

The SACRED HARP PUBLISHING COMPANY Newsletter

VOL. I, NO. 2 Stories about singers and singings, our music and traditions, and Sacred Harp's present-day growth.

AUG. 2012

Sacred Harp's "Yodeling Schoolgirl": the Story of "Little Lorraine"

By Chole Webb | Fort Worth, Texas



Lorraine Miles, age six, led "The Last Words of Copernicus" (p. 112 in *The Sacred Harp*) to win a gold piece in a children's singing contest at the 1930 Sacred Harp Singing Convention in Mineral Wells, Texas.

WITHOUT a doubt, the most recognizable face to Sacred Harp singers today is that of a little girl leading a song, one arm raised and holding in the other a large rectangular songbook. The sepia-toned photograph was chosen by Matt and Erica Hinton for the cover of their documentary *Awake My Soul, the Story of the Sacred Harp*. Singers across the country quickly fell in love with the little girl and wanted to know what had become of her.

While a companion soundtrack was being completed, bass player Murry Hammond said it should be easy to find her. The Hintons had already been

searching for three years and knew only that her name was Lorraine Miles and that the photo from the archives of hymnology historian George Pullen Jackson was taken in 1930 at a Sacred Harp singing convention in Mineral Wells, Texas. Following a hunch, Hammond began his own search, and within a few days, he told them a librarian in Mineral Wells had confirmed that Lorraine Miles *McFarland* was a current resident of the city. He even had her contact information. Hinton immediately phoned McFarland and surprised her with news that her face was on CDs, DVDs, and T-shirts all

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across the country.

Lorraine McFarland is petite, lively, and very attractive, with a ready smile and quiet sense of humor. She lives with her older daughter and son-in-law in the home that Lorraine and her late husband bought in 1976 when he retired from the military and they returned to her hometown. She'd been a six-year-old schoolgirl at the 1930 Sacred Harp convention in Mineral Wells, where W. T. Coston of Dallas sponsored a children's singing contest. Lorraine led a song, "The Last Words of Copernicus" (p. 112 in *The Sacred Harp*), and won a valuable gold piece. She proudly

Introducing Vol. 1, No. 2 of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter

Jesse P. Karlsberg

I'm excited to announce the publication of the second issue of *The Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*.

This issue features Chloe Webb's fascinating account of the life of Lorraine Miles McFarland, the girl depicted on the cover of *Awake, My Soul* as well as a preview of the forthcoming shape note songbook *The Shenandoah Harmony*. A special section of this issue is a selection of reports on each of the five all-day singings and conventions held on the fifth Sunday this past April (and the Saturday before). It is a testament to the vitality of Sacred Harp singing that all the singings held that weekend were a success. These singing reports also display the wonderful variety in our singings: those described ranged in attendance from over 200 to fewer than 15, and featured a variety of locations, songbooks, dinner on the grounds dishes, and traditions.

Please continue to write us and leave comments with your feedback. We welcome your news, questions, corrections, and ideas for future articles. And keep an eye out for our third issue! ■

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From an April 1, 1971 newspaper article commemorating the 1930 singing convention.

presented the prize to her father, who was struggling to support his family of eight children. They ate "pret-ty good" for about two weeks, she says with a smile.

In a laminated newspaper photo of a large group of well-dressed people on the steps of the Mineral Wells Convention Hall, she pointed to two small girls dressed in white on the front row. "There I am right there, peeking around my sister Nettie. That's the day I won the gold piece."

Mr. Coston was so pleased with the children's singing that he invited all of them to spend a weekend at the Coston home in Dallas, which Lorraine described as "more like a grand hotel, not just a house." At the time, the Miles' home lacked electricity and indoor plumbing. The most memorable feature of the Coston home was a huge bathroom with tile floors. It was summertime; she and Nettie lay down and pressed their faces to the delightfully cool floor.

Lorraine and Nettie's mother, Lula Hearn Miles, had come to Texas with her parents shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. The Hearn family had sung Sacred Harp music in Alabama and brought the music to Texas with them.

Lorraine's mother encouraged all of her children to learn shape note music, often singing at home, and arranged for them to attend a singing school taught in Mineral Wells by the well-known shape note singing master, "Uncle" Tom Denson.

The family sang together for fun, like her mother's family had done, and frequently put on their own "shows." One Christmas, the family was exuberantly singing together when someone began pounding on the front door. They were living in a duplex, and they suddenly realized they were disturbing the neighbors. They prepared to apologize on opening the door, but instead, the neighbor demanded, "What station are you listening to?! We can't find it on our radio!"

In the Miles' home, the radio was always tuned to a station with music, and someone was always singing along. That's how Lorraine learned to yodel. Her oldest brother Fred thought she was "pret-ty good," she laughs. He came to school one day to mysteriously get her out of class. When they'd left the building, he told her he was taking her to Fort Worth for an *audition* at radio station KFJZ. She was put into a booth and handed a microphone. She sang a yodeling song and giggled at the end,

which must have added to her charm, for she was offered a job on the popular radio show, "Hayride." However, the family had no automobile of their own, and with no way to get to Fort Worth on a regular basis, she soon had to quit.

But Fred was a good promoter, and soon Lorraine was singing with a band called the "Washboard Swingsters" on a show broadcast locally in Mineral Wells. Western swing music was wildly popular, and "Little Lorraine, the yodeling schoolgirl," was an instant sensation on the show's daily broadcast at noon, which was prime time. An elderly Fort Worth woman recalls listening to the show every day as she washed lunch dishes.

