

The SACRED HARP PUBLISHING COMPANY Newsletter

VOL. 5, NO. I

Stories about singers and singings, our music and traditions, and Sacred Harp's present-day growth.

AUGUST 2016

Unto the Raptured Eye

"Much More than the Songs": The Sacred Harp Photographs of Robert Chambless

Andy Ditzler | Atlanta, Georgia



Robert often photographs his and Judy's approach to a singing, including leaving the hotel and the scenery along the way. In this photo, a roadside sign points visitors to the singing, telling us, "we'll soon be there." *Photo by Robert Chambless, taken near Liberty Baptist Church, Henagar-Union Convention, July 2, 2016, Henagar, Alabama.*

Sacred Harp singing is an aural, musical experience, but as the sheer presence of cameras at singings suggests, it is visual as well. There is plenty to see. We watch the song leaders; we glance at each other across the hollow square; the abundance of dinner on the grounds delights our eyes; and later, we rejoice in seeing images of our friends and fellow singers near and far—images provided to us by photography.

There are many styles of photographic documentation of singings, with varying goals. Johnathon Kelso makes posed portraits of singers, as well as

documentary photographs of singings, which have been shown in galleries and published in articles on Sacred Harp. Martha Beverly's quite different project is to photograph each song leader at a singing, throughout the day, from her seat in the tenor section. This creates a comprehensive photographic archive of leaders—something of a visual analogue to the minutes. Of course, many of us spontaneously take snapshots of particular moments with our phone cameras. These few examples give a sense of the variety of practices we use to visually represent and remember our singing.

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Introducing Vol. 5, No. 1 of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter

Jesse P. Karlsberg and Nathan Rees

This issue of the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter* looks at the details of Sacred Harp singings today beyond the succession of leaders singing songs from our tunebook and remembers composers and supporters of Sacred Harp singing from the twentieth century.

Our issue opens with Andy Ditzler's interview with prolific Sacred Harp photographer Robert Chambless, detailing how Robert's images capture "all the in-between moments, the physicality, the spills as well as the smiles, of Sacred Harp." David Wright describes how contributors to the 1960 *Original Sacred Harp* were influenced by earlier compositions and unveils for the first time the astonishing method through which John Hocutt composed the much loved song THE RESURRECTION DAY. Two remembrances honor recently deceased singers who were awarded the Sacred Harp Publishing Company's posthumous citation. Jason Stanford's tribute to Carlene Griffin and Karen Rollins's to B. J. and Evelyn Harris reveal humble, loving, supporters of Sacred Harp singings in West Georgia, East Alabama, and across the country and beyond. Joe Jones contributes a portrait of a less recently departed singer, his grandfather, Sacred Harp composer M. F. McWhorter, and in doing so offers a glimpse of how Sacred Harp singings were central to the social fabric across Alabama and much of the South. Mairye Bates's report on the January All-California Convention draws readers into lively singing by a strong class, while reminding us of just how many other facets to a convention weekend there are besides singing. David Brodeur and David Smead focus on a new presence at Sacred Harp singings, the FaSoLa Minutes app by Mark T. Godfrey and Lauren Bock, delving into the history and meaning of the entropy number that has intrigued many singers since the app's release in 2013. Finally, in this issue's "Just a Minute" column, UK singer Helen Brown tells us the story behind an unusual event, a performance by an English group of West Gallery singers at the 1997 National Convention.

As always, the *Newsletter* team welcomes your comments on these articles and invites your suggestions of future article topics. Please get in touch. ■

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In addition to covering the grounds of the singing, Robert's photographs situate the spaces of Sacred Harp in the wider world. As visitors to Big Creek know, this nineteenth-century church now sits in a decidedly contemporary landscape. The view from the lawn is of this electric substation, which sits directly across from the very tricky left turn into the driveway—across several lanes of traffic on a newly paved road. *Photo by Robert Chambless, taken at the DeLong-Roberts Memorial Singing, June 26, 2016, Big Creek Primitive Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Georgia.*

One particular photographer got me thinking about how, and why, we document Sacred Harp visually. Last summer, I remember noticing a photo of me leading a song, taken earlier that day by Robert Chambless—a fixture at singings throughout west Georgia and Alabama along with his wife, Judy. The photo is casual. I'm in mid-motion, turning toward the basses, and am in mid-syllable as well. My immediate reaction was that this was not an ideal image of myself leading. Yet I kept thinking of it. In this picture my mouth is open because I was singing, not posing for a photograph. I was in mid-movement because I was leading a song. In the end, the photo told me a lot about the process of leading and singing—how physical it is, how enjoyable and active and exhilarating it can be.

Other photos of Robert's, reliably uploaded to his Facebook page the day of the singings, evoked similar questions. Images of singers getting out of their cars, or checking their phones; an empty serving dish after dinner; conversations with the participants half-observed by figures in the foreground—why this image, of that moment? It occurred to me that Robert's consistently unexpected imagery was prompting me to examine my own expectations of Sacred Harp photographs.

We all treasure a well-framed image of ourselves leading in the square, or photos of our good friends at singings. These images are precious to us. But posed photographs and ideally captured moments only tell us so much. What about the rest of the day? There is so much more. How do we move

through a whole day of singing? This, to me, is what Robert's photography best captures. And it does so in very particular ways.

First, there is the kind of action that Robert photographs. Photos of leaders are often taken in mid-gesture. These are *action* photos, a reminder that leading (and singing) is not such a delicate process—it's bodily, physical movement. Robert tends to photograph most if not all the leaders on a given day, often from his seat at the tenor corner of the bass section, but also from different angles and places in the room—sometimes discreetly moving to a different section of the room in the course of a single song, or using a zoom lens to capture a close-up. But as I mentioned before, Robert also captures many oft-overlooked events: intimate



This photo is from the perspective of Robert's usual seat at the tenor corner of the bass section. Karen Clark is opening the singing. This is an atypical image of leading, but it is revealing: note the almost—empty front bench of tenors and altos (soon to fill up, as subsequent photos prove); the elegant framing that situates us at an exact spot on the edge of the square; the lovely spring weather visible through the open door; details such as ceiling fans and vintage clock, and the room itself: light and airy, immaculately kept, with hardwood floors. Among other things, this photo thus gives us a good idea of the likely sound quality here. *Photo by Robert Chambless, taken at the Mount Pisgah annual all day singing, May 21, 2016, Mount Pisgah Primitive Baptist Church, Chambers County, Alabama.*

moments away from the singing, the way the orderly square dissolves into a chaotic mass of people at recess, and the fleeting, impromptu conversations during breaks. These are not glamorous moments compared to leading a song, but they add texture to our memories of the day, and they give a fuller account of the kinds of things that happen, and the things that we really do, during a day of singing. (Wouldn't it be interesting to have such an extensive visual record of singings from earlier eras!)

Undoubtedly, Robert's interest in these overlooked moments is part of the reason that many of his photos have their own kind of look. When we hold a camera, we subtly adjust how we look

at the world. We start to *frame* what's going on in front of us. This can result in powerful images. But on the other hand, it can also limit photographs to only those events which can be well-framed! Robert is interested in capturing moments that are worth preserving, but which can't necessarily be composed as a beautiful photograph. His images thus deliberately resist customary expectations of photography. Instead of positioning the main subject squarely in the center of the photo, or neatly balancing the different elements in the frame, sometimes the image is crammed with information, or conversely it can be quite sparse. But whatever the image, his photos consistently share this quality

of the unexpected. As a result, spending time with his photographs necessitates that we re-see our singing.

Second, Robert documents the singing day in as complete a manner as possible. He and Judy are commonly the first to arrive at a singing (thus ensuring that many singers' arrivals are documented). Images of the sunrise, roads leading to the venue, the empty parking spaces and building, gradually give way to people, and especially the many conversations and greetings that take place as we prepare to begin singing. (Looking through Robert's photos, I was reminded just how many images he makes before the singing even starts.) Some of these photos are posed, with singers smiling;



This is characteristic of the kinds of photos taken by Robert during a recess. At first glance, the image appears a bit chaotic, with no central reference point. Looking more closely, we see a mini-conference going on in the center of the frame, with the outgoing Secretary/Treasurer (Charlene Wallace) and the new Secretary and Assistant Secretary (Lela Crowder and Donna Bell). Many conversations and interactions surround them. On the right, singers are heading out of the room, and others move in the opposite direction into the room. Meanwhile, in the foreground, solitary singers study their books. The image conveys the level and kind of activity taking place in the room, and provides us a glimpse of the many things that go on at singings – in Robert’s words, “more than just the songs.” *Photo by Robert Chambless, taken at the Georgia State Convention, March 26, 2016, Big Creek Primitive Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Georgia.*

but most are very casually captured. Robert also circulates nimbly through the different spaces of a singing—as singers fill the room, we also see the dinner table gradually fill with dishes, for example. Outside details such as flying flags and Sacred Harp road signs are somehow captured along the way as well. Robert’s coverage of all the spaces of singing throughout the day, combined with his eye for the overlooked and unexpected image, results in an unusually extensive record of singings.

Third, and perhaps most interesting, there is the way Robert distributes his photos to singers. He takes the opposite approach from photographers who carefully edit and show only their best

images. Within a few hours (or less) of each singing’s conclusion, Robert’s entire cache of photographs appears as an album on his Facebook page—usually between two hundred and three hundred photographs, although sometimes more than four hundred images from a single singing. And they have an audience. Indeed, it has become a ritual for us, carpooling back to Atlanta after a singing, to check for Robert’s photo upload—and once it’s there, to scroll through the images, which prompt conversation and often merriment. But the sheer bulk of imagery, and the completeness of the record, allows us to almost re-experience a singing directly afterward—not exactly in real-time, but

certainly something closer to that than most collections of photographs afford.

I remember once looking through Robert’s photos with Jesse P. Karlsberg on the drive home after a singing. Someone had spilled water on the floor inside the church that day and, being nearby, Jesse brought over some paper towels to help wipe it up. We joked, “I bet Robert took a picture of that!” Sure enough, when the pictures of the day appeared on Facebook, there was a picture of Jesse wiping up the floor! We had a good laugh about that. And I now realize that images such as these do more than merely document; they also generate conversations and memories of their own.



During recess, Bridgett Hill Kennedy studies her copy of *The Sacred Harp*. This contemplative individual portrait stands in contrast to the almost overwhelming amount of activity in the previous image. *Photo by Robert Chambliss, taken at the Georgia State Convention, March 26, 2016, Big Creek Primitive Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Georgia.*

In the way that I treasure between-the-song moments that survive on some Sacred Harp sound recordings of earlier years, I have come to value Robert Chambliss's photographs of all the in-between moments, the physicality, the spills as well as the smiles, of Sacred Harp. Curious about Robert's own attitudes to photography, I emailed him some questions earlier this year, and he graciously responded. The interview has been condensed slightly for length.

How did you get started photographing? How long have you been extensively photographing singings? Are singings mostly what you photograph, or are there other ongoing subjects as well?

