to indicate which statement best represented their feelings about the religious or spiritual nature of the Sacred Harp nearly half, or 47%, indicated that minus this aspect, Sacred Harp singing would be left without one of its distinctive attributes and would be less authentic. Another 25% indicated that this aspect was "very important," while only 3% labelled this aspect as "unimportant." Thirteen percent realized it was a part of the music, but sang the music for itself and attached no particular religious or spiritual meaning to it.

Southerners on Northern Singings

The interview schedule used for Southern singers contained specific questions regarding their travels to and impressions of Northern urban Sacred Harp singers and singings.¹⁷ The author interviewed Hugh McGraw, Richard DeLong, Kelly Beard, Jeff and Shelbie Sheppard and Raymond Hamrick. He spoke informally with Charlene Wallace, Buell Cobb, Terry Wooten, Jerry and Ruby Phillips, and Lonnie and

¹⁷ A copy of the interview schedule used for Southern singers appears below in appendix A.

Vivian Rogers. In addition, numerous Southern singers offered general comments regarding the state of Sacred Harp singing in the North.

All agreed that the recent vigorous growth of the Sacred Harp singing has occurred outside the South. None expressed concern over the growth occurring outside the South, but seemed pleased that people anywhere were taking an interest in Sacred Harp singing. All of the Southerners indicated that within the last three to five years there had been a notable decline in the number of New England Sacred Harp singers attending Southern singings, and a corresponding increase in the number of singers from the Midwest, while a smaller number from other regions regularly came South. When asked to speculate about the cause of the reduction in the number of New England singers who attend Southern singings, most Southerners were reluctant to express their views--although to the author it seemed that some of them felt strongly about the issue. The few that did speak openly expressed mostly concern and puzzlement at some of the practices they had seen in other regions.¹⁸ One or two felt strongly enough to say they were

¹⁸ Textual parody and exaggerated hand and body motions were mentioned most often by the Southern singers.

firmly set against returning to these regions.

Nevertheless, Southern singers do continue to travel to the North. In October of 1995 as many as fifty Southerners were on hand for the New England Sacred Harp Singing held in Burlington, Vermont.¹⁹ Except as noted above, the general feeling of Southern Sacred Harp singers towards those of all other regions continues to be cordial.

Other Midwest Region Singings

Informal conversations with singers at the Holly Springs Church, material contained in the Sacred Harp Archives at the Sacred Harp Headquarters building and in the Directory of Minutes indicates Sacred Harp singings take place in the following Midwestern cities: Naperville and Paxton, Illinois; Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio; St. Louis, Missouri; Goshen, Indiana; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota; and Madison, Wisconsin. Many of the numerous flyers contained in the archives are advertisements for singings in these cities; in addition, a number of

Some expressed very strong feelings about the attitude of irreverence they felt these mannerisms conveyed toward Sacred Harp texts and music.

¹⁹ As reported by Mr. and Mrs. Felton Denny, 22 November 1995, in conversation with the author, no record retained.

newspaper articles provide further information on these singings.

While Southerners do travel to the North, interviews with Southern singers indicate that it is mainly the leaders of the Southern tradition who do so on a regular basis. By contrast, there are indications that, as a group, Midwest Sacred Harp singers tend to travel more frequently. Among those attending the Midwest Regional Convention, 70% of respondents described the Midwest as their "home" region, but 23% had attended other singings in the Midwest region. More than one-third, 38%, had attended Southern singings; 20% had attended singings in New England. While it is possible that a number of singers attend all or many singings in the Midwest, the four annual singings in the metropolitan Chicago area clearly make this group the largest and most active in the Midwest region.

West and Northwest Region Singings

Other regions outside the South in which Sacred Harp singings are regularly held include the West and Northwest regions of the U.S. At this writing cities with active groups include: Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco, California; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and

Denver, Colorado. Information regarding some of these singings is available in the Sacred Harp Archives, and many of the singers in these regions are active subscribers to the Fasola mailing list. In only a very general way, survey data indicate that as yet there is little contact between Midwest and West and Northwest region Sacred Harp singers.²⁰ According to Jeff Shepperd, of Glencoe, Alabama, he, Hugh McGraw and Richard Delong have travelled to the Northwest. Sheppard reports that at least one of the groups in the Portland, Oregon, area is actively following Southern style.²¹ Based on information observed in the Sacred Harp Archives, informal discussions with singers from these regions at the Holly Springs Church in June of 1994, and Sheppard's interview, the author believes the activities of these regions is greater than currently

²⁰ Among survey respondents at the Midwest Regional Convention, 12% indicated they had travelled to Southwest region singings, including California, and only 3% indicated they had travelled to Sacred Harp singings in the Northwest. Additionally, only 5% of respondents identified either the Northwest or Southwest as their "home" region.