Lorraine sometimes performed with the Washboard Swingsters in Fort Worth—notably, for an engagement during the Stock Show at the Silver Spur, which was "the" night club in the city. One night, Lorraine lost her voice as she began to sing. She tried again, but nothing came out. Amon G. Carter, owner and publisher of *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, was sitting front and center with a table of guests. Suddenly, a woman at Carter's table arose, took Lorraine's arm and said, "Don't worry about a thing. I'll fill in for you." The woman was Ann Miller. While the fifteen-year-old Lorraine recuperated, the Hollywood star Ann Miller sang and danced, thrilling the live audience as she continued to do for decades on film and on Broadway.

The Washboard Swingsters were also a hit, and Lorraine's voice returned. Radio station WBAP in Fort Worth, which aired such stars as W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel and his Hillbilly Boys, hired the Swingsters and Little Lorraine to broadcast directly from the Crazy Water Hotel, right there at home.

Water from local wells tasted terrible but became renowned for miraculous healing powers when a mentally disturbed woman, called the "crazy lady," regained emotional stability after habitually sipping water from one of the wells, thereafter called the Crazy Well. Large hotels had been built for thousands of visitors who came to baths and spas in Mineral Wells during the 1920s, but after the stock market crash

in 1929, people could no longer afford to travel. Owners of the Crazy Water Hotel, Carr and Hal Collins, who had first hired Lorraine, decided to take the water to the people—not by expensive bottling and shipping but by packaging the crystalline residue after the water had been boiled. When reconstituted, a single \$1.50 box of crystals would make five gallons of Crazy Water. The Swingsters and Little Lorraine had become immensely popular, and the Mineral Wells Chamber of Commerce hired the "Crazy Gang" to tour all over Texas with a road show promoting the town and "Crazy Water Crystals."

Lorraine was unaware of the wide breadth of the broadcast span until a sister in Odessa wrote the family that she had heard Lorraine on a Del Rio radio station broadcasting from Mexico. The show was actually broadcast on the NBC network to the entire nation from the lobby of the Crazy Water Hotel. The United States and Canada had formed an agreement that assigned and regulated radio frequencies, with 50,000 watts as the highest broadcasting power. However, Mexico was not part of the

agreement, and stations could broadcast from Mexico with as much as 500,000 watts. Until the practice was stopped, some U.S. stations installed transmission equipment across the border in Mexico, and transcription disks were transported from studios—such as that in the Crazy Water Hotel—to the station's office in Del Rio, Texas.

After the broadcast one day, Lorraine was told to bring her parents with her the next day: two talent scouts from Hollywood wanted to talk with them. The scouts said they had heard and seen Lorraine perform and thought she could have a successful career in the motion picture industry. They offered her a year of training in California, with auditions and management advice—all expenses paid. All they wanted in return was the right to be her agent.

Lorraine did *not* want to go. As a high school senior, she could not bear missing out on any more teenage fun. She tried to get her father's attention, mouthing, "No, no!" Finally, he began to speak. He thanked the men for their generous offer, then he said, "But I don't think this is the right thing for Lorraine right now."

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"Little Lorraine, the yodeling schoolgirl" on Fort Worth radio station WBAP with the "Washboard Swingsters" (later known as the Crazy Gang).



Lorraine Miles McFarland, *Awake My Soul* cover girl, in 2010—eighty years after the 1930 Mineral Wells Sacred Harp Singing Convention.

Lorraine's dancing and skating skills were also noticed. Her sister Nettie invited Lorraine to go with her to a dance at the U.S.O. Club; a sergeant wanted to meet her. The now seventeen-year-old Lorraine was offended that she would be interested in meeting an *old* man. But the dance sounded exciting; she had heard from her friends that there were young soldiers still in their teens at the U.S.O. She was on the dance floor when Nettie approached her from behind and said, "Lorraine, I'd like you to meet Sgt. A.J. McFarland." There, in full dress uniform, was the most handsome man she'd ever seen. Their eyes met, taking her breath away.

"Mac" McFarland later admitted that he'd seen her skating and devised a way to meet her. He was from Oklahoma and was only nineteen years old (although his "military" age was twenty-one). They were married a month later, a short while before her eighteenth birthday, and Mac—or rather, the military—took her off to see the world.

But she had not been forgotten in Mineral Wells. Lorraine soon received a phone call from Hal Collins, president of the Crazy Water, telling her that he was going to run for governor of the State of

Texas. The current governor, the former radio star, W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, had decided not to run for re-election but would instead run for the U.S. Senate. (O'Daniel's political race for governor was loosely parodied—though fictionally set in Mississippi—in the film, *O Brother, Where art Thou?* The real-life campaign in Texas was the only political race that O'Daniel's opponent Lyndon B. Johnson ever lost.)

Collins told Lorraine that he and O'Daniel were planning a joint campaign tour across the state, and they wanted her to join them. The rest of the Crazy Gang was already on board. The offer was \$127 plus expenses for the two-week tour. Mac was making \$68 per month in the military. He said, "Go."

They traveled by bus and automobile, while a truck with a bed served as the stage. Pat, Mike, and Molly O'Daniel, the governor's grown children, not much older than Lorraine, traveled with them. When pressed for details of the tour's campaign promises, she admitted that she didn't actually listen to the speeches. An article in the June 2, 1941 issue of *Time* magazine reported that at campaign rallies, Collins gave a mattress to the largest family present.

As the campaign's headliner, Governor "Pappy" O'Daniel, who'd first gained fame as announcer and manager of the Light Crust Doughboys, sometimes carried a broom, promising to sweep out corruption.

Lorraine did eventually see a big part of the world with Mac. After the war was over, she joined him when he was stationed in bombed-out Nuremburg, Germany, where she attended the Nuremburg trials nearly every day. Returning to Nuremburg a few years later, she found it transformed into a sparkling, thoroughly modern city. Lorraine and Mac traveled to other distant countries—France, Italy, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Thailand—through their fifty-one years of marriage.