Photography has always been an interest and taking pictures myself has become a hobby after I started work as a teacher. I find photography to be a

good way to share experiences with others and to help preserve memory. The cost of film pictures was prohibitive and the opportunity for sharing was limited as well; with the advent of the digital age and the ability to share with people all around the world, I am encouraged to do more.

At first when I started photographing at the singings, I took a few pictures which I shared with Judy and when I saw others posting their pictures online, I decided to do so as well. Then I took as I said a few pictures, maybe a dozen or so, but it grew and with the availability of Facebook, the number jumped up to over a hundred at each singing. Judy and I began following the singings in the area of eastern Alabama and western Georgia following our retirement. As we became more interested and could participate somewhat more, we branched out and included most of Alabama and

Georgia as singings we would attend. Seeing the various settings for churches, I would include more pictures of the facility and the surrounding area as well as the singers.

Judy has difficulty with her vision. She has retinitis pigmentosa. She would ask me who was at the singing and I am terrible with remembering names so I started taking pictures of everyone at the singing. She can remember people well and uses this memory as she does the arranging at singings.

I have taken a good many pictures at singings but enjoy taking family pictures even more. I love to take the camera and stroll around parks and towns and take pictures especially in places like walking trails and parks and gardens.

From seeing you take photos at singings, I know you are relatively quick to aim



Looking through windows and open doorways is a common motif in Robert's photography. (After all, it's a photographer's job to *look*.) The window frame here is a double for the frame of the photograph. Its obvious presence reminds us that we are seeing from the perspective of a photographer, situated in a very particular space at a particular moment. How different this is from the sense of timelessness that a posed portrait gives. Appropriately, the action here—singers on their way to dinner—is transitory rather than still. "Our life is ever on the wing." *Photo by Robert Chambless, taken at the Georgia State Convention, March 26, 2016, Big Creek Primitive Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Georgia.*

and shoot. What prompts you to take a given photo in the moment?

I take mostly aim and shoot photos because I would like to think that the pictures offer a commentary on the life of a singing. Many recordings are available of the singings from all the venues around the world and I like to add to the story of what a singing actually is. It is people singing, talking, laughing, commiserating, and celebrating; singings are worship but also a community gathering of people from near and far. People have told me how much they appreciate seeing people who have traveled great distances and others from great distances tell me that when they attend the singings in our area, they feel that they already know the people.

So, it is the idea that singings are much more than the songs but it is the whole package that sells the product that I try to add a visual to go with the audio made available from others.

Many documentary photographers strive to be unobtrusive, or "fly-on-the-wall." Is it important to you to be unnoticed as you photograph? Or does it not matter?

I am not a center-of-attention person, I appreciate talking with people but do not force the issue. I realize that some people find it annoying to have pictures made while most enjoy seeing the pictures. I have had one person ask that no pictures of him be placed on the net, I assume he means other than while he is singing. The negative comments have

been very few, at least to me, and the compliments have been many. I hope to continue attending singings and hope to be able to, perhaps, add a little bit to the understanding of what singings are.

My sense is that you use the camera as a documenting tool, and that you are content to capture what happens in front of the camera (rather than posing people or waiting for "perfect moments"). Is that fair to say? Do you have particular expectations for what images you want to capture at a given singing? Are you ever especially pleased (or disappointed) with the photographs you've taken on a particular day?

I enjoy the thought that these pictures may be around for a long time but have



A poignant image: wonderful singers, beloved friends, and all but one facing away from camera—and photographer. However embedded Robert Chambless is in Sacred Harp, his role as documentarian means he must always stand somewhat outside. Photo by Robert Chambless, taken at the Henagar-Union Convention, July 2, 2016, Liberty Baptist Church, Henagar, Alabama.

no idea how long that may be. I try to include everyone in attendance in a picture whether it be a small group or the whole group. The perfect moment for me is people being people, I drive through towns and see people on the street and think, “Boy, I wish I could stop and take a picture of the person before they change their position and pose.” (Other drivers would probably get mildly upset if someone stopped in front of them and jumped out to take a picture.) I like to see pictures that are clear and descriptive and show some aspect of the event such as singing, birthday party, spring flowers, etc.

Am I correct that you upload all the photos of a singing onto Facebook—that is, every photo you took that day, unedited? This strikes me as an unusual practice and I’m curious how you came

to the decision to do that regularly.

Generally, when we come home from a singing I know that to do a great deal of preparation with the pictures requires a great deal of time and many people have told me that they enjoy seeing the pictures as soon as possible. I come home, download to the computer, upload to Facebook, and get busy with whatever other activity that might require attention. Sometimes, it may be the next day or so before I actually look at the pictures myself.

Have you had interesting reactions to your photos from singers?

When people have been sick and unable to attend singings but show up in pictures, many people will say how pleased they were to see the person back at singings and looking well. One or two have asked why I do not do videos of

the day, too much involved in that for posting to the web is the reason I give for not doing so. Most just comment that they like seeing the pictures and feeling a connection to those at the singing.

How did you begin singing?

I like to sing, I have told this tale many times but here it comes again. When I was a preschooler there was a man who lived near us who had two children a little older than me but he must have heard me singing at some time or another. One day, I was about five I figure, he called me over to where he was and told me that he would give me a piece of Juicy Fruit chewing gum if I would sing him a song. I sang what I knew of the old Chuck Wagon Gang standard “A Beautiful Life” and he gave me the gum.



The parting hand. The square once again dissolves into individual one-on-one interactions, as we prepare to move from our community of singers back to the wider world. *Photo by Robert Chambless, taken at the Rogers Memorial Singing, March 6, 2016, Ephesus School, Roopville, Georgia.*

I first saw a moment of [Sacred Harp] singing in 1960 when my family moved to Heflin, Alabama. I remember at some festival, probably 4th of July that year, I was at the courthouse there in Heflin and a group was gathering to sing. Later, I went to Shoal Creek in 1970. I got married in 1971 and my wife to be and I went back to the singing at Shoal Creek so she could see and listen to the music (Judy played the piano in her home church). That time I sat in the bass section, front row, along with the old(er) men who were dressed in suits, I was casual as people are generally today.

I was singing the words with gusto and following one of the songs when the gentleman sitting next to me asked me a question. "Do you see how these notes go up and down?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Your voice is supposed to do so also."



Photo of Robert and Judy Chambless, taken at the Mount Pisgah annual all day singing, May 21, 2016, Mount Pisgah Primitive Baptist Church, Chambers County, Alabama. *Photographer unknown.*



Instead of the customary still life of an elegant, orderly table, we see the aftermath: decimated casseroles, destroyed desserts, and a single piece of cornbread politely left alone. The image is of satiation as much as abundance—with the task of cleanup implied. This unglamorous portrait of dinner on the grounds is an example of the inclusiveness of Robert's visual record of singing. *Photo by Robert Chambliss, taken at the Cullman County Convention, July 9, 2016, Cullman County Courthouse, Cullman, Alabama.*



This is a favorite image of mine. The utter lack of context about who's holding this drill, where it's going, or what it's about to do, gives rise to much speculation. All we can be sure of is that something in Wilson's Chapel needs fixing right away! *Photo by Robert Chambliss, taken at the Chattahoochee Convention, August 1, 2015, Wilson's Chapel, Carrollton, Georgia.*

When we decided, after retirement, to take learning and singing the music as a serious hobby and way to involve ourselves with more people, we found that Jeff and Shelbie Sheppard had a singing school down in Anniston, Alabama, once a month. We started attending these schools and singing a few songs with them and grew to like the people who attended these evenings. We began to regularly attend the National Convention in Birmingham, Alabama, and the four-books singings in Montgomery and then more and more from the Atlanta area down to Hoboken, Georgia, to Panama City, Florida, to Henderson, Texas, to Nashville, Tennessee, to Henagar and Ider, Alabama, and singings in that area. Several of the sites where singings were held are no longer supporting the singings, singers grow old and die and the young move to follow jobs and family situations.

The thing that keeps me coming back to these singings is the whole picture: people (the wide variety of "types" from atheists to true believers, from straight to gay, different denominations of beliefs, backgrounds and professions, different political views, different races, and other such distinctions which disappear as the people enter the singing site), sites (churches and buildings that we would never have just entered are visited for the singings that are held there, including large modern churches and schools to the old, rustic log churches and State Line Baptist), and music (the challenge to learn something new in the latter stage of life and to come to love the method and the vital nature of the music).

To view Robert Chambliss's photographs of Sacred Harp singings, get in touch with him on Facebook or visit his Google Plus page: <https://plus.google.com/116090201004450883530>. ■

News

Remembering Carlene McGraw Griffin, a Lifelong Sacred Harp Singer

Jason Stanford | Atlanta, Georgia



Gladys Wallace McGraw with her children on her ninetieth birthday. Back (left to right): Gary, Ricky, Earlis, and Carlene, Front: Judy, Gladys, and Carolyn.

In 2015, Carlene McGraw Griffin became the 88th recipient of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company Citation, an award presented posthumously to “honor and express appreciation to loyal supporters and dedicated singers for outstanding work in the company and untiring support of and dedicated service to the cause of Sacred Harp music.” A resource page from the Sacred Harp Museum describes the citation program and lists past recipients of the award.

Carlene was born in Carroll County Georgia on May 26, 1930, the oldest child of Thomas Buford McGraw and Gladys Wallace McGraw. Her parents were both members of families who have been instrumental in the Sacred Harp community for generations. Her father, who went by his middle name Buford, was the 49th recipient of the Publishing

Company’s citation and composed *THE THRONE OF GRACE* (p. 476 in *The Sacred Harp*). Carlene’s grandfather, H. N. McGraw, and great uncles T. B. and L. A. McGraw, also received the citation. It is no surprise then that Carlene was attending singings from day one.

As a child, Carlene and her siblings Earlis, Ricky, Carolyn, Gary, and Judy (Henry) would attend as many singings and singing schools as they could. Many of those singing schools were led by their grandfather, H. N. McGraw. This provided the foundation for a lifelong love of and dedication to Sacred Harp music. Carlene began by singing in the tenor section, as most do, and later moved to the alto bench.

Carlene and her husband, Nick, were especially instrumental in spreading the Sacred Harp singing tradition across the United States and internationally.

They purchased a van specifically for transporting singers across the country. Together they and a contingent of singers from West Georgia were like evangelists spreading the “Good News” of Sacred Harp. They traveled nearly every weekend to singings near and far, covering thousands of miles. This group of singers included her siblings and others such as Hugh McGraw, Richard DeLong, and her aunt Charlene Wallace. Carlene was always ready and willing to go wherever the next singing might be.

On one particular occasion the group was making their way to a convention in Texas in the Griffins’ van. As they traveled the group would often sing the songs they knew and loved so well. Somewhere near Vicksburg, Mississippi they were enjoying a spirited rendition of *FIRE ALARM* (p. 25). Little did they



Left: Carlene Griffin (left) with Joyce Walton (right) and Charlene Wallace (center) at the first National Sacred Harp Convention in 1980, Birmingham, Alabama.