²¹ Jeff Sheppard, interview by author, 4 November 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

thought and that further research, study and travel to these regions is merited.²²

²² Flyers announcing singings in Portland, Oregon; Seattle and Tacoma, Washington; and Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco, California; Denver, Colorado; and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and newspaper articles detailing Sacred Harp singing in these cities may be found in the Sacred Harp archives. Several singers from the West and Northwest were present at the Holly Springs Convention in June of 1994. They seemed enthusiastic about Sacred Harp singing in their regions, and all said they thought participation in the singings was growing.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reasons for the Spread

The earliest stirring of Sacred Harp singing in the Urban North occurred as part of folk festivals in the 1960s and 1970s. The most influential of these was the Newport Folk Festival, founded in 1963 by Pete Seeger.¹ Four years later (1967), the first Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife was held, and in the years immediately following, federal grants went to a myriad of organizations and individuals active in the folk music revival. These included the Highlander Research Center and the Old Town School of Folk Music;² both of which were mentioned repeatedly by Northern urban singers as early important influences on greater public recognition of Sacred Harp

¹ Bruce Jackson, "The Folksong Revival" in Rosenberg, 76.

² Rosenberg, 77.

singing; they are cited specifically by several as being the means by which they first became aware of Sacred Harp music. Additionally, electronic mail posts from various Northern urban singers,³ and newspaper articles in the Sacred Harp Archives, state that many of the early important urban folk festivals included Sacred Harp music.⁴ Since the mid-1970s, Hugh McGraw, Richard DeLong and other Southern singers have ventured North to lead demonstrations of Sacred Harp singing for these and other festivals.⁵

George Pullen Jackson's series of books studying rural Southern musical practice, beginning with White Spirituals

³ Dick Hulan, Steven Levine, John Garst, Ginny Ely, and Ted Johnson, electronic mail posts, 2-5 August 1995, Digital record, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁴ Patricia Ward Biederman. Untitled newspaper article, Los Angeles Times, 28 July 1991. She cites the Old Town School in Chicago, and alludes to other earlier East-coast folk music festivals, but fails to specify these. Other articles, with no author, date or publisher given, mention the Folklife Society of Greater Washington, D.C., and the Augusta Heritage Arts Festival in Elkins, West Virginia.

⁵ Numerous newspaper articles in four large books at the Sacred Harp Headquarters contain information about the inclusion of Sacred Harp music, or other shape-note music of unspecified origin, in Northern folk festivals. Except as noted herein, articles are pasted up "scrapbook" style, with the publisher and date cut away. Examined by the author 4-6 November 1994.

in the Southern Uplands, 1933, was instrumental in bringing The Sacred Harp to the attention of scholars and folklorists,⁶ but little additional research focused on shape-note music until the 1960s when several dissertations were written;⁷ at this writing there are still relatively few scholarly works whose main topic is the Sacred Harp tradition. Students who were to become prominent folklorists entered the Ph.D. program in Folklore Studies at Indiana University during the 1960s.⁸ Even though

⁶ His other works in this vein are: Another Sheaf of White Spirituals, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970); Spiritual Folk-Songs of early America, (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin, 1937); The Story of the Sacred Harp, 1844-1944, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1944); and White and Negro Spirituals: Their Life Span and Kinship, (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin, 1943). Jackson's works are cited frequently by American music scholars such as Chase, Cobb, Hamm, Hitchcock, and others.

⁷ See chapter I of this paper for information on dissertations about the Sacred Harp and other shape-note music traditions.

⁸ These include Joe Hickerson, who directed the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, Illinois; Neil Rosenberg, folklorist and author of Transforming Tradition, a recent collection of essays on the twentieth-century folk-music revival, and Ellen Stekert, Professor of Folklore Studies at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, who has been active in the organization and operation of numerous folk life festivals in the East and Midwest. She is also the co-editor of The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition, a collection of essays exploring the effects of the urban environment on transplanted rural folk

"university students and some faculty members were central to the revival, the revival had little direct impact on university teaching or research in the 1950s and 1960s."⁹

Moreover, the revival

. . . did not fit the academic models of folkloric behavior fashionable in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps the revival was too closely linked to popular movements [mostly left wing], perhaps it was too close to contemporary political and social events for the taste of American folklorists.¹⁰

But in the 1980s and 1990s, the folk music revival seems to have moved away from its early political roots and gained a wider acceptance. Furthermore, as the popularity of the Sacred Harp tradition and its music has grown, an increasing number of college and university professors are integrating the study of shape-note music into classes in American music studies, using this means to introduce students and others to Sacred Harp music. Some academics, such as Neely Bruce, regularly offer classes in Sacred Harp singing; articles and papers with aspects of shape-note music as the main topic are becoming increasingly frequent.

traditions. See also Rosenberg, 74.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Rosenberg, 80.

