

# The SACRED HARP PUBLISHING COMPANY Newsletter

VOL. 5, NO. 2 Stories about singers and singings, our music and traditions, and Sacred Harp's present-day growth. DEC. 2016

## Special Issue, Raymond C. Hamrick on The Sacred Harp



Raymond C. Hamrick leading at the Mt. Zion Memorial Singing, Mt. Zion Methodist Church, Georgia, July 1973. Photograph by Bill Lightfoot. Courtesy of Pitts Theology Library.

## Raymond Cooper Hamrick, A Tribute

Mary Brownlee | Barnesville, Georgia

WE knew Raymond through his nearly lifelong association with Sacred Harp, but he was known mainly in Macon as a master watch and clock repairman and jeweler. He often made house calls to repair clocks that could not be brought into his shop. I saw him often at his workbench, working with tiny parts and tools. Precision and time marked his professional life, and he instructed us, and sometimes admonished us, to pay attention to the time signature in our songs.

I have paraphrased some words taken from an epitaph of a master watch and clock maker who lived in the 1700s<sup>1</sup> as an

apt tribute and memorial to Raymond Hamrick: Integrity was the mainspring, and prudence the regulator of the actions of his life. He had the art of disposing of his time so well, that his hours glided by in harmony and dignity. He ran down November 24, 2014, in hopes of being taken in hand by his Maker, thoroughly cleaned, repaired, wound up, and set going in the world to come, when time shall be no more.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> This watch and clock maker was George Routleigh (1745–1802), who is buried at the Lydford churchyard in Dartmoor, England. The epitaph's earliest known printing is in a 1786 issue of the Derby Mercury, in which the fictional deceased is named "Peter Pendulum."—Ed.

**Editor's Note:** Raymond Hamrick taught Mary Brownlee and her sisters Rosemund Watson and Martha Harrell to sing, and for many decades Hamrick joined Brownlee and Watson to practice shape-note songs old and new at Brownlee's home in Barnesville. Brownlee read this tribute to Hamrick at the 2015 Emmaus Primitive Baptist Church Singing, Thomaston, Georgia, and the Middle Georgia Singing, Union Primitive Baptist Church, Goggans, Georgia.

## Introduction to “Raymond C. Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*,” Volume 5, Number 2 of the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*

Jesse P. Karlsberg

THE eleventh issue of the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter* features esteemed Sacred Harp singer, composer, and scholar Raymond C. Hamrick (1915–2014), a recipient of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company’s posthumous citation. The issue includes insightful essays by Hamrick himself, a video interview, and commentary on his many contributions to the Sacred Harp world.

Our issue opens with South Georgia singer Mary Brownlee’s tribute to Hamrick, which eloquently evokes Hamrick’s courtly personality and significance to the South Georgia singing community. Jesse P. Karlsberg next offers an in-depth survey of Hamrick’s long life and wide-ranging involvement in Sacred Harp singing. The issue next turns to Hamrick’s own writing, sharing groundbreaking essays by the singer on Sacred Harp’s history and practices, some never before published. We begin with Hamrick’s two 1965 contributions to the *Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News*: a report on growing appreciation of the work of composer William Billings and an evocative survey of role of shape-notes in American music history. The issue then turns to Hamrick’s previously unpublished 1972 study of tempo in *The Sacred Harp*, the first comprehensive examination of the subject. Hamrick’s 1986 contributions to the *National Sacred Harp Newsletter* follow. The singer’s celebrated study of the methods and results of pitchers at Sacred Harp singings appeared in vol. 2, no. 2 of the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter* with an introduction by Ian Quinn. We include it in the print edition of this issue. We also reprint Hamrick’s convincing articulation of the value of shape-notes for composers. We next feature Hamrick’s 1996 return to the music of his favorite composer, William Billings, with an essay published in a special issue of the peer-reviewed music education journal, *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*. This section of the *Newsletter* concludes with two additional previously unpublished contributions: an essay Hamrick wrote in the mid-1990s, offering a thorough insider’s account of the process of revising *The Sacred Harp*, and Alan Lomax’s brief 1982 interview with Hamrick, in which the Sacred Harp singer seems to surprise the veteran folklorist with his informed analysis of Sacred Harp practices. Our issue concludes with two more essays on Hamrick’s contributions to Sacred Harp singing. John Hollingsworth describes the story of editing and publishing *The Georgian Harmony*, a tunebook featuring nearly two-hundred of Hamrick’s shape-note tunes. Finally, Shaun Jex recounts Hamrick’s longstanding generosity in sharing his knowledge and experience with others.