While she was visiting her parents in Mineral Wells after her younger daughter was born, Lorraine's father held the new baby on his lap and watched contentedly as her older child played nearby. As Lorraine talked of her life and her family, he said on seeing her happiness, he was glad they had turned down the offer from the Hollywood talent scouts. The subject had never been discussed after the decision was made, but he must have occasionally pondered "what-ifs."

Lorraine and her family had sung Sacred Harp music until the singings ceased in Mineral Wells. Eventually, the old Convention Hall where W. T. Coston awarded gold pieces was demolished. A few months after the interview with Matt Hinton, Lorraine attended the East Texas Sacred Harp Singing Convention in Henderson, Texas, her first Sacred Harp singing in more than seventy-five years. She led "The Last Words of Copernicus" with Mike Hinton—no relation to Matt, but the grandson of her early singing school instructor, "Uncle" Tom Denson. There she stood, with one arm raised and holding in the other a long, rectangular songbook. "Fa-La-Sol," she sang. Voices found a pitch, and then filled the room with pulsing sound. It all came back to her; she didn't miss a beat. ■

Singing Reports

The Southwest Texas Convention

Text and Photographs by Matt Hinton | Atlanta, Georgia



Matt, Erica, and Anna Hinton leading with Lorraine Miles.

THIS year my family and I went, for the third time, to the Spring session of the Southwest Texas Sacred Harp Convention. The convention was held at Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in McMahan, Texas on April 28–29. Here is what happened:

We took what has become our standard route from our home in Atlanta: through Montgomery and Mobile, and through New Orleans, where we stayed for the remainder of the first day. Traveling 16 hours to Lockhart with two young kids is no joke, so splitting the journey in half is good. New Orleans sits almost exactly halfway between Atlanta and Lockhart, TX. It is a lovely city and is populated by Sacred Harp singer Charles Franklin as well as some other folks. But of all the population of New Orleans, it is Charles that we enjoy visiting with the best. He is an excellent guide to New Orleans and seems determined to only take us to restaurants called “Liuzza’s.” Last time it was “Liuzza’s by the Track,” a cajun/creole place. This time it was an Italian place just called “Liuzza’s.”

Charles is a photographer whose series of Sacred Harp images [www.crfranklinphoto.com] are among the most affecting I have seen. We met him

in 1998 at Holly Springs in Bremen, GA where he asked to take a picture of Erica. He did not ask to take a picture of me. He can usually be found at Liberty in Henagar on the first Sunday of July and Saturday before, as well as at State Line, in April. Charles is from Arkansas but has lived in New Orleans for over thirty years. He was one of the many who escaped New Orleans on a boat after Katrina hit. He works on various film and television productions in New Orleans. It was a pleasure to catch up with him. The next morning, after croissants and beignets (which, let’s face it, are basically the same thing as funnel cakes, but with a fancy-sounding name) we hit the road.

After Louisiana comes Texas, and it is a big one. When you cross the state line, a mileage sign informs you that Beaumont is 23 miles away and El Paso is 857 miles. Very arrogant. (Weirdly, this makes Texas only the second largest state we’ve sung in. Alaska actually dwarfs Texas, and the singing in Sitka—a very small city in a very huge state—is lovely. Go ahead and make plans for a trip there in October. You won’t regret it.) Anyway, we made our way to Lockhart, TX, where we were staying with Jeb, Liz, Riley, Jackson, and Lauren Owen.

In fact, it was a rushed journey as we had every intention of making it there by 7 pm. Kreuz Market is one of several world-renowned purveyors of BBQ, the likes of which you have probably never had unless you have been to Lockhart or Luling, just down the road. Kreuz (the locals say “Krites”) closes at 8, so we had time to eat a big pile of brisket and sausage before they closed. I think I would drive to Lockhart just for the BBQ. It’s really difficult to express how good it is.

Thankfully, the singing in McMahan (just up the road from Lockhart) is as good as the BBQ (maybe better). The Southwest Texas Convention (no one I asked was able to tell me with much confidence why it was called the Southwest Texas Convention when it isn’t in Southwest Texas at all) is a big, loud Sacred Harp singing. It is hosted in a small-ish Primitive Baptist church on a property that includes such features as an old cemetery, a fellowship hall (which, evidently, is the original old church), some mesquite trees which grow as much horizontally as vertically (thus providing an excellent natural bench for young kids), and perhaps the largest shelter/tabernacle for dinner on the grounds that I have ever seen. Also, it is always fantastically windy and warm. You’d better hold onto your plate cause you’re liable to lose it to the wind. The grounds are as lovely and inviting as any church we sing at. The church itself is able to accommodate about 200 folks and when we started singing, it’s almost shocking how powerful the sound is. This convention has become a well-attended singing, drawing visitors from hither and yonder. For example, in the three years I have visited the Southwest Texas Convention, it has consistently drawn a strong contingent of singers from Sand Mountain, AL and Hoboken, GA. This year, there was an especially strong Wootten presence from Sand Mountain, AL.



Left: Some young singers socialize during recess.



Top right: Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in McMahan, TX—site of the Southwest Texas Convention.



Bottom right: Erica and Anna Hinton with Lorraine Miles.

Now, the Southwest Texas Convention is a Cooper book singing, but the convention feels like a cross between a Denson and Cooper book singing. On one hand the Cooper book is the book we sang from, but the Texas singers seem to favor the songs that Denson book singers think of as “Denson book songs” but which they themselves think of, quite rightly, as “Sacred Harp songs.” In other words, comparatively few gospel-type songs were led, and those who did lead them were usually Denson book singers who seem to feel the need to lead distinctively “Cooper book songs” when they are at a Cooper book singing (I am no exception). In other words, it is precisely the Denson book singers who skew the song choices toward more Gospel-flavored material. Nevertheless, the Southwest Texas Convention is decidedly oriented toward dispersed harmony, whether in the form of those songs that it shares with the Denson book or else those songs that would fit almost seamlessly in the Denson book.