Without Hugh McGraw's efforts it is doubtful that the spread of the Sacred Harp to the urban North could have sustained itself. His decision to take the music northward beginning in the mid-1970s, and the sense of purpose with which he has approached this mission must be considered a vital impetus to the spread of the movement and to its staying power. In the last 20 years, he has founded numerous singings, sold tens of thousands of Sacred Harp books and travelled an untold number of miles. His stature within the movement is that of a nationally prominent leader. In 1982, McGraw was selected to receive the prestigious National Heritage Fellowship Award, acknowledging his service in support of the Sacred Harp tradition.¹¹

In a more general way the spread of Sacred Harp singing outside the South is a reflection of trends in modern society. In order to satisfy a yearning for something simple and familiar, Folk Music enthusiasts

. . . went shopping for alternatives to what was offered to them either by the marketplace or by their culture. Many were looking to give their lives new or

¹¹ A copy of the award and letters of congratulations from Senators Sam Nunn and Newt Gingrich of Georgia are displayed at the Sacred Harp Archives building.

expanded meaning by adopting aspects of the lives of others.¹²

What enthusiasts viewed as simply an alternative, though, did become something more for some of them. Thus, when Southern Sacred Harp singers express their gratitude for others' interest in their music, they are expressing pleasure that others have become part of the living tradition. While "much of the [folk] revival was fad or fashion . . . the nice thing about it is how much of it survived and became part of the general culture, how much of it is still accessible," wrote Bruce Jackson.¹³

Fortunately for Sacred Harp enthusiasts of the North or South, the tradition continues both to live and to be accessible.

In addition to its inclusion in folk festivals and McGraw's efforts, another reason for the success of Sacred Harp music can be seen in its viability as a music teaching

¹² I. Sheldon Posen, "On Folk Festivals and Kitchens: Questions of Authenticity in the Folksong Revival," in Rosenberg, 127.

¹³ Rosenberg, 73.

method. According to George Pullen Jackson, early singing school teachers

. . . concluded that a system of giving to each note-head a characteristic shape--one that would reduce the reasoning and reckoning process by showing instantly that the particular note in question was fa, sol, la, or mi, leaving the singer simply to the exercise of his melodic feeling--should simplify his learning to sing.¹⁴

The subsequent success of the shape-note system--and its nearly two hundred years' endurance--should be ample validation of its worth. Designed for the beginning singer or person of relatively little education, the shape-note system has survived in rural, Southern areas. In the late twentieth century, though, shape-note singing has made new inroads among singers who are educated but musically inexperienced. While a number of Northern urban singers are trained church musicians,¹⁵ many are not. Those who have no prior musical training are often able to sing shape-note music more easily than they believe possible, and, over

¹⁴ Jackson, 11.

¹⁵ As noted above, some Northern urban singers identified themselves as being part of an urban church music tradition which had trained them in music reading and other musical skills. This impression was also expressed by Joyce Harrison of Macon, Georgia, when she attended a New England Sacred Harp singing. Newspaper article by Rebecca Bailey, Valley News, White River Junction, Vermont, n.d., in the Sacred Harp Archives.

time, become quite able sight readers. The author has heard this expressed by many Northern singers and has witnessed the Chicago Sacred Harp group--comprised mainly of non-trained singers--read at sight a new tune with virtually no errors.¹⁶ On another occasion, at the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church, Black Mountain, North Carolina, in March of 1995, the author led a brief singing school. Only five of the approximately 75 persons in the room had ever heard of shape-note music. Only a handful of trained musicians, members of the choir, were present. Following a brief explanation, photocopies of basic rudiments were distributed, the group was led through "Fire Alarm" (rudiments, page 25, 1991 Edition) and continued with "New Britain" (45), "Holy Manna" (59) and "Northfield" (155). While the tunes to the first two songs may have been familiar to some, the use of syllables was not. When the group came to "Northfield," neither tune nor syllables were familiar. But with surprising facility this group sang--and then were eager to sight-sing other tunes! Their response indicated that shape-note singing was in fact easier than they had thought and that they had surprised themselves.