This issue of the *Newsletter* came together thanks to

an especially large team of volunteers and the generosity of several editors and archivists. In addition to the many contributions of the *Newsletter* team of associate editor Nathan K. Rees and layout helpers Elaena Gardner, Leigh Cooper, and Jason Stanford, two singers—Marie Brandis of Portland, Oregon, and Justin Bowen of Nashville, Tennessee—transcribed essays written by Hamrick. Debra Madera and M. Patrick Graham of the Pitts Theology Library of Emory University, provided access to and scans of essays by Hamrick, correspondence, and tunebooks in the library’s Raymond Hamrick Papers. Nathan K. Rees also assisted in gathering and digitizing materials in the collection of the Sacred Harp Museum. Robert A. W. Dunn digitized copies of recordings testing submissions to the *1991 Edition* in a private collection. Richard Colwell, founding editor of *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, Mary Leglar, past editor of *Georgia Music News*, and Timothy Reynolds, editor of the *Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News* graciously permitted the reprinting of essays first published in these periodicals. Finally, Raymond C. Hamrick’s daughter Patti Hamrick Dancy combed her collection of family photographs and digitized many of the images of Hamrick with family and at singings that grace this issue’s essays. Thanks to her and to Susan Hamrick Hatfield for permission to enrich this tribute to their father through the inclusion of these photographs.

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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## Feature

## Raymond C. Hamrick's Contributions to Sacred Harp Singing and Scholarship

Jesse P. Karlsberg | Atlanta, Georgia



Raymond C. Hamrick as an infant, Macon, Georgia.  
Courtesy of Patti Hamrick Dancy.

RAYMOND Cooper Hamrick (1915–2014), of Macon, Georgia, was a well-loved singer, composer, and scholar whose intellectual curiosity, generosity of spirit, and kindness seemed boundless. Perhaps the greatest Sacred Harp composer of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Hamrick imparted to his music a distinctive voice that recalls the earliest American composers while embracing a fluid melodic style and expansive chordal palette all its own. He wrote hundreds of shape-note songs across a sixty-year period, contributing some of the most popular and well-loved songs to *The Sacred Harp*, and consenting to have some 179 of his songs published in two editions of *The Georgian Harmony*. Hamrick's singing voice was renowned, an accurate bass singer with a warm and round tone. Hamrick harbored an unquenchable curiosity—he collected rare tunebooks, studied the history of the tradition's songs and composers, and asked and answered questions about the music's practices in the groundbreaking articles he wrote for Sacred Harp newsletters and scholarly journals. Hamrick was a gracious and generous mentor and a friend to many. He shared his knowledge of Sacred Harp's history, his insight into composition, and his thoughtful opinions with singers young and old over decades.

Hamrick was born on June 14, 1915, in Macon, to Horace Clifford Hamrick and Ida Eugenia Berry. His family attended Sacred Harp singings in the surrounding area but neither Raymond nor his older brother Horace were interested in the music in their youth. As Raymond Hamrick later recalled, “at that age ... you're more interested in social things than you are musical.” As a teenager, Hamrick developed an interest in classical music and began working as a jeweler and watchmaker.<sup>1</sup>

During the Second World War he served as a member of the US Army Air Corps. Hamrick narrowly escaped disaster at an Air Force base where he was stationed in Idaho. While preparing to conduct a routine test flight on the base, Hamrick noticed the plane had missed recent maintenance and urged that it be checked before the flight. His colleague wanted to fly the plane anyhow and decided to do so despite Hamrick's protestations. The plane suffered an equipment failure and crashed, killing Hamrick's colleague.