Right: Carlene McGraw Griffin with her aunt Charlene Wallace at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, Bremen, Georgia.

know a real fire was about to ensue. The van's transmission suddenly blew up, pouring transmission fluid onto the hot engine's exhaust. The van caught fire and the song came to an abrupt end. A roadside evacuation commenced. Hugh McGraw quickly grabbed a tire iron and began shoveling dirt under the van to suppress the fire. After making a hasty exit from the burning vehicle Charlene Wallace realized she left her pocketbook. She returned to rescue it over Hugh's vigorous objections. She emerged from the flames unscathed with pocketbook in hand. Thanks to the efforts of Hugh McGraw and a neighborly truck driver with a fire extinguisher the fire was suppressed before the van was entirely engulfed in flames. Reports indicate that no one was injured and no songbooks were destroyed in the incident. However, all were demoralized and dejected—resigned to the fact that they were likely to miss the singing. As luck would have it though, the van was not beyond repair. They were able to have the van fixed at a local mechanic shop adjacent to a Holiday Inn. They were back on the road the next day, and had an exciting excuse for arriving a day late to the convention. The van remained in service for a few more years and thousands more miles.

Carlene's travels by van, car, Ruth Brown's bus, and plane took her to singings all over the United States. She led at the first Midwest Convention, held in Chicago in 1985, and the first All-California Convention in 1989. Her travels also took her outside the United States to sing in Canada and Israel. She enjoyed seeing new places and meeting new people. She also enjoyed collecting little mementos from each place she visited to remind her of the travels. These keepsakes ranged from a rock she picked up in the "Holy Land" to souvenirs shaped like state outlines. Over the years she amassed quite a collection, which she displayed like trophies on a shelf. Thanks to the efforts of Carlene and those she traveled with during this important period in Sacred Harp's growth, the tradition has expanded far beyond its base in the South.

Carlene had a dry sense of humor and saw the joy in life. She was a caring and industrious individual. She worked for many years in the textile industry, employed by the Arrow Shirt and Sewell Manufacturing companies. She was a devoted member of the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church in Mt. Zion, Georgia. She and Nick were married for fifty years and adopted three boys:

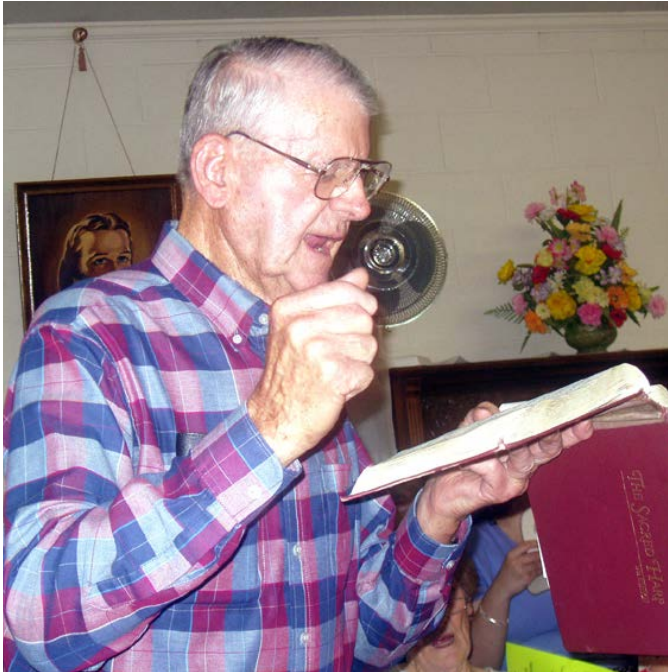
Eddie, Danny, and Matt.

"Death is the gate to endless joy, and yet we dread to enter there." Carlene entered that gate on January 9, 2014. She was interred with many other dedicated Sacred Harp singers in the cemetery at Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. At least on two occasions she sang *FAREWELL TO ALL* (p. 570), which states: "Though I can never come to thee; Let not this grieve your heart; For you will shortly come to me, Where we shall never part." Carlene has now joined another contingent of singers. It includes her parents, grandfather, and many other dear friends from near and far. They have traveled a great distance to yet another singing, one that lasts forever and is better than the best singing any of us have ever experienced. Carlene wouldn't miss it, and maybe one day we'll get to sing with her and all the rest throughout eternity. ■

News

The Embodiment of Love and Fellowship: Honoring Billy Joe and Evelyn Harris

Karen Rollins | Bowden, Georgia



Left: B. J. Harris leads at the 4th of July Singing, Muscadine Methodist Church, Muscadine, Alabama, 2007. *Photograph by Martha Beverly.*



Right: Evelyn Harris cleaning up at the Burnham and Brown Memorial, Jacksonville, Alabama, 2007. *Photograph by Robert Chambless.*

In October, 2015, the members of the Board of Directors of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company voted unanimously to present a citation to the descendants of Billy Joe and Evelyn Harris. The practice of awarding citations to outstanding deceased members of the Company was begun in 1969. This joint award was only the third one given to a couple; previous double recipients were Virgil and Ruby Phillips and Jeff and Shelbie Sheppard.

Billy Joe and Evelyn loved singing and singers; they traveled to sing with others, they supported singings in their area, and they welcomed singers into their home in Oxford, Alabama. They were loyal participants in the “bus trips” conducted by Ruth and Leman Brown and Pearl Guier, an important outreach to new singing communities across the

country. [*Read a report on a 1985 bus trip to the New England Convention in vol. 2, no. 2 of the Newsletter—Ed.*] Their presence on more than thirty-five of those trips was marked by love and laughter. They also were diligent in visiting singers who were homebound or otherwise unable to travel to singings. I have fond memories of their visits to my parents.

Evelyn came from a longstanding singing family; her family had participated in Sacred Harp for several generations. She learned to sing as a child and often accompanied her parents, Chester and Estella Warren, to local singings. As a teenager, she attended several singing schools. She introduced Billy Joe to the music after they married. When Mr. Warren passed away in 1951, Evelyn and Billy Joe (or B.

J., as he was affectionately called) began regularly taking Mrs. Estella to singings. As long as they were physically able, they never stopped going. In fact, their adult children complained that seeing them on a weekend required an appointment because they were always “gone sangin.”

Evelyn and B. J. could be counted on to support local singings in every way: cooking many dishes, opening their home to visitors, and welcoming one and all—especially new singers. They were the backbone of singings in Cleburne County, Alabama, at Old Harmony, Cane Creek, Edwardsville, and Oak Hill.

Billy Joe was known for his sense of humor, his droll impersonation of local characters, his unlimited supply of jokes, and his ability to laugh at himself. He could engender laughs for even the dullest tales. He was quite the



Left: B. J. Harris at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, 2007. Photograph by Robert Chambless.



Right: Evelyn Harris (left) with her sister Ruth Daniel (right), Ephesus, Georgia. Photograph by Johnathon Kelso.

raconteur, and his “spot-on” delivery was unsurpassed. Frequently, he was the subject of the stories. I remember his recounting of the time he went to purchase a new luxury car. He wore his usual overalls and did not display the roll of bills in his wallet with which he intended to pay cash for the vehicle. When he admitted that he did not plan to borrow any money from the local bank and was reluctant to offer any information for a credit check, the salesman ignored him. B. J. promptly went to another dealership, purchased a similar car, and made certain that his route home took him by the earlier dealership so that he could tell the employee that the competitor did not ask for a credit check.

Evelyn continued to participate in singings after Billy Joe had passed away. She often volunteered to drive elderly singers to various locations. She also reached out to singers of all ages, taking a special interest in those who were newly introduced to Sacred Harp. When Mary Jo Shafer came to Anniston to work for the city newspaper, Evelyn encouraged her. This is Mary Jo’s account of the special relationship they shared:

I first met Evelyn when I attended my first singing in Alabama. It was the Labor Day singing at Shoal Creek in the Talladega National Forest. I was just settling in, getting adjusted to a new place, new job, and new people. In many ways

I was far from my New England home! But, I knew that my move was bringing me closer into the homeland of traditional Sacred Harp singing and so I was excited to go to Shoal Creek that September day. As luck would have it, I sat down next to Evelyn in the alto section. From that serendipitous seating, I had found a real friend. It is her wonderfully welcoming and hospitable nature that I remember most about Evelyn. I include this as one of her key contributions to Sacred Harp. Evelyn was the most welcoming, considerate, and open-hearted woman. She made strangers feel at ease. She was always friendly, smiling, interested in one’s stories, and kind. In all these ways, she was a wonderful ambassador for Sacred Harp. I believe there are numerous other strangers who were put at ease and welcomed by her sweet smile and gentle voice. I count myself as very blessed to have gotten to know her and to travel to various singings throughout the area with her. She was also the best partner to go to a singing with because she was a fount of knowledge about the history and people who populate her corner of Alabama. Some of my best memories are of driving through Cleburne County with her, headed to a singing in a small country church, while she told me stories about her childhood and family and singings in the past. She was, to me, in many ways an embodiment of so much of the history and tradition of Sacred Harp—it was in her blood and in her bones—and she was

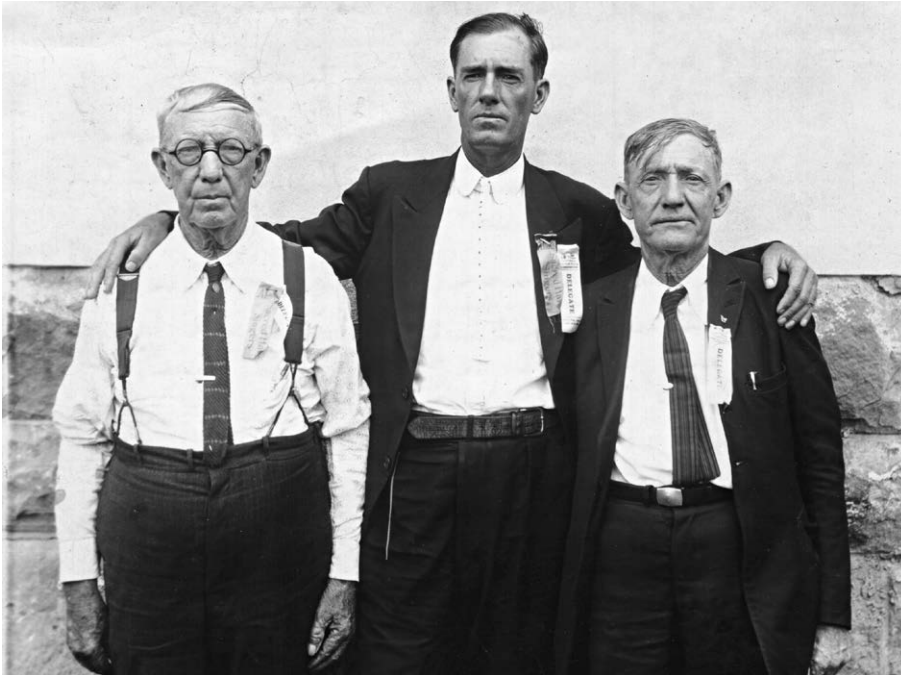
always willing to share her knowledge and her stories. She did so with a quiet grace, never looking for attention or accolades. Evelyn was one of the many proficient and dedicated practitioners who have helped to keep Sacred Harp singing such a vibrant tradition. She did this through her faithful attendance at singings but I must mention too her dedication in cooking for the hungry singers. I was always amazed at her willingness to get up early and cook huge portions of food. She took much joy in this as well—being able to nourish those who had come to sing. I can still close my eyes and taste her sweet potato casserole, or salted pecans from her own tree. One of the many aspects of Sacred Harp that I appreciate is that we remember and honor those who have gone on before and so getting to hear these stories from someone like Evelyn is so important to me. I will be forever grateful for the time I got to spend with her. She helped me through her welcoming spirit, her infectious joy for the singing, and for her community, her strength, and her faith. She left a lasting legacy in the Sacred Harp community, as did B. J. Harris. I cherish their memories as true ambassadors of the tradition.