Another noteworthy quality of the Southwest Texas Convention is the singers themselves. In general, I would say that a Sacred Harp singer does not need to have a strong, polished voice.

It is as a whole class of singers that our voices join in such a way that the whole becomes vastly more than the sum of its parts. This is not necessarily the case at the Southwest Texas Convention. Without wishing to generalize, these folks, even individually, can flat-out sing. Their voices just sound good. Not in any showy way—they just sing round honest tones, without evident vibrato. They aren’t like the rest of us who get by OK because we’re in a big group. They are great singers (apart from that guy Jeb, whose last name I will not mention) and it is a pleasure to sing with them.

Since I first attended the Southwest Texas Convention, I have often thought that as a convention and as a singing community, it is like a Cooper book version of the singing convention at Liberty Baptist Church in Henagar, AL which is rightly famous as one of the really outstanding large singings in the country. Each community is strongly associated with two or three prominent families who have been each singings’ most visible supporters (where there are a preponderance of Iveys and Woottens at Liberty and Sand Mountain generally, there are Owens and Rogans at the Southwest Texas

Convention.) Connected to this is the fact that both on Sand Mountain and in McMahan/Lockhart, TX there is this other sign of family involvement: children. These families among the very few traditional singing families whose children have actually continued the tradition of Sacred Harp singing, and from the looks of things, seem likely to persist. In both Sand Mountain and McMahan/Lockhart, there are as many as four generations of family singers represented. This is heartening but is a troubling reminder of other regions on the Sacred Harp map which have uncertain futures. On both days there were packs of kids running around during breaks and in the house for the singing. Naturally, our kids, Anna (7) and Eli (4) had a blast.

Also like Henagar is the amazing dinner on the grounds. Naturally, in Texas, brisket and sausages from the local BBQ joints are featured prominently. Unlike Henagar, they don’t know how to make sweet tea in McMahan, so watch out! Dinner is spread on a long set of tables in the old church that was replaced by the newer structure on the property. This old white church house is now used as a fellowship



Charles Franklin, with leftovers.

hall and is just beautiful. It has old schoolhouse globe lighting and they pipe the sound in from the singing through the old speakers that are mounted on the wall so the ladies laying out the food can hear. And the food was great—one of the highlights of the day.

The final similarity to singing in Henagar that I'll mention is that the Southwest Texas Convention hosts a large social at one of the schools in Lockhart on Saturday night. It is an occasion to catch up with folks that one only had time to wave to from across the hall, and to eat hamburgers and hotdogs (if you hadn't already snuck off to Smitty's Market to get some more of that fine brisket and sausage, as we had). A distinctive feature of the social is that by the time it starts to get dark outside, copies of a book called *Harp of Ages* get distributed and we get to sing again, this time from a little soft cover book that collects songs we know from *The Sacred Harp* as well as hymns and gospel songs. Everyone was made to feel welcome and happy to be there.

One of the real pleasures of this singing was visiting with Lorraine Miles McFarland, known by many as "that little girl on the cover of [our Sacred Harp documentary] *Awake, My Soul*." You can learn more about her in Chloe

Webb's story on page 1 in this issue, but suffice it to say, she is everything you had hoped she would be, and a good deal less stern than you might think. She is friendly, charming, and for being in her late 80s, is remarkably active, as well as possessing a sharp memory. She sat next to our Anna, who is the same age that Lorraine was when her photo was taken by George Pullen Jackson at the Interstate Sacred Harp Convention in 1931 in Mineral Wells, TX. They got along famously, and within a short time decided that they are now best friends. They have since begun a written correspondence.

Despite not having gone to singings since the 1930s, Lorraine has a strong memory of the songs she used to sing, even recalling the notes of many of them (they sang out of the James revision of the *Original Sacred Harp* when she was little). She is, after all, one of the very few students of "Uncle" Tom Denson's singing schools still alive. We marvel

with one another about the fact that a photo taken 80+ years ago has brought our family and her together and we have become fast friends. At the social, Chloe Webb gave a presentation about Lorraine's very remarkable life. Lorraine seemed embarrassed by the attention, but I think she enjoyed reflecting on her life in this way.

As is usual, the singing on Sunday was even better than Saturday. Naturally, on our way to the singing, we picked up 25 sausages from Smitty's and snuck them in the freezer in the fellowship hall till the end of the day. We spent the night in Austin, which is only about 30 minutes from Lockhart, and is the home of such things as tacos and tamales. The next day we headed back east (by the way, does anyone say "out east" and "back west"?), nor did we neglect to pay New Orleans a visit that night.

An altogether edifying and enjoyable trip.

We can't wait for next year. ■



Curtis and Tom Owen lead at the Southwest Texas Convention.

Singing Reports

The 27th Midwest Sacred Harp Singing Convention

Photography by Ted Johnson, text by Ted Mercer | Chicago, Illinois



The Sunday class swelled to over 150 singers after lunch.

THE Chicago class once again hosted the annual Midwest Convention, held this year on April 28 at the Historic Pulaski Park Fieldhouse, and on April 29 at the Irish American Heritage Center, both locations on Chicago's north side. Attendance was robust, belying low expectations for a Midwest singing date falling at the end of April (the result of an obscure calendrical formula based on "5th Sundays" combined with a date obverse to a former (!) formula of the Union Musical Convention in the Atlanta area. (It is said that only three Chicago singers are privy to this occult knowledge.)