¹⁶ This was James P. Page's song "Northern Court," presented at the Chicago singing, 8 January 1995.

This experience demonstrated that the shape-note system remains a successful method for learning to sing the kinds of music included in the Sacred Harp books.

The Speed of the Spread

Sacred Harp singing has spread rapidly to regions outside the South in the last twenty-five years. The speed of the spread can be partially attributed to advances in communications technology and improvements in national infrastructure since the mid-twentieth century. Computer technology such as the Internet, including the Fasola mailing list and the various World Wide Web pages, now allows the spread of information and interaction among singers at an unprecedented speed. Information about singings, once passed only by word of mouth within a fairly limited geographic area, can now be exchanged within minutes around the world. The interstate highway system, begun in the early 1950s, is now complete to much of the U.S. and facilitates ease of travel on a level not possible in past years. Jet aircraft service, began in the U.S. in the early 1960s, now enables interested singers to move quickly between singings across large geographic areas. Additionally, the post World War II economic boom has

enabled young urban professionals to acquire both the leisure time and financial resources necessary to travel extensively. Older Southern singers, many of whom are retired, also possess the freedom, time and financial resources to travel more extensively than those of past generations.

Traditions New and Old

By all accounts, there is within the Sacred Harp tradition in the late twentieth century two distinct streams of activity: that which is devoted to the continued development of music and performance practice in the Sacred Harp style but which does not necessarily follow Southern tradition (e.g. the New England groups and some in the Northwest and California);¹⁷ and that which specifically follows the Southern traditions and seeks to preserve them (e.g. the Chicago group and others in the Northwest and California). All of the interviewees for this project confirmed the presence of this bifurcation of activity. In his essay, "Musical Revival as Musical Transformation," Burt Feintuch has noted that while many musicians within

¹⁷ An explanation of the term "Southern tradition" as used in this study may be found above, p. 32.

folk music revivals feel they are "bolstering a declining tradition," there can also be other outcomes:

. . . rather than encourage continuity, musical revivals recast the music--and culture--they refer to. They are actually musical transformations, a kind of reinvention. And in reality, each revival achieves its own momentum with its own standard repertoire and styles and its own selective view of the past.¹⁸

This seems to be the case with the spread of the Sacred Harp to the urban North.

In keeping with statements made by interviewees, 85% of survey respondents indicated Southern tradition is important and should be followed. In addition, they felt what innovations are made should be made only while following Southern tradition. A significantly smaller number were in favor of "free innovation" (10%) or following no tradition at all (7%). Nevertheless, other regions of the country that began by following Southern Sacred Harp tradition have sought to create it anew.

In 1987 Susan Garber stated:

Sacred Harp singing has expanded tremendously over the past fifteen or more years . . . and it

¹⁸ Bruce Feintuch in Rosenberg, 183-93, "Musical Revival as Musical Transformation."

has grown apart in some ways from its southern inspiration.¹⁹

Garber reports on the activities of several New England Sacred Harp singing groups including the Connecticut Valley Harmony, the Norumbega Harmony, the Gather Round Singers, and other smaller regional groups in New England. In her concluding comments she notes that:

In general, singings show revisionist tendencies, appending additional and new sets of words to favorite tunes, composing new tunes and (in some collectives²⁰) changing texts to reflect inclusive language. Parody is widely used among some groups. Their revisionism is evidence of a growing attempt among singers to personalize the music.²¹

Characteristics that Garber and other New England singers view as strengths, though, are looked on as curious and even offensive to many Southerners. This may account for the determination by some Southern singers not to attend some Northern singings.²²

The perspective of some New England singing groups is further clarified by material in the Sacred Harp Archives.

¹⁹ Garber, 8.

²⁰ Garber's word for Sacred Harp singing groups.

²¹ Garber, 257-58.

²² The author has heard a number of Southern singers express themselves at length on this topic.

In one article the author expresses a sentiment observed to be present in a number of articles and in other writings, such as the Garber thesis.²³ This sentiment seems to be a feeling of possessiveness by some Northerners towards Sacred Harp music: "Since this type of music actually did begin in New England," they say, "we certainly have nothing to learn from Southerners!" According to Sue Turbak, a member of the Norumbega Harmony:

In the last decade, Sacred Harp singing has returned from the South to its New England birthplace. The local singers started by copying the Southerners, but are now developing their own sound. With each New England convention, the tradition is being shaped and molded to fit our voices.²⁴

Their insistence appears to be on forming (or attempting to recover) their own New England singing traditions, accompanied by a complete repudiation of any Southern

²³ Newspaper article, Boston Globe, 28 September 1984. No author. Book 3, Sacred Harp Archives. An advertisement for a Sacred Harp singing in New England, written by Gennie Ely, in the Newsletter 7, number 5 (February/March 1992) says "We will concentrate on composers from Boston and Eastern Massachusetts. . . ." and names Billings, Belcher, French, Maxim, Holden, Holyoke, Kimball, Swann, Edson, Wood and Belknap.