As Mary Jo noted, Billy Joe and Evelyn were the embodiment of the love and fellowship that surrounds the hollow square. Their lives will be remembered long after we cease calling their names in memorial lessons. ■

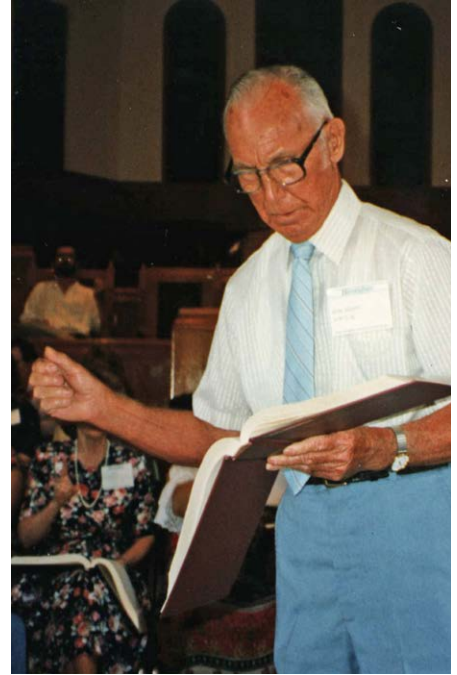
Feature

The Variety of Influence: Forms of Craftsmanship in the 1960 Edition

David Wright | Seattle, Washington



S. M. Denson, S. Whitt Denson, and T. J. Denson at the 1930 Young People's Interstate Sacred Harp Convention in Mineral Wells, Texas. *Photograph courtesy of the grandchildren of George Pullen Jackson.*



John Hocutt at the 1995 National Convention, Birmingham, Alabama. *Photograph by Ginnie Ely.*

Introduction

The *Original Sacred Harp: Denson Revision*, 1960 Edition,¹ produced by an august music committee consisting of A. M. Cagle (chairman), H. N. McGraw, T. B. McGraw, Elmer Kitchens, Hugh McGraw, and Ruth Denson Edwards and edited by Owel Denson, is remembered today partly as the subject of extramusical anecdotes. Singers were displeased to find the ink of its cover rubbing off onto their clothes. Owel Denson, defending the quality of its binding to a skeptical Hugh McGraw, threw a copy against the Birmingham courthouse wall, but this touching show of faith failed to prevent the eventual consignment of some 1,500 books to oblivion in the Coosa River.²

While there may have been a certain slipshod quality to the book, both as

a physical object and in some of the music it contained,³ it could boast of having introduced such quintessential Sacred Harp classics as O. A. Parris's MY BRIGHTEST DAYS, A. M. Cagle's I'LL SEEK HIS BLESSINGS, and Paine Denson's PEACE AND JOY (pp. 546, 542, and 532 in *The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition*; hereafter songs mentioned are in the 1991 Edition unless indicated otherwise). It also marked the first appearances in *The Sacred Harp* of Hugh McGraw, John Hocutt, and Raymond Hamrick.⁴ The 1960 Edition thus represents a significant milestone: a crucial point of transition, but also one of continuity, between the great Sacred Harp composers of the first half of the twentieth century (Cagle, Parris, the older Densons and McGraws) and those whose names have defined Sacred Harp composition into the present day. As in previous editions

of the book, the authors not only sought to emulate existing Sacred Harp musical styles,⁵ but also turned to established forms of arrangement and adaptation of earlier material. These adaptations provide insight into various aspects of Sacred Harp composition and creative practices.

Companions and Derivations

One practice with previous Sacred Harp precedents used by 1960 Edition composers was recasting the melody of an existing minor-key tune in the major mode, or vice versa. Later composers referred to such tunes as major or minor "companions," the best-known pair being Stephen Jenks's NORTH SALEM (p. 440) and John G. McCurry's RAYMOND (p. 441).⁶ In the 1960 Edition, S. Whitt Denson contributed LOVE BEYOND

Example 1**Example 2****Example 3**

Example 1 The opening bars (m. 1–6) of SEABORN and FILLMORE, illustrating their similar melodic contours.

Example 2 SEABORN and FILLMORE (m. 23–24). In writing his minor companion to FILLMORE, Owel Denson changed 6-las in FILLMORE to 7-sols in SEABORN.

Example 3 ALSTEAD and THE CHOICEST BLESSINGS (m. 1–4), illustrating how rewritten versions of New England tunes often had just eighth-note passing or accessory tones added.

DEGREE (p. 567 in the 1960 Edition, hereafter OSH1960), a minor companion to MOUNT PLEASANT (p. 218), and LAND OF REST (p. 484 OSH1960), an abbreviated minor companion to WESTFORD (p. 280). Owel Denson wrote SEABORN (p. 468 OSH1960), a minor companion to FILLMORE (p. 434), and THE LOVE OF GOD (p. 550 OSH1960), a major companion to PRAISE GOD (p. 328).

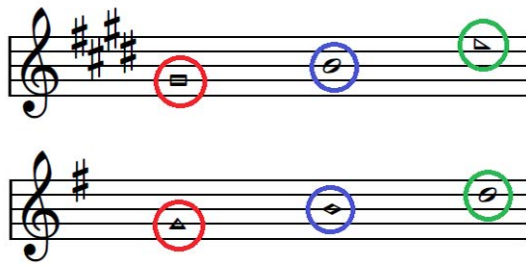
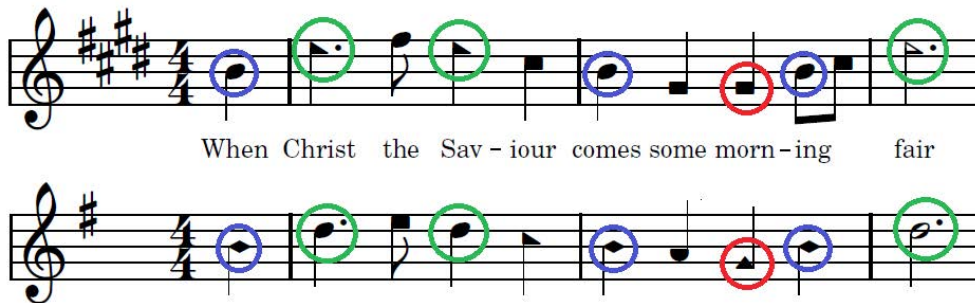
The major and minor companions have a value beyond mere novelty: they illustrate features of Sacred Harp musical style in a unique way. The companion never maintains a note-for-note (scale degree to scale degree) correspondence with the original; the deviations often occur as the composers negotiate differences in treatment between the respective (major and minor) modes. For example, the sixth scale degree (6-fa) is used frequently in major-key tunes but more sparingly in minor-key tunes; conversely, the seventh scale degree in minor (7-sol) is used extensively, the seventh scale degree in major (mi, the “leading tone”) much less so, and virtually never as

the root of a chord since its triad (the “subtonic”) lacks the stable perfect fifth interval found in other triads. Thus Owel Denson changes the prominent 6-las in FILLMORE to 7-sols in SEABORN, using the minor-key 6-fa only as a passing tone. Where an original minor-key tune has a stable harmony on the 7-sol (for example, measures 12–13 of NORTH SALEM), the major companion will transfer the harmony to some other chord, often the dominant (as in the corresponding measures of RAYMOND). Comparison of companions to their models offers a wealth of insight into the respective properties of major and minor Sacred Harp music; writing companions may have been not only a way to generate new material, but also an opportunity for composers to develop or demonstrate their mastery of the Sacred Harp idiom.

Another longstanding practice found, rather surprisingly, in the 1960 Edition is the unacknowledged derivation of material from early New England composers.⁷ GRACE SO FULL AND FREE (p. 494 OSH1960) and WHERE

CEASELESS AGES ROLL (p. 505 OSH1960), both attributed to R. E. (“Uncle Bob”) Denson, are based on Lewis Edson’s GREENFIELD and Ishmael Spicer’s CARLISLE respectively. (In the 1966 edition, WHERE CEASELESS AGES ROLL was rewritten into its current form—an essentially original tune with only vestigial traces of a relationship to CARLISLE.)⁸ THE CHOICEST BLESSINGS (p. 575 OSH1960), attributed to S. M. Denson, is Oliver Holden’s ALSTEAD.⁹ The tunes are altered from the originals in a fairly consistent fashion, amounting to a cursory remodeling of all four parts, primarily by the addition of eighth-note passing or accessory tones to original quarter notes.

Interestingly, O. A. Parris’s revisions of *The Christian Harmony* in the 1950s contain similarly rewritten New England tunes attributed to Sacred Harp composers. The 1954 partial revision, in upright format, contained two tunes attributed to S. M. Denson: PRISON CHAINS (p. 20 in the 2010 *Christian Harmony*, hereafter CH2010), based on Japheth Washburn’s VOICE OF NATURE,

Example 4**Example 5**

Example 4 Re-mapping the triad. THE RESURRECTION DAY above and AMONG THAT BAND below. The 1-doe, 3-mee, and 5-sole of AMONG THAT BAND become, respectively, the 3-la, 5-sol, and 1-fa (in the upper octave) of THE RESURRECTION DAY.