The new Saturday location, with its ornate plaster barrel-vault ceiling, was a big hit. The moveable "singing wall" behind the last row of tenors had to be moved after the first recess to accommodate more singers, who after lunch numbered 140 around the square. The largest contingent of visitors by far came from Minnesota (and 14 other states were represented). The bass was especially strong.

On Saturday evening, hostess Kris Richardson invited singers to her home on the north side for refreshments and an enjoyable sight-reading session from the forthcoming *Shenandoah Harmony* led by Pennsylvanians Dan Hunter and former Chicago alto Kelly Kennedy. "And not one note of gospel all evening," one Chicago singer muttered with satisfaction as she left. Rochelle Lodder reports that the Hyde Park group has been singing many of the "sampler" songs at its weekly singings.

Sunday the class, led by Chairs Susan Geil and Randy Neufeld, reconvened in the Fifth Province Room at the Irish American Center, without loss of attendees. The singing wall had to be moved back once again at a recess, and when we resumed after lunch the class had swelled to about 155. A moving Memorial Lesson, led by Kathy Williams and Kelly Kennedy, was held just before lunch.

This singing marked the debut of a double-CD of the 2011 session of this convention ably recorded by Ohio bass

Shawn Fenton. This recording has been enthusiastically received and can be ordered directly from Shawn Fenton, 18 Sue Dr, Germantown, OH 45327, email sfenton1@woh.rr.com. Cost is \$15/copy plus \$2 postage (add 50 cents per additional item).

I have asked other singers for recollections and comments about the singing. Here are a few:

Carol Mosley: "Joy. Just pure joy."

Petrina Patti: "An astounding experience; I had those songs running through my head for days afterwards."

Ann Sleeva: "It was great to have members of the Chicago Children's Choir bring the class back from a break with Lisa Grayson."

Co-Chair Randy Neufeld: "The first day at Pulaski Park was the best ever... the room had great energy and old Park District charm. I'm always amazed that so many drive so far."

Jim Swanson: "On Saturday I was struck by the sound: sitting in the back row of the bass, it was like I was right up front."

Steven Schmidgall: “The opening chord made my hair stand on end and I was sure nothing could be better ... but I was wrong. Saturday evening had ‘Fasolakia Lamb’ at the Original Psistaria Greek Restaurant on Touhy. It was great to hear Jim Helke (recovering from heart bypass) lead ‘The Spirit Shall Return.’ Sure was a GREAT day to be a bass. I stretched my personal ‘Sacred Harp’ so much that a day after returning to Minnesota I still sounded like Johnny Cash.”

Ginny Landgraf: “Leading ‘Granville’ on Saturday I led it fairly slow and sang the crunchy unprinted tenor notes. The intensity of the room and class were perfect.”

Jeff Breting: “Most memorable for me was singing with the MINNESOTA BASSES and sitting next to Jim Swanson. I also enjoyed having lunch with Johanna Fabke and hearing her recollections of being in Chicago during the early days of improv theatre and comedy. I will also remember sharing rides with Donna Van Stralen of Minnesota and hearing about her amazing adventures serving in Haiti after the earthquake.”

Ted Johnson: “I suppose I can look back on our 2012 Midwest Convention with either a short-term perspective or a long one. Long-term, we do go back some years now to the 1980s, when we first became part of an emerging Sacred Harp diaspora. That’s still only a small piece of what extends so much further back into the American past—the long moving river to which our recent stream connects, but I got the feeling that this year, among our new friends and our old ones, with fresh officers and a different venue, we once again helped carry forward—and were strongly carried along by—the living current of tradition that helps keep us afloat. As for the short term, the individual moments and experiences, it’s hard to remember them now—I may have been zoned out. That’s what happens at singings at their best: you can enter into a space where time is both rushing and standing still, and here you may connect to singers past, present, and to come. The photographs I took are little frozen slices, glimpses into that timeless space. From the look of things, we were having a good time.” ■



Top to bottom: For Steven Schmidgall (far right) it “was a GREAT day to be a bass”; Altos in the spirit!; tenors enjoying the moment at the new Saturday location of the Midwest Convention.

Singing Reports

Fish Fry and Fasola: The Harrods Creek/Bob Meek Memorial Convention

Text by Michelle Cull, Louisville, Kentucky | Photography by Darrell Swarens, Bloomington, Indiana



The late Bob Meek leads at the Harrods Creek Convention in August, 2009.

THE 17th annual Harrods Creek/Bob Meek Memorial Convention was held April 28–29, 2012 at Harrods Creek Baptist Church in Brownsboro—just outside Louisville, KY. We were blessed to have singers from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Virginia, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Alabama, Colorado, and Minnesota in attendance.

The singing was started by Bob Meek in 1991 as a one day singing, and expanded into a two-day convention in 1999. He was an ardent supporter of singings and spreading the word about Sacred Harp, going as far as having “FASOLA” and “SHAPES” as license plates. Upon Bob’s passing on January 12, 2011, “Bob Meek Memorial” was added to honor his memory and commitment to shape note singing. Our hope is that the convention will be a long standing tribute to him.

The original church where the singing is held was built in the 1820s. The stone

walls and wood floors provide a resonant room in which to sing. Members of the church have preserved this historic structure and it has been placed on the National Historic Register. Other features of the grounds include a pond, a playground and a modern (1960s) church building.

The weekend started with our traditional Fish FRYday at Vine Street Baptist Church. David Waters (my brother) catches, cleans and fries around 100 pounds of catfish every year for the dinner. I and other family members provide sides, desserts and drinks. Several out of towners make it a point to attend the Fish Fry every year.

One of the unique aspects of this singing is the use of three books: The 1991 and Cooper editions of *The Sacred Harp*, and *The Southern Harmony*. Leaders can call from whichever book they choose. This means we sing fewer songs than in a straight red book

singing, but the variety offers singers the opportunity to lead something they have never tried before. Out of 140 songs led over the weekend, twenty-two were from *Southern Harmony* and twenty-three from the Cooper book. The singing moved along pretty smoothly despite the constant switching of books.