²⁴ Ibid.

tradition. Furthermore, the author of another article²⁵ suggests Southerners would do well to take note of Northern traditions. She indicates that Southerners who really wish to follow original tradition should ask the Northerners to come down and teach them. This is similar to the phenomenon noted by I. Sheldon Posen:

Among Folksong revivalists, many who took the notion of "folk" as the basis of their quest for authenticity sooner or later decided they either couldn't or didn't have to go to outside groups for what they sought. Using criteria they had learned to apply to others, they could recontext and essentially validate a folk group they already belonged to, one that usually turned out to be their ethnic group. Their own authenticity was then built in. Their new style had replaced an understanding of the music in [any other] context, and [for them] had even become context.²⁶

Despite the feelings of some New England singers, many still support Southern tradition. One Sacred Harp singer from the Boston area was present at the Bethel and Holly Springs singings, and confirmed that a certain anti-Southern sentiment is developing among some Northern singers. She indicated that some groups are "much less

²⁵ Barbara Benary, newspaper article contained in Book 3, Sacred Harp Archives, n.d., n.p.

²⁶ I. Sheldon Posen, "On Folk Festivals and Kitchens," in Rosenberg, 129.

attentive [to Southern tradition] and more standoff-ish," but noted that there are others who want to follow the Southern traditions. Increasingly, those who desire to follow Southern tradition are forming their own groups or, as in her case, making a greater effort to travel to the South or to the Chicago area. She indicated that among New England singers she knew, the Chicago group has the reputation of following Southern tradition.²⁷

Not all Northern urban singers agree about what is more important. Survey data indicates that among Northern urban singers in the Chicago area, 38% felt that the Southern tradition is important and should be followed.²⁸ Nevertheless, another 47% of respondents indicated that they believed groups should use their knowledge of tradition to guide innovations in Sacred Harp singing. In other words, while they felt the Southern tradition was important, they also felt that some innovations, such as the use of gender-neutral language or more personalized

²⁷ Sharona Nelson, interview by author, 7 November 1994, Tape recording, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

²⁸ The feelings of interviewees and survey respondents with regard this matter were particularly passionate.

leading styles, were appropriate. But, unlike some Northern singers in other regions, Chicago singers indicated that most other modern social issues, such as that of gender-neutral language, held no importance for them insofar as the Sacred Harp tradition was concerned.²⁹ They feel that the Southern tradition should be followed and that includes singing the songs with the texts the way they are. Among Southern singers interviewed, none indicated an awareness of the use of gender-neutral language as an issue in current Sacred Harp singing.³⁰ While the New England groups clearly favor free innovation, the strongest group and the one with the most national influence outside the South currently is that of Chicago, which follows Southern tradition closely.

One of the most vigorous streams of activity in recent Sacred Harp singing is that of new collections of music in

²⁹ In saying that these things held no importance for them, several referred to what they knew Sacred Harp singers in other regions thought were important (e.g. the use of the word "Brethren," in "Holy Manna," number 59, or in "Pray, Brethren, Pray," number 162, which other groups feel is patriarchal and sometimes change to "Christians.")

³⁰ Most Southern interviewees either expressed no opinion on the issue or indicated they were unaware of gender-neutral language as an issue; several indicated they were completely unfamiliar with the term.

the shape-note style, all of which contain new compositions. New recent collections include An American Christmas Harp, The Sacred Harper's Companion, Emerald Stream, Northern Harmony, The New Northampton Collection of Sacred and Secular Harmony, The Valley Harmony, and Hamm Harmony.³¹ Like the most recent editions in the Denson and Cooper books, these collections contain at least some new pieces by living composers in the four-shape shape-note style, along with other shape-note music not contained in the Original Sacred Harp (Denson Revision).³²

³¹ Karen Willard, An American Christmas Harp (Buckley, Washington: By the author, 1994); Glen Wright and Susan Mampre, The Sacred Harper's Companion (Belmont, Massachusetts, By the authors, 1993); Larry Gordon Emerald Stream (Plainfield, Vermont, By the author, 1992); Tony Barrand, Larry Gordon, and Carole Moody Crompton, eds. Northern Harmony (Plainfield, Vermont, By the editors, 1990); Timothy Ericksen The New Northampton Collection of Sacred and Secular Harmony (Northampton, Massachusetts, By the author, n.d.); Bruce Randall The Valley Harmony (Broadway, Haverhill, Massachusetts, By the author, n.d.); Neely Bruce Hamm Harmony (Middletown, Connecticut, By the author, n.d.). A complete list of new collections and further information about each may be found in Steven Sabol's Sacred Harp and Related Shape Note Music: Resources. See appendix C.