Example 5 Hocutt's re-mapping of the tonic triad in action. THE RESURRECTION DAY above, and AMONG THAT BAND below.

and LAST BED, based on Timothy Swan's MONTAGUE.¹⁰ The completed oblong revision of 1958, co-edited with John Deason, added CREATION (p. 8 CH2010), attributed to G. S. Doss but based on VENUS, (probably) by Elijah Griswold.¹¹

One may be inclined to wonder about the attribution to S. M. Denson of tunes published some twenty years after his death (and, in the case of THE CHOICEST BLESSINGS, dated 1959)¹², especially considering *The Sacred Harp's* unusual practice, described by David Warren Steel in *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, of “dedicatory attributions”—songs which “are credited to an individual as a form of tribute or dedication, but are actually composed by another person, perhaps a well-known Sacred Harp composer who already has many tunes to his credit.”¹³ PRISON CHAINS, LAST BED, and THE CHOICEST BLESSINGS are found in an undated manuscript book, now in the collection of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company's Sacred Harp Museum, in which S. M. Denson wrote down his arrangements of forty-four pieces from William Hauser's 1848 tunebook *The*

Hesperian Harp. Annotations on the manuscript suggest it was later reviewed by others, including S. Whitt Denson and R. E. Denson (S. M. Denson's sons) and A. M. Cagle, and was the source of the material published in *The Christian Harmony* and *The Sacred Harp*.¹⁴

Also among the arrangements in S. M. Denson's manuscript book are those published as GRACE SO FULL AND FREE and the 1960 version of WHERE CEASELESS AGES ROLL. These can thus be identified as examples of dedicatory attributions—doubtless considered fitting in light of R. E. Denson's status as S. M. Denson's son and a much respected and beloved singer in his own right.

Melodic Re-mappings

The above examples show how the 1960 *Sacred Harp* perpetuated historical practices of deriving tunes from earlier material. Close analysis suggests that another of its tunes is also derived from an existing tune, but this time in a more distant and unusual way that provides

insight into its composer's creative process and how he may have thought about music.

John Hocutt's tunes, described as “thumping, robust” and “sturdy, cleverly crafted pieces” by Buell Cobb in *Like Cords Around My Heart*, have quickly established themselves as favorites in all the books where they have appeared. Hocutt also sang *Christian Harmony* and “new book” music; his compositions had appeared in the 1954 and 1958 editions of *Christian Harmony* before he contributed three new tunes to the 1960 *Sacred Harp*. One of these, THE RESURRECTION DAY (p. 498), shares some unusual features—despite outward differences in musical style and content—with a tune from the 1958 *Christian Harmony*, John Deason's AMONG THAT BAND (p. 322 CH2010). The tunes not only have the same peculiar meter¹⁵ but are in fact rhythmically identical, except at the end of the penultimate phrase where Hocutt draws out the words “snow white throne.” They also have the same structure of paired voices in the fugal section, with the alto and treble exchanged (in AMONG THAT

BAND, the treble, rather than the alto, enters with the bass). Could there be a deeper relationship between the tunes?

AMONG THAT BAND has a strongly triadic melody—the notes on the first and third beats of each measure are almost entirely from the 1-3-5 tonic triad. To look at it another way, the melodic contour—the rising-and-falling shape of the melody—is articulated on a root-position triad. Hocutt, I believe, has fashioned the melody of THE RESURRECTION DAY by “re-mapping” the contour of the Deason melody onto a first-inversion rather than root-position triad.¹⁶ That is, the 1-doe, 3-mee, and 5-sole¹⁷ of AMONG THAT BAND become, respectively, the 3-la, 5-sol, and 1-fa (in the upper octave) of THE RESURRECTION DAY. While the correspondence (as with the major/minor companions) is not exact throughout—Hocutt applies the re-mapping scheme loosely where appropriate for the new tune—I think the overall similarity of contour, and the triad-to-triad correspondence of at least one entire phrase, are sufficient to suggest that such a “thought experiment” involving melodic structure was the initial seed from which the new tune germinated.¹⁸ It is a testament to his skill and grasp of the idiom that, while AMONG THAT BAND, with its varied harmonization, exemplifies a certain type of Christian Harmony style, Hocutt is able in THE RESURRECTION DAY to turn the remodeled tune into an equally compelling example of a different Sacred Harp style, which quickly found and continues to enjoy a well-deserved popularity.

Conclusion

It is perhaps unfair, though understandable, that the 1960 Edition is often remembered today for its failures, its musical content becoming partly inaccessible¹⁹ as newer revisions of the book superseded the old, leaving behind only a memory of ink-stained clothes. Its symbolic importance (of which its architects may well have been conscious) as a point of continuity in the lineage joining the 1911 James revision to later

editions of the book, including the 1991 Edition, is considerable—all the more so in that many of its living links to the 1911 and 1936 editions, including Cagle, Parris, Whitt and Owel Denson, and T. B. and H. N. McGraw, would pass away in the decade following its publication. At this significant moment in the book's history, its authors hewed to the classic adage. The music of the 1960 Edition enlarges our understanding of the many ways in which Sacred Harp composers have sought the old paths, to walk therein. ■

Endnotes

- 1 Called the “1960 Supplement” on its title page. It added 103 tunes (91 of them new compositions) to the back of the book, but otherwise left the 1936 edition unchanged.
- 2 Hugh McGraw shared these and other stories at Camp Fasola in 2008 where they were recorded in the camp's minutes. See Jesse P. Karlsberg and Aldo Ceresa, “Camp Fasola Session I (Adult Emphasis),” in *Minutes of Sacred Harp Singings*, June 28, 2008, <http://fasola.org/minutes/search/?n=2842>.
- 3 The book's physical and musical shortcomings may possibly be due to the sheer haste of its production. The music committee was only appointed on February 7, 1959, so the book, with 116 pages of new material, must have been produced in barely a year. Acknowledging the uneven quality of the 1960 book's music, the 1966 edition advertised the correction of “all errors and irregularities in the music contained in the 1960 supplement,” bringing it “up to the standard” of the rest of the book. The 1971 edition went even further, calling the 1960 edition “a great disappointment to those most concerned” and noting that the 1966 revision committee “was careful to secure high-quality workmanship and good printing.”
- 4 Credited with arranging the Southern Harmony/Christian Harmony tune KAMBLA and selecting William Billings's BENEFICENCE (p. 486) for inclusion in the book. Hamrick later acknowledged his authorship of MILLARD (p. 572n osh1960), dedicated to South Georgia singing school teacher Millard Hancock, and credited to Mrs. Raymond Hamrick.
- 5 Over half the new compositions added in 1960 were fuging tunes, most of them in much the same vein as the Denson and McGraw fuging tunes in the 1936 edition.
- 6 McCurry also created a major companion to STRATFIELD, called HERMON (p. 70 in The Social Harp). NORTH SALEM and RAYMOND

first entered The Sacred Harp in the 1911 James revision; an earlier companion, from the 1870 edition, is ST. PETERS (p. 389t), but in this case the original model, Billings's Savannah, was not included. Revisions of the B. F. White Sacred Harp contain several major and minor companions by Cooper Book composers, the earliest predating the addition of NORTH SALEM and RAYMOND to the James revision. See Robert L. Vaughn's *Songs Before Unknown: A Companion to The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition*, 2012 (Mount Enterprise, TX: Waymark Publications, 2015) for identification of these tunes.

- 7 The nineteenth-century editions contained New England pieces, by Abraham Maxim, Samuel Holyoke, and others, arranged without acknowledgment (until later editions) or claimed outright by Sacred Harp composers. The practice continued into the twentieth-century Cooper Book revisions as well. It is hard to say whether the inaccurate (by modern standards) or incomplete attributions reflect a conscious attempt at deception, or a different concept of authorship than is generally held today, or perhaps in some cases (such as the attribution of Lowell Mason's SHAWMUT to Ruth Denson Edwards in the 1960 Edition) were accidental.
- 8 The bass, treble, and alto parts of GRACE SO FULL AND FREE were also rewritten. Both tunes were re-credited “Re-Arranged by R. E. Denson 1966.”
- 9 SHOWERS OF BLESSINGS (p. 528), now acknowledged as an arrangement of Joseph Stone's GRAFTON but in the 1960 Edition credited outright to A. A. Blocker, might also be included in this list, but is much closer to what we would consider an actual arrangement, with alterations to the fuging structure and (unlike the other examples) completely new bass, treble, and alto parts.
- 10 Thanks to Rachel Wells Hall for pointing out LAST BED/MONTAGUE to me. LAST BED was removed in the 1958 revision. Christian Harmony tune dates are from copyright dates in the 1994 edition.
- 11 Later often printed with the title CREATION and, beginning with Ananias Davisson's Kentucky Harmony, attributed to Nehemiah Shumway.
- 12 This type of careless oversight occurred in several other cases in the 1960 Supplement where there is otherwise no apparent reason to doubt the authorship. Tunes by Paine Denson (d. 1955), T. J. Denson (d. 1935), and L. A. McGraw (d. 1957) were also dated 1959. On the other hand, two other newly-published tunes by T. J. Denson were “correctly” (or at least plausibly) dated 1935 while other new

compositions were not dated at all. In the 1966 Edition, *THE CHOICEST BLESSINGS* and T. J. Denson's *ADMONITION* were re-dated to 1935, and the new Paine Denson tunes to 1950.

- 13 Examples identified by Steel include *HUMILITY* and *SHINING STAR* (pp. 50b and 461; both written by Raymond Hamrick) from the 1991 Edition, and *THE LAMB OF GOD* (p. 572; written by T. B. McGraw) from the 1966 Edition.
- 14 The arrangements in Denson's manuscript were untitled and had no texts. O. A. Parris wrote a text for *PRISON CHAINS*; texts found elsewhere in *The Sacred Harp* were used for *LAST BED* and *THE CHOICEST BLESSINGS*.
- 15 Three couplets of 6s & 10s followed by a concluding 8, 6. O. A. Parris wrote the text for *AMONG THAT BAND*.
- 16 Inversions of triads are described in the 1991 Edition rudiments, p. 22.
- 17 Spelling per the Christian Harmony rudiments, p. vii.
- 18 This may also at least partly explain the relationship between Hocutt's own *HOCUTT* (p. 464 in *The Sacred Harp*, Revised Cooper Edition, 2012; printed during Hocutt's lifetime in *The New Millennium Harp*, a 2001 collection of new compositions edited by Lisa Grayson) and his earlier Christian Harmony tune *THIS HEAVY LOAD* (p. 316 CH2010). The tunes seem obviously related somehow, with their distinctive double fuge and even shared melodic material (transposed and exchanged from one part to another in places), but the exact nature of the relationship is elusive. A plausible reading is that Hocutt again experimented with taking the contours of one melody and re-mapping them onto a different range of pitches to create a new melody.
- 19 The new tunes in the 1960 Edition are, of course, still under copyright, even if since deleted, and thus (unlike material from older public-domain tunebooks) have not been widely reprinted in later compilations or editions. In recent years, with the permission of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, all deleted tunes from the 1960 and 1966 editions have been made available online, first by Berkley Moore, later by Robert Stoddard at "The Sacred Harp: Deletions for the 1991 Edition," [BostonSing.com](http://www.bostonsing.org/music/sacred-harp-deletions/), <http://www.bostonsing.org/music/sacred-harp-deletions/>. This is a valuable resource, although its picture of the 1960 Edition is not quite complete, since where 1960 tunes were revised in 1966 or 1971, the revised version rather than the original is presented. (The original version of *WHERE CEASELESS AGES ROLL/CARLISLE* is not included, since technically the tune was never deleted.)