On Saturday, there were over 80 singers in attendance. The class was strong, especially with a full bass section and an experienced front tenor bench. Highlights for me included John Bayer leading “Dove of Peace” from *Southern Harmony* and Joan Aldridge and Elene Stovall leading “Ninety Fifth” (p. 36b from *The Sacred Harp*) with Darrell Swarens. It was good to see some of our wayward folk, Stephanie Fida and Liz Meitzler (among others) who have left the area but returned to sing with us.

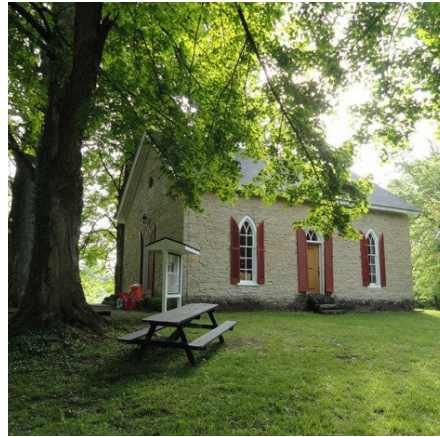
Lunch both days was organized by Pat Meek and her crew. We are blessed to have a group of non-singers who are

willing to help all weekend. Leftover catfish, twenty-five pounds of beer-marinated meatballs and forty pounds of smoked pork butt were highlights of lunch with an array of sides and desserts. If you left hungry, it was your own fault!

After the singing on Saturday, there was a tailgate jam session of sorts, with Vic Whisman, Greg Howard, Stephanie Fida, and Nikkos Pappas showing off their instrumental skills on fiddle, banjo and bones. Close by, historic LaGrange, KY offered a nice respite for singers. Several singers strolled along Main Street enjoying the shops and local car show. The Saturday night chili supper featured Bob Meek's recipe with (gasp!) spaghetti, a tradition in this region. We then adjourned to sing selections from the forthcoming *Shenandoah Harmony*.

With a shortage of basses on Sunday, the treble section stepped up to the plate especially in the afternoon on "Jacob's Vision" (p. 551) and "Save Lord or We Perish" (p. 224) among others. The altos were strong all weekend. I particularly enjoyed Peggy Brayfield leading a slow tempo "Great Roll Call" out the Cooper book [originally printed in the 1911 James edition of the Original Sacred Harp—ed.]. Darrell Swarens and Jim Herr offered a moving Memorial Lesson.

Many thanks go out to the Pat and the Kitchen Crew, food toters, pew movers, and everyone who made the singing possible. Bob would be proud! ■



Pictured

Top left: Harrods Creek Baptist Church, Brownsboro, Kentucky.

Top right: Stephanie Fida visiting with Katherine and Rebecca Eldridge.

Middle: Elene Stovall, Darrell Swarens, and Joan Aldridge lead "Ninety-fifth" (p. 36b) on Saturday.

Bottom: Alabama and Kentucky singers at the 2002 Harrods Creek Convention.

Singing Reports

Fifth Sunday Singing in Old Chicora, Florida

By Mary Ellen Schrock | Sarasota, Florida



Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church is the site of the 5th Sunday singing in Old Chicora, FL. Photograph by Peggy A. Bulger, State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/119633>.

OLD Chicora, located approximately 40 miles southeast of Tampa, FL, on the far eastern edge of Hillsborough County, has been home to Sacred Harp singing since the late 1800s. Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church has been the site since the early 1920s, hosting singing every fifth Sunday from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm, with dinner on the grounds at noon. Most years have four months with five Sundays, but this year we were fortunate to have five.

The congregation was incorporated in 1871, but singings weren't held in the church until May 1924. The earliest singers met in homes, and later at the Johnson School about 2 miles away from the present site. (The schoolhouse is no longer standing.) The first church building was constructed of logs. (One singer recalls hat racks on the walls, in an era when men wore hats and suits to most public events.) The present concrete-block structure was constructed

in 1960.

In years past, Sacred Harp singings were also held in nearby areas of Central Florida, including Vero Beach and Winter Garden. The latter was home to the Florida State Convention before it moved to its current home in Panama City.

As with any activity in Florida, attendance varies with the season. In recent years, attendance in winter has been as high as 45, and attendance in the off-season averages 20 to 25. We've been fortunate to have the occasional participation of singers from the Tallahassee and Gainesville (Micanopy) areas as well as Georgia.

This past April, I was among 20 or so singers at Bethlehem. Though our group wasn't large, we had a good day of strong singing. As usual, I led "Exhortation" (p. 171 in both *The Sacred Harp*, 1991 Edition and the Cooper book). When leading this song at Bethlehem—a Cooper book

singing—I bring printouts from the 1991 Edition, which has two verses (Cooper has only one). In my early days singing here, this song was unknown to most of the group—but it is now a well-known part of our repertoire.

I discovered the Old Chicora group through fasola.org soon after purchasing a second home in the Sarasota area in 2004. For several years, while working in New York City (my introduction to Sacred Harp), I planned regular Florida "mini-vacations" to coincide with the fifth-Sunday singings. Now actively retired, I frequently travel to sing wherever and whenever the Spirit leads (and finances allow), but have a special bond with Bethlehem.

Many of the Bethlehem singers have roots in Sacred Harp singing in the area going back several generations. Moderator Janice Clenney has attended singings for over 70 years, first as a small child accompanying her parents. Her maternal grandfather Jesse Arthur Albritton sang Sacred Harp. When Jesse's daughter Ella Mae (Janice's mother) married Uriel Benton, Jesse requested that his new son-in-law bring Ella Mae back for singings, and Uriel did so faithfully.