³² For example, James Page's The Wisconsin Harmony (Madison, Wisconsin, By the author, 1992), contains "Exultation," (19), attributed to Humphreys, 1820; "Babe of Bethlehem," (26), by William Walker, 1835; and "Wabash," by Thomas Commuck, 1845.

While the Chicago group remains the largest and most active outside the South, Sacred Harp singings in other regions are active and growing. Interviews, survey data, anecdotal evidence and the number of articles and flyers in the Sacred Harp archives provide clear evidence of significant Sacred Harp singing activity in other cities outside the South. In the Midwest, other than Chicago, singing activity in Cincinnati, Ohio, and St. Louis, Missouri, is notably strong. In the Northwest, singings in Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, are the largest and most active. Sacred Harp singing activity in the West includes groups in San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco, California, all of which report vigorous activity. The newest of the groups is in the Southwest where regular singings are now held in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico.³³

³³ At the Holly Springs Convention in June of 1994, the author spoke informally with singers from all of these cities. All were enthusiastic about Sacred Harp singing activity in their area. Newspaper articles in the Sacred Harp Archives, follow-up correspondence with these singers via electronic mail posts to the Fasola mailing list, as well as general traffic observed on the list, and information from the Directory and Minutes confirms regular activity in these locations.

Recommendations for Further Study

Among the goals of additional study in these regions might be: 1) to further document how Urban groups outside the South were founded; 2) to better understand what type of person practices Sacred Harp singing in urban areas outside the South; 3) to further document which groups follow Southern tradition, which innovate while following Southern tradition, and which practice free innovation of Sacred Harp music; 4) to better understand why these groups follow or do not follow Southern tradition; and 5) to further explore the relationship between the Folk Music revival and Sacred Harp singing.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES AND SURVEY RESPONSE FORM

Interview Schedule for Southern Singers

1. When did you first begin to hear about singings in the North?
2. How long have you been going to the Northern singings?
3. Have you been to one more than the others? Or is there one that stands out in your mind as being a good one or better than some others?
4. How are their practices different?
5. Do they sing different tunes?
6. How important do you think the religious nature of the Sacred Harp is?
7. If I wanted to go and look at a Northern singing, which one do you think I should go to?
8. If I wanted to talk to someone from the North about how they do the singings, who would I talk to?

Interview Schedule for Northern Singers

1. When did Sacred Harp singing begin in Chicago?
2. Who first promoted or organized the activity?

3. How did (person named in #2 above) first hear about Sacred Harp singing?
4. Where does the group meet?
5. How regularly does the group meet?
6. Describe a typical singing.
7. How important to this group is the religious or spiritual nature of the Sacred Harp?
8. Do they attempt to follow any tradition or simply take the music and innovate freely?
9. Have you attended any singings outside this region?
10. Which ones have you attended?
11. Does the group make use of gender-neutral language in singing texts?
12. Does the group compose new music in the style?

Survey Response Form

- 1) How did you first hear about the Sacred Harp?

____folk festival
____friend or family member
____college or university group
____media advertisement (paper, radio, TV)
____other (specify)

- 2) How long have you been singing Sacred Harp music?

____one year or less
____one to five years

- ☐ five to ten years
- ☐ ten to twenty years
- ☐ more than twenty years

3) What is most important to you about Sacred Harp singing? Place a "1" by the most important, a "2" by the next most important and so on.

- ☐ the sound of the music
- ☐ the freedom to sing the way I want
- ☐ the community aspect of singing together
- ☐ being able to sing loud
- ☐ connection with living historic tradition
- ☐ the spiritual experience of worship
- ☐ other (specify) _____

4) Which region of the country would you say is your "home" region?

- ☐ North (including New England)
- ☐ South (including the Southeast)
- ☐ Midwest
- ☐ Northwest
- ☐ Southwest (including California)

5) In which region of the country do you now live? If same as #4, check "same." If different, specify.