After the war, Hamrick returned to Macon and the jewelry business, but found that his social network from before the war had evaporated, a likely consequence of the mid-twentieth-century rural southern depopulation accelerated by the opportunities created by the GI Bill. Feeling "at a loss," in 1946 he agreed to accompany his older brother Horace to a singing school in the southern part of Bibb County taught by Primitive Baptist Elder J. Monroe Denton. Hamrick enjoyed the experience, finding he knew many of the young pupils attending the school. Yet soon he was intrigued by the eighteenth-century composition dates of many of the songs in *The Sacred Harp*, and ultimately wrote for more information to George Pullen Jackson, the author of numerous books and articles on the songs collected in tunebooks such as the *Sacred Harp*. For Jackson, it was "a pleasure to find one like [Hamrick], a real Southerner, so deeply interested in his own native music. It is usually the Northerner who sees beauty in it and the Southerner who despises it," Jackson wrote in his reply to Hamrick, along with information on some of his books.<sup>2</sup> The two began a correspondence that cemented Hamrick's interest in the history of the tradition's music. [Hamrick recounted his correspondence with Jackson in an interview with Alan Lomax that appears on p. 43 of this issue.—Ed.]

Hamrick soon began attending singings outside his South Georgia area, meeting prominent Sacred Harp singers, teachers, and composers Hugh McGraw and Alfred Marcus "A. M."



Hamrick during World War II, when he served in the US Army Air Corps.  
Courtesy of Patti Hamrick Dancy.

Cagle. These two recognized Hamrick's love of Sacred Harp singing and were impressed by his historical knowledge of the music and his deep, sonorous bass voice. They soon enlisted him in activities supporting Sacred Harp singing. Hamrick was among a group of eight Sacred Harp singers McGraw recruited to join another group of eight singers organized by Dewey President Williams to participate in the 1970 Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife, held on the National Mall in Washington, DC. He returned to Washington in 1973 to participate in another festival, supported Hugh McGraw by anchoring the bass section

at numerous singing schools and recording sessions, and was present to sing during the dedication of a historical monument to Sacred Harp co-compiler Benjamin Franklin White in Hamilton, Georgia, in 1984.

Driven by his interest in the history of the tunes in *The Sacred Harp*, Hamrick began to collect old shape note tunebooks. He placed advertisements in book dealers' trade journals indicating his interest in oblong shape-note tunebooks and corresponded with dozens of used booksellers across the United States who responded. He ultimately accumulated about 100 volumes, many of which were the best preserved or only surviving



**Left:** Hamrick at Andersen's Jewelers, ca. 1938–39. Courtesy of Patti Hamrick Dancy. **Right:** Raymond C. Hamrick with his two daughters, Patti (left) and Susan (right), September 1960, Macon, Georgia. Courtesy of Patti Hamrick Dancy.

copy, rarely paying more than \$5 or \$10 per book. He acquired what was then the best available copy of *The Hesperian Harp* for \$15, later commenting that he was reticent about spending such a large sum for a tunebook but decided to go ahead given the rareness of the volume. Hamrick studied these tunebooks, lent them to researchers, and provided them for use in producing facsimile editions, making their contents accessible to singers and scholars.

Hamrick developed a particular interest in the early New England composers whose songs were included in *The Sacred Harp*, especially William Billings (1746–1800), the eccentric Boston composer-teacher-compiler who also worked as a tanner and occasional hog-catcher. Hamrick read the extant scholarship on Billings and other early American composers, studied their tunebooks in his collection, and wrote articles to share his knowledge of this era of American music history with his fellow singers. Hamrick wrote “The Twentieth Century Looks at William Billings,” summarizing Billings’s biography, compositional style, and then-recent “rising interest” in the early tunesmith’s works “by composers and conductors” for *The Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News*, the first Sacred Harp newsletter, in May 1965. In September

of that same year, he contributed “The Curious History of Shape-notes” to the newsletter, sharing the history of the invention of shape-notes in the context of changes in music pedagogy and printing technology. In both essays, Hamrick emphasized the “growing recognition being extended by music educators, musicologists, musicians, and academic communities” of features of *The Sacred Harp*, presenting this as validating what singers “have known all along.”<sup>3</sup>

Hamrick’s writing on Sacred Harp’s pre-history and his correspondence with scholars of early American music brought him to the attention of the editors of a scholarly journal on music education, *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, whose associate editor invited him to contribute to a 1996 special issue: “William Billings: A 250th Anniversary Celebration.” His essay, “Sojourn in the South: Billings among the Shape-Noters,” describes how Billings’s compositions were republished in early-nineteenth-century western and southern tunebooks, including *The Sacred Harp*, and remained popular among singers through to the present day. Hamrick, who recommended that Billings’s *BENEFICENCE* (p. 486 in *The Sacred Harp*) be added to the 1960 Edition of the tunebook, recounted how the twelve compositions in the songbook

were joined by yet two more—*AFRICA* and *JORDAN* (pp. 178 and 66)—in the 1991 Edition. Hamrick’s “Sojourn in the South” was reprinted in *Visions of Research in Music Education* in 2010 and is included in this issue of *The Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*, along with his two contributions to *The Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News*.