Janice's earliest Sacred Harp memories are of playing with her dolls on the floor near her family while they sang. When she heard "Send A Blessing" (p. 369), she knew it was time for dinner. (The tradition of singing "Send A Blessing" before breaking for the meal continues today.) Janice's husband Jeril accompanies her to the singings, and their daughters and granddaughters are often with them.

Ernestine Albritton Mann Stalvey, age 90, has also been singing Sacred Harp in Bethlehem since she was a small child accompanying her parents. Her father, Jefferson F. Albritton, was Jesse Arthur's brother. Ernestine's son Terry Mann and daughter Claudia McCormick



The late M. Lane Albritton, moderator (for many years) of the Bethlehem singing, leading in August 1979. Photograph by Peggy A. Bulger, State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/119861>.



The late Iris Albritton Yarbrough, leading at a Bethlehem singing in August 1979. Photograph by Peggy A. Bulger, State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/119635>.

Janice's earliest Sacred Harp memories are of playing with her dolls on the floor near her family while they sang. When she heard "Send a Blessing" she knew it was time for dinner.

now bring their mother to the singings, sometimes with Claudia's daughters.

Eileen Moody and LeeAnn Aycock are sisters who sing at Bethlehem. Their late mother, Iris Albritton Yarbrough, shown leading in 1979 in the attached photo, was Janice Clenney's aunt.

Joining this stalwart supporters of Sacred Harp singing in our area this April were some singers. Among these was Kathryn Keller, who was introduced to Sacred Harp in a class at a junior college in the Gainesville area. Her teacher was Pat Morse, moderator of the Micanopy Sacred Harp group. James Kushner, also in attendance, was introduced to Sacred Harp while in school in Southern California, and has been singing with Central Florida groups since the late 1990s. We were also joined by some first-time visitors. Among these were two retired couples; one couple rides their motorcycles all over the country (and had ridden them to the singing that day)!

A meaningful part of every Bethlehem singing—in addition to the music and fellowship—is dinner on the grounds. To cover the table, the Clenneys bring tablecloths made from feed sacks that have been in the family for generations. These tablecloths are made from bright cotton prints, large squares stitched together and laid end to end. Some women remember, as children, wearing dresses their mothers sewed from feed sacks. (Younger readers may not be familiar with the bright, colorfully patterned, high-quality cotton material that feed sacks were made of back in the day.)

The Central Florida fifth-Sunday singing warmly welcomes singers from near and far to join us. But our winters are especially inviting to northerners, midwesterners, northeasterners (etc.) tired of digging out of snowdrifts and shivering in below-zero temperatures. ■

Singing Reports

Small in Number Yet Full of Spirit: The Mt. Pisgah Singing in Sylvester, Georgia

By Trent Peachey | Albany, Georgia

SACRED Harp music is no stranger to southern Georgia. Its haunting melodies and messages have echoed through the generations bringing tears of joy and sorrow to countless singers. Unfortunately, the decades have taken their toll on this beloved tradition in this region. Where once singings were numerous, loud, and vibrant, now only a few remain. Though small in number, these singings still possess the same passion that any large singing could muster up.

The annual singing held at Mount Pisgah Primitive Baptist church is one of the few singings that remains active in southwest Georgia. This singing is held on the second fifth Sunday of the year. Set back on a country road several miles out of the small town of Sylvester, this singing is off the beaten path and has been forgotten by many. For me, the singing at Mount Pisgah is very special. It is my “homecoming” singing. It was several years ago at this location where I attended my first all day Sacred Harp singing.

This year’s singing was held on April 29. The official time to commence was set at 10:30 though it was almost 10:45 before we started. Lauren Harrison once told me the farther south, the later the singing starts. Singers are arranged in the traditional hollow square. The exception is that no altos fill their spot below the pulpit. While we pray for this section to be filled, we don’t stress. After all—much of the original music in *The Sacred Harp* was written without alto lines anyways.

The singing was called to order by Louis Hughes Jr. leading “Tribulation” (p. 29b) and “Ogletree” (p. 138b). The opening prayer was offered myself (Trent Peachey). Singers were called to the square by Tim Meeks who served as secretary for the day. It is traditional at this singing to lead two tunes during a

The words of “Irwinton” do a good job of describing the singers at Mount Pisgah: though small in number, a poor, despised company, these children of the King sing loudly and with joy.

lesson. By the time we were a few tunes into the singing, it was clear that even though small in number, the spirit of Sacred Harp was alive and well within this group. Oscar McGuire led “Irwinton” (p. 229). The words of this song do a good job of describing the singers at Mount Pisgah: though small in number, a poor, despised company, these children of the King sing loudly and with joy. By the time lunch had arrived, we had sung through our list of leaders. This stands in contrast to some larger singings when you may each person may only lead one song all day.

Lunch was the usual dinner on the ground, with each cook proudly bringing their contributions to the spread. If anybody left hungry it was because of their own negligence and certainly no fault of the cooks. Adding to the good food were the joys of catching up with friends. Topped off with a piece of delicious caramel cake, the lunch hour was soon over.

The afternoon session was called back to order by Louis Hughes, Jr. This session was very interesting to me as a relative newcomer to Sacred Harp. The singers shared memories of times past and how they used to drive all over the states of Georgia and Alabama to attend singings. George Ann Corbin shared memories

of singers coming down from Atlanta to teach singing schools and staying at her parents’ house when she was a little girl. Before leading us in “My Shepherd Guides” (p. 490), Lamar Robinson encouraged us to sing the music not only for its pleasing sound, but to pay attention to the message of the songs and to allow them to speak to us. For me this is the greatest appeal of singings in our area. Many of the singers in southern Georgia are descendents of generation of Sacred Harp singers. Their families and lives are woven into the very core of this music. Such individuals are often singing not only for the sake of the music, but for the message. Singing in such company, I sometimes almost feel as if I could catch a glimpse of the beliefs of the composers of this music.