Singing Report

Sacred Harp's (All-)California Dreaming

Mairye Bates | San Diego, California



An enthusiastic crowd at the All-California Convention. Photograph by Mairye Bates.

On the weekend of January 16–17, 2016, an enthusiastic crowd of singers gathered in Poway, California, for the 28th All-California Sacred Harp Singing Convention. Poway, known as the "City in the Country," is centrally located in San Diego County. The All-California Convention rotates between the Los Angeles area, the San Francisco area, and the San Diego area, so it was last held in Poway in 2013. Singers from eighteen states, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada attended.

The San Diego singers offered a full weekend of events, starting with the Friday night activities, held in the Old Adobe Chapel, in the Old Town neighborhood of San Diego. This is a beautiful and intimate space, with great acoustics. The pews were rearranged for singing in the traditional hollow square. In addition to the electric lights, lit candles in sconces and candelabras added to the mood, creating a warm nostalgic feeling on a rare rainy night in San Diego.

We started with "pitching practice," a friendly chance for novices to practice

pitching, or keying. Singers chose a song, set a pitch for the piece, and led the class in a verse. At the end of each song, first the leader, and then the singers, provided feedback on the pitch. It was interesting to hear comments from such a variety of perspectives. A few people felt their pitch was off, but the crowd felt comfortable. Several experienced keyers also offered their insights. [Read about Georgia keyers' perspectives on this mysterious art and new findings about how singers pitch Sacred Harp music in vol. 2, no. 2 of the Newsletter.—Ed.]

Next, the alternative singing from *The Shenandoah Harmony* started. With sixty to seventy people, the class filled the chapel with soaring song. The songs were new to many of us, but beautifully rendered. I thought this was a great reminder of how our shape-notes help with sight singing.

There was a truly magical moment during a break. The electric lights in the chapel were turned off, so we could imagine attending a service lit only by candlelight. A call from the crowd started us on a haunting rendition of



Left: Convention chair Elaine Denny (left) and arranging committee member Carla Smith (right).

Right: Three altos look out over a large class inside Templars Hall in Old Poway Park. Photographs by Judy Getrich.



IDUMEA (p. 47b in *The Sacred Harp*) sung from memory. I know many of us were deeply touched by this spontaneous song.

Saturday morning we gathered at Templars Hall in Old Poway Park. This is another building with great acoustics. The beautiful hardwood floors, the floor-to-ceiling windows decorated with swags of hunter green, the vaulted ceilings, and the fresh air breezing through make it a wonderful singing space. Well over one hundred singers gathered to raise their voices in lovely harmony. The chair, Elaine Denny, opened the convention with the vice chair, Esteban Veliz, and the chaplain, David Fetcho, who led an opening prayer.

The members of the arranging committee, Judy Getrich and Carla Smith, kept the class going with a great balance of singing and visiting over the breaks. During the day, singers led ninety-six songs, as recorded by the secretaries, Mimi Wright and Judy Getrich.

Mike Hinton, a singer from San Antonio, Texas, and president of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, said,

“Session after session, I would think, ‘this next session cannot possibly be as strong and lively as the morning session,’ and lo and behold, the singing just kept going, tune after tune.”

Dinner on the ground included so much food on the tables, no one could have gone hungry. Food for all—vegans, vegetarians, (well, this IS California!) and as our chair, Elaine, put it, “people who eat meat.” And there were so many desserts, we didn’t just have a dessert table—there was a dessert ROOM. So many delicious contributions!

On Saturday evening, Susan Willis-Powers organized a Composium. An enthusiastic crowd sung new pieces composed in the Sacred Harp style. And then there were two separate socials—one at a local hotel, for those who wanted to stay close to Poway, and another at my house in Escondido. For those who asked about the addictive and delicious chocolate confection I made, the recipe for the Nanaimo Bars is at <http://www.nanaimo.ca/EN/main/visitors/NanaimoBars.htm>. (I use pecans in place of the almonds.)



On Sunday, we gathered again to sing, and singers led ninety-five songs. The memorial lesson, given by Mike Hinton and Susan Chernes, included moving observations about those who could not join us. Mike's remark that we find mention of memorial lessons in the oldest minutes of singings was a powerful reminder that what we sing has the weight of tradition behind it.

Elaine made an impassioned speech about the wonderful Camp Fasola (<http://campfasola.org/>) experience, and asked past participants to stand. I didn't count, but there were probably dozens. She thanked David Ivey, the camp organizer, for doing so much to help keep our tradition alive and well, and encouraged everyone to attend if they can.

Jerry Schreiber and Geoff Grainger of the resolutions committee helped to wrap up the day by recognizing so much of what went into hosting a wonderful singing and expressing thanks to all.

And, although the singing ended, the events didn't. Since this convention fell over a holiday weekend, many people

could stay on Monday. Susan Willis-Powers led a wander through the tide pools of La Jolla, and Elaine Denny led a hike in the mountains.

Speaking for the San Diego singers, I can say we delighted in creating a weekend of song and joy, and are so grateful for the many folks who traveled to spend time with us. And now, we're all looking forward to next year's All-California Sacred Harp Singing Convention, scheduled for the Los Angeles area. Come sing on the third Sunday and the Saturday before, which falls on January 14-15, 2017. Hope to see you there! ■

Left: Templars Hall, site of the convention.

Right: Midge Harder attends to bounteous tables getting ready for dinner on the ground. *Photographs by Judy Getrich.*

Old Paths

Grandpa McWhorter: Singer and Civil Servant

Joseph M. Jones | Huntsville, Alabama

The 1911 edition of *Original Sacred Harp* included a song by M. F. McWhorter titled DENSON, a testimony to the author's friendship with his singing school teachers T. J. and S. M. Denson.

The issuance of the reproduction early last year of the 1911 *Original Sacred Harp* (the James Book) caused me to reflect upon the extraordinary influence that historic old book and its predecessors had on common community life throughout the deep South a century ago. I knew from childhood that my grandfather, M. F. McWhorter (1858–1940) had a significant role in the production of the James Book. In 1906, he was named by the United Sacred Harp Musical Association as a member of a committee to bring forth this new revision of the 1870 *Sacred Harp*. The first printing of the book had a page of photographs of leading men of the Sacred Harp movement: the chairman of the committee, Joseph S. James, and all members of the music

editorial committee, including Grandpa McWhorter. Like my grandfather, many of the singers depicted on this page were leaders in their communities. In many cases, I believe Sacred Harp singing was a key to their prominence and orientation toward service. My grandfather's life demonstrates this influence of *The Sacred Harp* on everyday life in Alabama during his era.

The Sacred Harp was recognized in its day as second only to the Holy Bible; it was seemingly prevalent in nearly all "cultivated" homes. Before there was radio, television, the internet and other forms of communication and entertainment, choral music was a major facet of southern society, and *The Sacred Harp* from mid-nineteenth century onward was the king of choral music. Nearly every community crossroads

hosted at least one singing a year. George Pullen Jackson, the Vanderbilt University professor who "discovered" Sacred Harp for academia, wrote in one of his several books that in a typical year, 1929, there were 150 singing events of note in the north half of Alabama alone. "Nine of these," he wrote, "[were] three-day affairs, eight last[ed] two days, and the rest [were] merely for one day."¹

Millard Fillmore McWhorter was an obscure dirt farmer of the Mars Hill community in far northeast Cleburne County, Alabama, a stone's throw from the Georgia state line. Obscure except for one thing: he had in some manner now unknown become addicted to the Sacred Harp song movement, and had given himself to teaching that widely-accepted art form in communities all around him in Alabama and Georgia. It is apparent that he had come under the tutelage of a pair of brothers, Seaborn M. Denson (1854–1936) and Tom J. Denson (1863–1935), both born in Cleburne County's Arbacoochee community, who had taught singing schools far and wide and eventually became the deans of Sacred Harp. The 1911 edition of the song book included a song McWhorter wrote, at page 515, titled simply DENSON, testimony to the author's friendship with the pair. Another piece of Grandpa's, JACKSON, at page 518, continues in the current *Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition* (now on p. 317).

Grandpa followed the Densons and became a leading teacher of the music, which leads me to believe that his resulting widespread popularity was the single factor that led to his success when he offered for the elective position of county sheriff in the early 1920s. He thus quit the farm and moved his family to the two-story brick jailhouse behind the courthouse in the county seat of Heflin, which became a center of music on the first floor where the sheriff and family resided, whereas the second floor was given to housing county inmates,



The McWhorter Family.

all supplied by a first floor kitchen. The brood of eleven McWhorter children, who by that time had many children of their own, must have felt it quaint to gather for annual family reunions and singings at the county's jailhouse!

After that four-year term ended, McWhorter moved back to the farm and offered himself for another county leadership position: commissioner for his district on the county governing body. He was successful there also.

As unlikely as it may seem, some of those same factors seem to be at work in 2016 in DeKalb County, Alabama, quite possibly the most Sacred Harp-centric county of the state's sixty-seven, that county alone hosting about a dozen singings each year. There, three major current county leaders are ardent Sacred Harp people, led again by a man who taught Sacred Harp throughout the area in his younger years. Ricky Harcrow of Ider, sixty-four, taught many singing schools until his calling into the ministry

redirected the emphasis of his life. He became a Primitive Baptist pastor but that did not supplant his interest in the old music; he continues today as an active leader of song, as well as a popular preacher in his denomination at large. But he also is in his second term as the county's CEO, the head of the county commission, after first having served three terms as a commission district member. He also is retired from the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Terry Wootten of Ider, sixty-year-old farmer, is in his sixteenth year as a member of the county's board of education. He is of the famous Wootten family which is widely known in the singing world. And Terry's cousin, Shane Wootten of Henagar, in his forties is the newest and youngest Sacred Harp mainline singer-turned-politician. He is a member of the county commission, filling the position Harcrow had when he was elevated to chairman.

It seems that history still repeats itself,

and in this case we're all the better for it. The resurrection of these stories from the distant past serves to reinforce the value we justly place on *The Sacred Harp* in shaping and ordering society in the early singing South, instilling qualities of community leadership in that day as well as this. ■

Endnote

1. *George Pullen Jackson, White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Songs, Singings, and "Buckwheat Notes" (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 105.*

Number, Measure, Weight

Entropy Unpacked: The Entropy Number from “FaSoLa Minutes”

David Brodeur and David Smead | Decatur, Georgia; Athens, Georgia



Matt Hinton, Anna Hinton, and Mark Godfrey consulting the FaSoLa Minutes app. *Photograph by Leigh Cooper.*

Introduction

Since its initial release in 2013, the FaSoLa Minutes iOS app has become an important component of how many singers learn and engage with Sacred Harp songs, singers, and singings. The app includes data from the *Minutes of Sacred Harp Singings* since 1995. A review of the app appeared in vol. 3, no. 2 of this newsletter. Among many useful features described in that review, the app can be used to answer statistical questions such as:

- Which songs in *The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition* have been led the most often?
- How has the popularity of each song varied over time?