- ☐ same
- ☐ North (including New England)
- ☐ South (including the Southeast)

- ☐ Midwest
- ☐ Northwest
- ☐ Southwest (including California)

6) In which region of the country does most of your immediate family (parents, brothers, sisters) live? If same as #4 and #5, check "same." If different, specify; check all that apply.

- ☐ same
- ☐ North (including New England)
- ☐ South (including the Southeast)
- ☐ Midwest
- ☐ Northwest
- ☐ Southwest (including California)

7) Which of the following statements best represents your feelings about a particular tradition of Sacred Harp singing?

☐ each regional group should innovate freely and find its own singing tradition independent of any other

☐ a particular tradition is not important to me

☐ Southern tradition is important and should be followed

☐ use knowledge of tradition to guide innovations in contemporary Sacred Harp singing

☐ a particular tradition is somewhat important to me.

8) Have you attended singings in regions outside the one in which you now live?

☐ Yes ☐ No

9) If "no" to #8, skip to #10. If "yes" to #8, in which other regions have you attended singings? Check all that apply.

_____ North (including New England)

_____ South (including the Southeast)

_____ Midwest

_____ Northwest

_____ Southwest (including California)

10) Use a "1" to indicate which statement best represents your feelings about the religious and/or spiritual aspect of Sacred Harp singing and a "2" for another statement that may also apply.

_____ I realize it is a part of the music, but it has no religious or spiritual meaning to me

_____ this aspect is very important to me

_____ without this aspect, the Sacred Harp isn't the Sacred Harp

_____ this aspect is somewhat important to me

_____ this aspect is unimportant to me

Appendix B

SACRED HARP INTERNET RESOURCES

The Fasola mailing list is an Internet mailing list of shape-note music enthusiasts, singers, scholars, performing artists, etc., currently over 200 in number, that is administered by Dr. Keith Willard at the University of Minnesota. After early e-mail correspondence and collecting of e-mail addresses by David Warren Steele at the University of Mississippi, Willard offered to administer the list, and on June 1st, 1993, with around thirty participants, it went online as 'shaped_note'. Run as merely a mail alias list on Willard's machine at the University of Minnesota, the list experienced a fairly steady growth and passed the 100 mark somewhere in February 1994. On June 28, 1994, the list was renamed "Fasola" and moved to the "majordomo" automated list server. In late August of 1994, the list archives were installed on the World Wide Web.

Unmoderated (unreviewed) messages can be posted by subscribers of the list to all other subscribers. There are limitations to use of the list, e.g. only subscribers may post, but anyone may subscribe to this list. Keith Willard writes:

The members of this list are primarily drawn from the four-shape fasola tradition of the Sacred Harp but others are present and very welcome. The type of subject material ranges very widely from personal experiences (many of our members regularly sing at traditional singing conventions and like to talk about it) to arcane historical/theoretical discussions. While vigorous discussions are common, civility is highly prized since most of us will sing together sooner or later.

The subscriber may request an automated server to send him/her by e-mail a variety of archival material, including past postings to this mailing list, bibliographies of articles on shape-note music, a composer index to The Sacred Harp, a postscript file of a graphic time-line history of shape-note singing, a directory of periodic singings, an index of shape-note tunes found on all available recordings, the latest version of this resource list, and other resources (these are also available on the World Wide Web; see below). Subscription is available to anyone who sends e-mail from the address at which he/she wishes to receive mail to the following automated-server

address: majordomo@tahiti.umhc.umn.edu. In the body of the message type "subscribe fasola."

World Wide Web Pages

The World Wide Web is a recently developed Internet information resource in which one can obtain multimedia information (text, graphics, color photos, and even sound and video recordings) from Internet sites around the world. A "home page" is usually the introduction to a subject and contains highlighted words or phrases ("hyperlinks") on which one can click to obtain new pages of information stored at different Internet sites. Access to the Web requires a browser program such as Mosaic or Netscape and either direct Internet access or a dial-up account with a commercial Internet provider with Web service. There are a number of Web pages about shape-note music. The Fasola Homepage developed by Keith Willard of the University of Minnesota provides access to the following resources:

"Introduction to Shape-Note Singing," by Keith Willard, with essays by several Sacred Harp singers; The Sacred Harp Online Index, by Chris Thorman (see description below);