Our lack of alto and small numbers certainly didn’t keep us from the fugging tunes in the afternoon. We enjoy trying out numbers like “Present Joys” (p. 318), “Homeward Bound” (p. 373), and even “Easter Anthem” (p. 236). Tim Meeks—our lone treble—made his presence known on “Eternal Day” (p. 383). In closing we sang Raymond Hamrick’s “Christian’s Farewell” (p. 347) and took the parting hand, hoping and trusting that we would once more gather to sing these tunes that have stood the test of time. ■

News

A Preview of *The Shenandoah Harmony*

Rachel Wells Hall | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



The Shenandoah Harmony music committee (from left): Leyland, Myles, Kelly, Dan, Nora, John, Rachel. Photo: John Alexander.

I AM pleased to announce the forthcoming publication of *The Shenandoah Harmony*, a new four-shape tunebook that will include about 450 songs in a compact format suitable for regular or all-day singing. The music committee includes John Del Re, Kelly Macklin, and Leyland Del Re of Virginia; Nora Dunn of Maryland; and Daniel Hunter, Myles Louis Dakan, and Rachel Hall of Pennsylvania. The expected publication date is late 2012.

The original inspiration for *The Shenandoah Harmony* was to create a collection of the best songs published by Ananias Davisson from 1816 to 1825 in the Shenandoah Valley. These works include five editions of the *Kentucky Harmony* and three editions of the *Supplement to the Kentucky Harmony*, which combine New England composed tunes with the arranged folk melodies of the era. In addition to songs from Davisson's books, *The Shenandoah Harmony* includes folk hymns from the Chapins, Ingalls, Walker, McCurry, Hauser, and their contemporaries; additional early New England compositions, including some never before printed in shapes; and modern four-shape compositions.

The music committee has been meeting

monthly for over a year and a half and reviewed over 1,300 songs (not counting the hundreds of songs reviewed by individual members of the committee), choosing about 450 for the book. Following the traditional practice, we have edited—and occasionally arranged—some of these songs with the goal of making them suitable for class singing. We are on track to finish typesetting and proofreading this summer. We have produced an 84-page preview packet for our first annual all-day Shenandoah Harmony singing in Millwood, Virginia on the first Sunday in June. The packet is available for free download on our web site.

Four songs from *The Shenandoah Harmony*

We've chosen four of our favorite songs to highlight the variety in our book. Visit the online version of the *Newsletter* to listen.

"Psalm 30" is in the same tune family as "Abbeville" (p. 33b), Davisson's "Golden Hill," and Ingalls' "The General Doom." Its first publication was in Patterson's *Church Music* (1813); however, Nikos Pappas has found this arrangement of "Psalm 30" in a manuscript by Amzi Chapin, probably late 1790s. This recording is from the

Keystone Sacred Harp Convention 2012.

"Consolation New" is a collaboration "beyond the bounds of time and space" (to quote from Wesley's lyrics): the tenor and bass are from Wyeth's *Repository, Part Second* (1813) and Davisson added the treble in the 1820s in his *Supplement to the Kentucky Harmony*. We found that none of the original three parts were singable for altos. Our friends Robert Stoddard, Becky Wright, Bethany Towne, and Nathan Berry helped write this alto part. This recording is from the Keystone Sacred Harp Convention 2012.

Named for a Chicago neighborhood, Richard Popp's "Stony Island" (1994) is a modern shapenote composition originally published in *The New Millennium Harp* (2001). Popp's use of modal harmony reminds us of the frontier sound of Davisson's books. This recording is from the Northern Shenandoah Valley All-Day Shenandoah Singing, 2012.

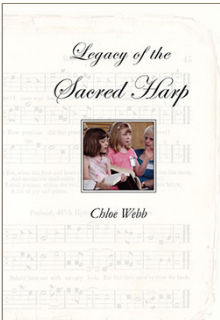
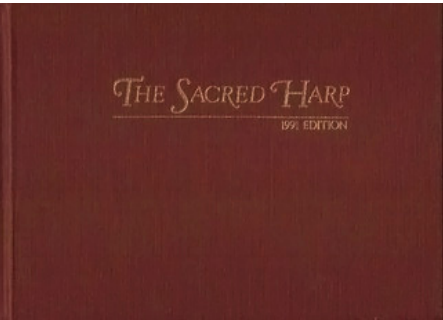
We first encountered "Sinai" (1801) in Hauser's *Hesperian Harp* (1848). It is the best known composition of the teenaged Woodruff, who drowned at the age of nineteen. Back in the day, the alto, or counter, part was often sung by boys, and we like to think that Merit wrote this fantastic alto part to sing himself. This recording is from the Northern Shenandoah Valley All-Day Shenandoah Singing, 2012.

Compiling and editing *The Shenandoah Harmony* has been a fascinating process that has given us all a much greater appreciation for the many composers, arrangers, and book editors who worked and continue to work in the four-shape tradition. We would especially like to thank the many singers and singing communities who have welcomed us, helped audition new songs, contributed numerous hours typesetting and proofreading, and provided financial assistance. For more information, please visit our web site

shenandoahharmony.com. ■

The Sacred Harp Publishing Company is a non-profit organization that promotes traditional Sacred Harp singing, community, and culture across the United States and around the world. SHPC publishes *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition* and other books, recordings, and resources that support Sacred Harp singing.

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Consider attending Camp Fasola, a weeklong all-ages summer camp teaching Sacred Harp singing and traditions. Visit campfasola.org for more information.

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