- How many times has each leader led since 1995, and how many different songs?
- What is each leader's entropy number?

...and this is the point in many discussions of the FaSoLa Minutes app where the puzzled expressions appear, because the entropy measure is unfamiliar to most Sacred Harp singers. You may have some additional questions:

- Why is the entropy measure included with the other statistics in the app?
- What does a leader's entropy indicate about that leader?
- How is the entropy number calculated?

- How does my choice of songs change my entropy number?
- Does my entropy measure matter—and should I work to change it?

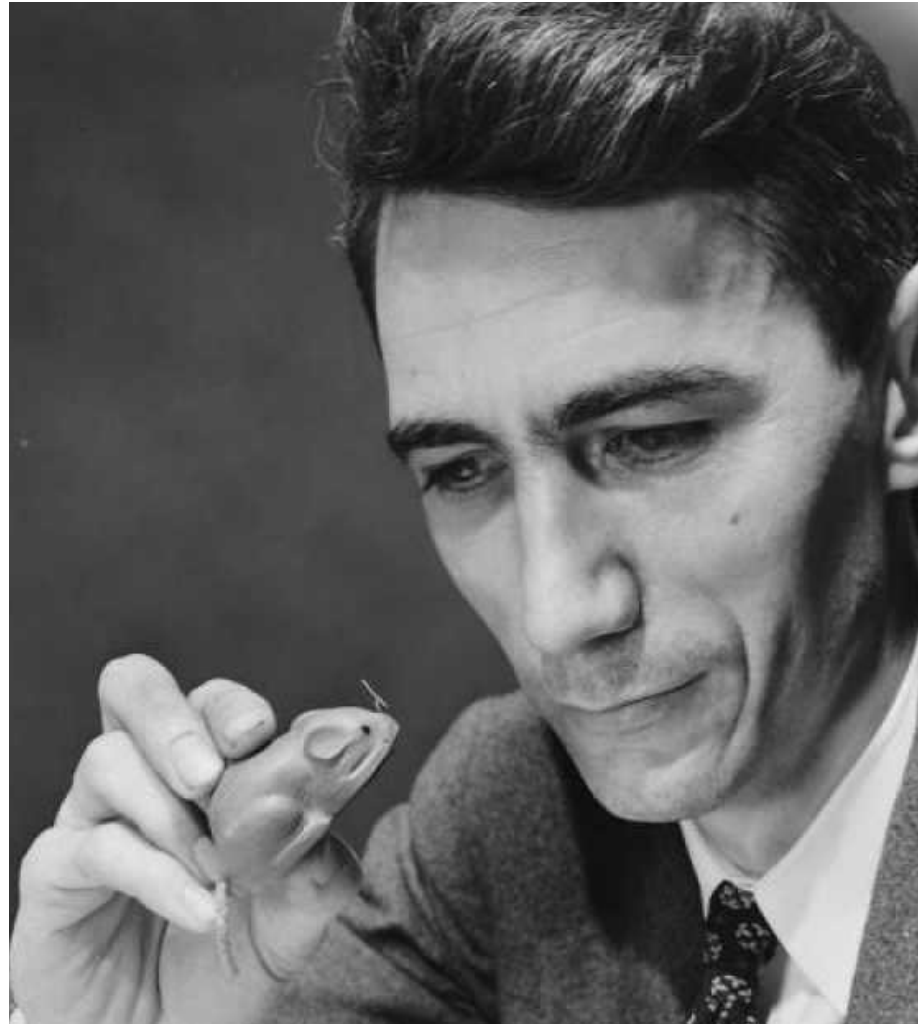
We will answer these questions with both nontechnical explanations and formulas for readers who are so inclined. In the following sections, we describe what the entropy number is intended to measure and how to interpret it. Then we explain the formulas used to define entropy with simple examples that illustrate how song choice affects the entropy measurement. We conclude with thoughts on how song leaders can use the entropy number, with tables that illustrate how entropy is affected based on a leader's choice of songs.

How to Interpret the Entropy Number

The “Help” page in the FaSoLa Minutes app describes entropy as “a measure from 1 to 0 of a singer’s unpredictability when leading.” An entropy number near 0 indicates that a leader is very predictable, while a number near 1 indicates high unpredictability.

The entropy measure is built from the frequency that a leader has called each song in the book, so it provides more information about how predictable the song choices of that leader are than the other song count information in the app. For example, picture two hypothetical leaders, Adam and Bertrand, who have each led 100 times and have led 20 different songs. However, Adam has led each of his 20 songs 5 times, while Bertrand has led 19 songs 1 time each, and ROSE OF SHARON 81 times. At the next singing Adam and Bertrand attend, the arranging committee will have a harder time predicting what Adam will lead. The entropy measure for each leader reflects this by assigning a higher entropy number to Adam than to Bertrand.

Note that the entropy number does not indicate whether someone is a good leader. For example, one of the qualities of a good leader is the ability to choose an appropriate song considering such factors as the time of day and the energy of the class. A leader who is unpredictable to the point of being completely random is unlikely to do this well. Also, the statistics in the app are based on song choices in the minutes, and therefore don’t reflect other recognized qualities of a good leader, such as familiarity with the song one chooses to lead, selection of appropriate verses and tempo, and good communication of the leader’s intentions to the class. There are excellent leaders with relatively high entropy, and there are other excellent leaders with relatively low entropy.



Claude Shannon was an American mathematician, electrical engineer, and cryptographer known as “the father of information theory.” Photograph from Wikipedia.

History and Mathematical Formula for Entropy

The formula for entropy was developed by Claude Shannon in the 1940s. Shannon was a mathematician at Bell Labs, the research and development branch of the Bell Telephone Company. His ideas of information theory became part of the foundation of computer science. Shannon defined the smallest unit of information as a “bit,” which can only have one of two values: 0 or 1. He described how any message can be encoded as a sequence of bits, and developed the entropy formula as a way to measure the amount of information in a message.

Shannon entropy “H” is defined by this formula:

$$H = - \sum p_i \log_2(p_i)$$

where:

- p_i is the probability of a particular term appearing in the message, out of all the possible terms—in our case, the probability of leading a particular song (song i) from *The Sacred Harp*.
- \log_2 is a logarithm to base 2. (Logarithms are the reverse of exponentiation. We say that the logarithm of 8 to base 2, written $\log_2(8)$, is equal to 3 because $2^3 = 8$.) Shannon used base 2 in this formula because the “bit” has two possible values.

The symbol Σ (the Greek letter Sigma) is mathematical shorthand for a sum of a number of terms, where in this case each term is $p_i \log_2(p_i)$ with the index value “i.” So the entropy formula could also be written as:

$$H = -1 * [p_1 \log_2(p_1) + p_2 \log_2(p_2) + p_3 \log_2(p_3) + \dots]$$

including a separate term for each song, but that would take much longer to write out.

For the entropy calculation in the app, we make the assumption that the frequency each song has been lead in the past is likely to predict future behavior. So, for example, if you’ve led 100 times in the minutes, and 20 of those were LENOX, then the frequency with which you led LENOX was 0.2, or 20 percent, and we would use 20 percent as the probability p_i for LENOX.

For each leader, the probabilities of leading each song in the book need to be added together to calculate that leader’s entropy. If you’ve never led a particular song, it neither adds to nor subtracts from your entropy.

The maximum possible entropy comes from choosing any of the 554 songs in *The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition*, with equal probability. In other words, the class has no way of predicting which song you are about to call, so the leader with maximum entropy is completely unpredictable. In math terms, all the p_i ’s would be the same, $1/554$. The Shannon entropy of the completely unpredictable leader would be:

$$H = -554 (1/554) \log_2(1/554) \\ = -\log_2(1/554) = 9.114$$

In the FaSoLa Minutes app, someone who is completely predictable (i.e. always leads the same song) has an entropy of 0, and the completely unpredictable leader has an entropy of 1.0. This is because entropy reported in the app has been “normalized” by dividing by $-\log_2(1/554) = 9.114$. (Normalization is frequently used in statistics, because it makes it easier to identify where a statistical value falls between the minimum (0 or 0%) and maximum (1 or 100%) possible values.) A reported (“relative”) entropy

of 0.600 is actually a raw entropy of 5.47, divided by 9.114, the maximum possible entropy.

FaSoLa Minutes app normalized entropy = $-\sum p_i \log_2(p_i) / -\log_2(1/554)$

Example: How Song Choice Affects Entropy Number

Say a leader, Catherine, has led 2 different songs 3 times: LENOX twice, and NEW BRITAIN once.

Then in the calculation of the entropy formula, LENOX has a probability of $2/3$, and NEW BRITAIN has a probability of $1/3$, so the entropy number is 0.1008. (If you look through the leaders listed in the app, you will find many leaders who have led two different songs three times and therefore have this entropy number.)

Now Catherine is going to lead for a fourth time, and is choosing a song. How will her entropy number change based on her choice?

Option 1: If she leads LENOX again, its probability rises to $3/4$, and NEW BRITAIN’s drops to $1/4$. This makes her song choice more predictable than before, so her new entropy number goes down to 0.0890.

Option 2: If she leads NEW BRITAIN again, then its probability rises to $2/4$, and LENOX’s probability falls to $2/4$. Her entropy rises to 0.1097, because her song choice is less predictable than before, even though she has still only led 2 songs.

Option 3: She picks a new song to lead—for the formula it doesn’t matter which of the other 552 songs in *The Sacred Harp* she chooses. Then LENOX’s probability drops to $2/4$, NEW BRITAIN’s drops to $1/4$, and the new song has probability $1/4$. As a result, her entropy rises to 0.1646, because her song choice is much less predictable than before.

In general, leading a song that was previously led could either increase or decrease the entropy number, depending on how it changes the probabilities of the songs already led, but leading a new song always results in the largest change in entropy, and it always increases the entropy number.

(Homework for the interested reader: Using some algebra and the properties of logarithms, the formula for FaSoLa Minutes app entropy shown in Part III simplifies to $E = \sum p_i \log(p_i) / \log(1/554)$, which uses common logarithms instead of the logarithm to base 2. Common logarithms are a common function on scientific calculators, so this makes it possible to work out simple examples such as the ones above with a calculator. Give it a try!)

How Song Leaders Use Entropy

So what does entropy mean for song leaders? One way to think about it is in terms of the number of songs a singer seems to be leading. If a leader has led 20 different songs one time each, her entropy would be 0.48. If she has led 50 different songs, her entropy would be 0.63. See Table 1 below for some sample figures. If a leader led the number of songs on the left, one time each, that leader would have the entropy number on the right.

Table 2 shows the equivalent number of songs, led one time each, which correspond to a given entropy number based on the app formula. This gives a sense of the minimum number of songs an individual would have to lead to arrive at the corresponding entropy.