"English Roots of American Shape Note Singing," by

Keith Willard; "Time Line of Fasola Related Events," by Keith Willard; the Shape-Note Resource Guide; "Bibliography of Shape Note Articles," by John Bealle; and the Shape Note Recording Index, by Berkley Moore. Also included are the 1995 Directory of Annual Sacred Harp Singings, from the Sacred Harp Publishing Co.; Local Regular Singing Directory, by Bob Hall and Ella Wilcox; archives of past Fasola mailing list messages; Fasola notation examples and sound sample hyperlinks to other relevant WWW pages, including one presenting the history of the shaped notes (see below), and notices about singings in selected cities. Other items are expected to be added to this resource in the near future, including a page about West Gallery music in Britain. The address for the Fasola homepage is:

http://martinique.umhc.umn.edu:8001/Docs/.www/fasola_homepage.html

The Sacred Harp Online Index by Chris Thorman is an integrated online version of all lyrics, words, titles, page numbers, poets, and composers in the Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition. As Mr. Thorman states, "Linked to the lyrics are the following indices: page numbers, titles, first lines, poets, composers, meters, words and phrases (Concordance). All of the indices are hyper-linked with the song lyrics

and vice-versa." For example, with the online concordance, one can look up a word, find a list of songs using the word, and then click on the name of a listed song to reveal the complete lyrics of and information about that song. There is also a list of the 200 most common words in the tunebook. This series of indices is reached through the Fasola Home Page or the following address:

[http://martinique.umhc.umn.edu:8001/Docs/
.www/Index/Index.html](http://martinique.umhc.umn.edu:8001/Docs/.www/Index/Index.html)

APPENDIX C

SACRED HARP AND RELATED SHAPE-NOTE MUSIC: RESOURCES

This extremely comprehensive booklet should be considered an indispensable tool to any type of research into four-shape shape-note music in general and to The Sacred Harp in particular; the resource specifically excludes seven-shape traditions. Its fourteen sections contain information on virtually every aspect of shape-note singing, as well as a broad range of related topics. Contributors include singers from all walks of life and from all regions of the country.

The resources guide is updated regularly and is available from the publisher. A photocopy of the title page, including information about how to contact the publisher, is found below.

SACRED HARP & RELATED SHAPE-NOTE MUSIC: RESOURCES

Compilation and commentary by Steven L. Sabol (Washington, D.C. Sacred Harp Singers)
with help from many singers, particularly Charles Whitener, Doug Allison, Keith Willard,
Cayton Powell, James Page, Barkley Moore, Kelly Day, Warren Steel, Robert Vaughn, and Bob Hall

Revised June 23, 1995

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STAR IN THE EAST. 11s & 10s.

R. Horan.

Compiler's Note: This list is intended to promote interest in and knowledge about shape-note singing, an activity attracting many amateur musicians. Rather than being a critical selection of materials meeting high standards, this list strives to be a compilation of all available serious resources by both amateurs and professionals (including theses and journal articles). The compiler has refrained from criticizing suboptimal productions by amateurs, because he seeks to encourage their efforts. This list focuses on music in the Sacred Harp style but not on seven-shape gospel music. For additional copies or updates, write to Steven L. Sabol, 5504 Lincoln St., Berwyn, MD 20817. Please enclose a check for \$2.00 per copy for photocopying and postage costs. Information about items to be added, or corrections, to this resource list are most welcome. This list may be freely copied.

VITA

Mark David Johnson was born September 3, 1956, at McAllen, Texas. His higher education was received at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree in voice performance. His Master's of Music degree in voice performance was received at Oklahoma City University. He pursued further graduate study at Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, where he received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in voice performance, with secondary concentrations in musicology and philosophy.

In addition to holding graduate assistantships at Oklahoma City University and Louisiana State University, Johnson's teaching experience includes an adjunct appointment at Southeastern Louisiana University, and a full-time appointment to the faculty of the World Evangelism Bible College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He has held positions in music ministry with churches in Oklahoma, Louisiana and North Carolina, and has appeared with

regional opera companies and symphony orchestras. At present he is head of the Department of Music at Montreat College, Montreat, North Carolina.

Mr. Johnson was elected to membership in Pi Kappa Lambda, national music honor society, and is a member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing.

He is married to the former Molly Cason. The Johnsons have a daughter, Sarah.

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

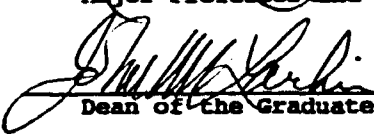
Candidate: Mark D. Johnson

Major Field: Music

Title of Dissertation: The Sacred Harp In The Urban North: 1970-1995

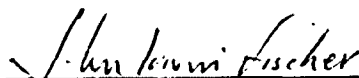
Approved:


Major Professor and Chairman


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:










Co-Chair

Date of Examination:

1/29/96