Your entropy number can be interpreted as a measure of the range of songs you are likely to select. Repeating a previously-led song will result in a lower entropy than leading a new song, as described in the previous section. The number of songs listed in the tables serves as a kind of “functional minimum” on the possible number of songs a leader is expected to have available. Looking at the chart, a leader with an entropy of 0.700 has led at least 83 songs, but likely many more. For example: After leading five different songs, I would have an entropy of 0.255. If I then choose to lead a repeat song, my new entropy will be 0.247. But if I choose to lead a new song, my new entropy will be 0.284. As the entropy number rises, the change will become smaller. At the other end of the spectrum, if you only lead two

songs in perfect alternation, your entropy number will oscillate around 0.11, no matter how many times you lead.

Note that because almost all leaders have repeated songs, and most leaders lead some songs more often than other songs, most leaders who have led 20 different songs will have an entropy lower than the maximum 0.48; this difference between the actual entropy for a leader and the highest possible entropy in these tables indicates indirectly how often a leader has chosen to repeat a previously-led song, as opposed to trying a new one.

Some Observations

You'll notice from the tables that the result isn't "linear": as the entropy number increases, it takes a lot more songs to get the same amount of change in entropy.

The best way to raise your entropy number is to lead a lot of songs at singings recorded in the minutes, and to lead a new song each time. But the fact that the app measures entropy doesn't mean this needs to be your goal. While leading many different songs might be a good way to become a more proficient leader, we should always think about how a song might fit with the texture of the singing when choosing. This should be something we consider whether we're leading a new song or not. For example, it's not a sign of a proficient leader to choose *ROSE OF SHARON* at the end of a day-long singing, regardless of the leader's entropy number. In addition, the only way to improve your leading of a particular song is to lead it multiple times.

Conclusion

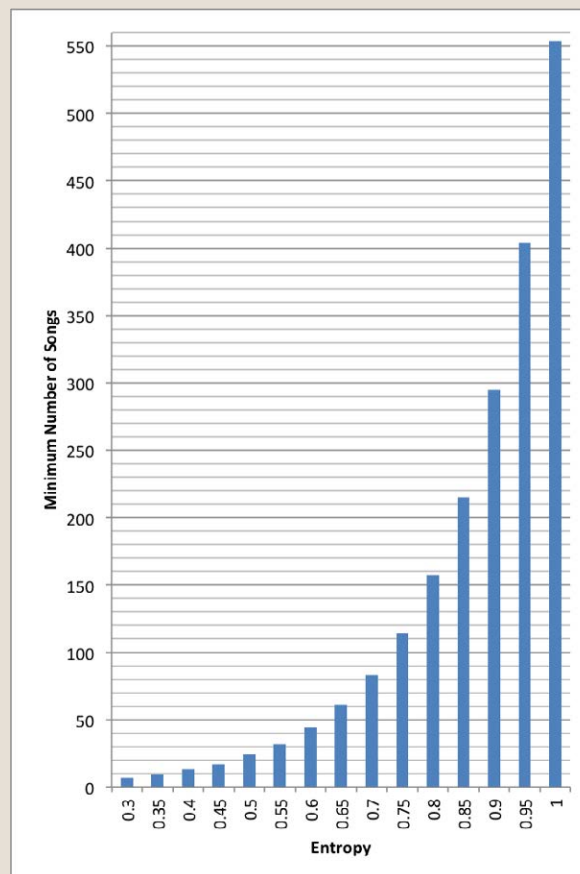
We hope that this article improves understanding of the entropy statistic in the FaSoLa Minutes app, and appreciation for all the components that make one a good leader. Attaining a high entropy number is not a useful end in itself, but the entropy measure provides information that can help us think about how we choose songs to lead.

The iOS application FaSoLa Minutes was developed by Mark Godfrey, and designed by Lauren Bock. It is available for \$4.99 from the iPhone App Store, with proceeds going to the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association (<http://www.fasola.org>). ■

Tables and charts:

# Songs	Entropy
4	0.219
8	0.329
16	0.439
32	0.549
64	0.658
128	0.768
256	0.878

Entropy	# Songs
0.300	7
0.350	9
0.400	13
0.450	17
0.500	24
0.550	32
0.600	44
0.650	61
0.700	83
0.750	114
0.800	157
0.850	215
0.900	295
0.950	404
1.000	554



Just a Minute

“With One Accord”: A UK West Gallery Quire at the National Convention, June 12, 1997

Helen Brown | Derby, United Kingdom



With One Accord outside Trinity Baptist Church, Homewood, Alabama 1997.

Editor's Note: *This issue's installment of "Just a Minute," our examination of the story behind an unexpected line in the Minutes of Sacred Harp Singings, features a paragraph from the minutes documenting an unusual event: a performance by a musical ensemble at a Sacred Harp singing. The minutes of the 1997 National Sacred Harp Convention report:*

The United Kingdom group, With One Accord, was then introduced by Buell Cobb. The group, who brought 14 of their members to the convention, then sang selections from their repertoire of 18th and 19th century music. It is in this music that the roots of Sacred Harp can be found.

Helen Brown, a member of the group, and today a stalwart of the National Convention's arranging committee, explains how the performance came about.

In 1997, a group of fourteen singers from the United Kingdom formed a scratch choir we called "With One Accord." Our intention was to perform concerts of music from the English West Gallery tradition (a music practice in which Sacred Harp has some of its roots) in the heartland of Sacred Harp and to culminate in attending the National Sacred Harp Convention in Birmingham, Alabama.

The music we performed was from the rich and varied tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English rural parish and non-conformist church music. The construction of special galleries to house the singers and musicians at the west end of churches gave rise to the name West Gallery Music for this style of sacred song. Mainly metrical psalm settings, the music consists of plain

tunes and more intricate fugging tunes with robust harmonies and rhythms which would have been performed in an uninhibited fashion by a band of local singers and musicians (known as the Quire), essentially formed to help lead the worship in church. This music fell from favor by the Victorian era; the bands were replaced with organs and the quires were disbanded. The music only survived in the carol-singing traditions of the West Country, South Yorkshire, and Derbyshire until the past thirty years or so when enthusiasts revived interest in this music, performing pieces rediscovered in old and dusty church manuscripts. Unlike Sacred Harp, West Gallery music is revivalist and mainly performance music. Yet there are many similarities between the two styles, and both are exhilarating to sing and a joy to share.

Our trip began in Atlanta, where we were hosted by the congregation of The First Baptist Church in Tucker. We performed a couple of concerts around this area, including an evening concert at the church, where the audience included Sacred Harp singers John Plunkett, Judy Mincey, and Lee Rogers.

The next day we headed off on I-20 with a scheduled stop which would have been unthinkable for us not to make. We arrived at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church in Bremen, Georgia, where Hugh McGraw was waiting to meet us. We were privileged to visit with him for a couple of hours, chatting and singing for a while. I particularly remember that Hugh called *WAR DEPARTMENT* (p. 160t in *The Sacred Harp*); the majority of us were not at all competent in reading the notes at this time and the song was pretty much a train wreck!

We got lost as we headed into Birmingham—no GPS in those days! A frantic phone call brought Buell Cobb out to meet us and we were guided in to the Church of the Advent, where we were to give a concert that evening. I seem to remember that the church was fairly full for the concert, with quite a few folks in the audience who had arrived in time for the National Convention. After the concert we had dinner with Buell at a small restaurant in Homewood and then we were ferried out to our various housing hosts.

The National Convention met at Trinity Baptist Church, Homewood, and we arrived on the first morning in great anticipation of what we were sure would be a wonderful experience. As we registered, we were warmly welcomed by several folks in the reception area, amongst them Judy Hauff and Jim Carnes, as I recall, and then, later on, Amanda Denson. As the first group of UK singers to attend the convention, there was great deal of interest in us—and our strange accents! We met so many people, all of whom were so wonderfully welcoming.

The buzz in the hall was already vibrant, and as the first notes were given, the singing began. I can only say that,



With One Accord singing with Hugh McGraw at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, Bremen, Georgia.

from that first moment, I was blown away by the sound in that room. The energy was almost tangible and the sound was like nothing I had ever heard. I had been singing Sacred Harp music for about eight years in a small group and had, of course, heard recordings, but this was on a completely different scale. I was totally overwhelmed by the sound and the emotion and, after a little while, felt that I had to move to escape an intensity which I was not used to. Also, despite being able to read music, I did not read the shapes very well at this time and was experiencing a very steep learning curve. After the recess, I went to sit in the balcony area overlooking the singing space, just to let the experience sink in and to give me a moment to acclimatize, as it were. It seemed that many of the group had the same idea and I think that the majority of us spent much of that first day just revelling in this wonderful, incredible sound, struggling with the volume and the emotions which were being evoked, but enjoying it from a safe distance.

In the session after lunch, Buell introduced us, advising a little about West Gallery music, and asked us to sing a few pieces from our repertoire. I'm sure that most folks really just wanted to get on and sing (after all, this was the always the best session of the day, right?) but everyone listened patiently and were very complimentary about our music.¹

As the three days went by, we all became a little more used to the intensity (which only heightened on Friday) and felt more able to be a part of the singing square, surrounded, carried, helped, and encouraged by the singers around us in our sections. It was such a privilege for me to sing in the treble section with singers including Freeman Wootten, Shelbie Sheppard, and Mary Lambert within earshot (of course I had no idea who they were at the time) and I wholly revelled in the entire experience. On several occasions I would just stop singing and let the sound wash over me whilst I watched some of the older ladies, particularly, leading their songs so gracefully. It was an inspiring experience for which I am so grateful.

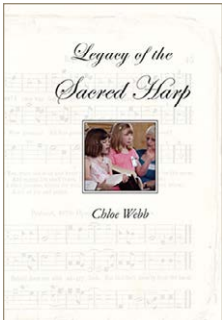
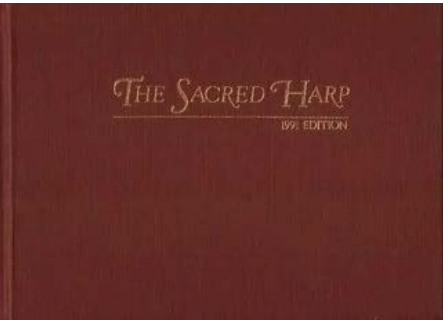
I can only speak for myself in relaying what happened (albeit a dim and distant memory from nineteen years ago), but I know that being a part of this convention had a profound effect on most of the group. What I can say, however, is that the trip completely changed my life; Sacred Harp in its entirety has been a blessing and has truly enriched my and my husband Ted's lives. ■

Endnote

¹ Our selections that day included *ARISE AND HAIL THE GLORIOUS STAR*, *PENTONVILLE*, and *GIBRALTAR*. On Friday we sang for the convention again, performing *SHROPSHIRE FUNERAL HYMN* and *KINGSBRIDGE*.

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