Hamrick also became interested in the range of practices associated with Sacred Harp singing. Noticing that song leaders in West Georgia set faster tempos than those commonly heard in South Georgia, Hamrick began a sixteen-year-long study of singing tempos, documenting differences among regions, across networks singing from different *Sacred Harp* editions, and over time. His previously unpublished 1972 essay, “The Matter of Tempo in the Sacred Harp,” included in this issue, is the first to address tempo in Sacred Harp singing. In it, Hamrick places these regional and temporal differences in the context of tempos prescribed for different moods of time in tunebooks dating to the eighteenth century drawn from his personal collection and relays the shifting opinions of Sacred Harp singing school teachers on tempo across the twentieth century.

Hamrick also studied the practice of keying songs by ear, comparing

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Isaac Watts 1707 In memory of Millard Hancock Mrs. Raymond Hamrick

1 Return O God of love, return; Earth is a tire-some place; How long shall we thy children mourn our absence from Thy face.

2 Thy wonders to Thy servants show; Make thine our work complete. Then shall our souls Thy glory know, And own Thy love is great.

MILLARD, included in *Original Sacred Harp: 1960 Supplement* and removed six years later at Raymond Hamrick's request, was attributed to Hamrick's wife but was in fact written by Hamrick himself.

recordings and surveying the preeminent pitchers at Georgia Sacred Harp singings. He wrote "The Pitcher's Role in Sacred Harp Music," the first article on the subject of keying Sacred Harp music, for the *National Sacred Harp Newsletter* in 1986. The article circulated widely and has influenced keyers ever since. It was republished in the 1980s in other Sacred Harp newsletters and in the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*, with an introduction by music theorist and Sacred Harp singer Ian Quinn, in 2013. A second article for the *National Sacred Harp Newsletter*, published later in 1986, demonstrated the value of shape-notes to composers, and is also reprinted in this issue of the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*.

Hamrick's interest in the music of William Billings and other early New England composers including Daniel Read and Timothy Swan, led him to try his hand at composition, beginning in the late 1950s. A self-taught composer, Hamrick had his first published song included in the 1960 Edition of *Original Sacred Harp*. The song, MILLARD, was dedicated to Millard Hancock, a tenor singer, pitcher for the South Georgia Sacred Harp class of singers, and mentor to Hamrick.<sup>4</sup> Ever modest, Hamrick attributed the song to his wife, the former Joyce Rape, whom he

had married in 1950, though he later acknowledged having composed the tune himself. Raymond and Joyce raised two daughters, Susan and Patricia (Patti), and later divorced amicably, with Joyce remarrying and taking her new husband's surname, Harrison. Hamrick remained close with Joyce and his children.

Meanwhile, learning to write in the Sacred Harp style took considerable time and effort, Hamrick reported. "I still have some of my early efforts," he wrote in 2005, "and I wonder where I came up with some of [the] musical ideas expressed therein."<sup>5</sup> Hamrick and McGraw exchanged tunes and advice on harmonization with A. M. Cagle until Cagle's death in 1968, and continued to share music with each other in the decades that followed. While McGraw's writing in many ways resembles the style of other twentieth-century composers such as Cagle and McGraw's second cousins, once removed, Thomas Beatrice and Henry Newton McGraw, Hamrick's music draws largely on the sweeter sound and more expansive chordal palette of the eighteenth-century New England composers whose work he so admired. As Hamrick remarked in 2006, "Marcus [Cagle] and I had some discussion on [harmony writing], but he felt, as I did, that you write what you

feel." "In my early days," Hamrick noted, "I especially liked the Billings, Swan, and Read music."<sup>6</sup> But although Hamrick is unique among his contemporaries in having hewn so closely to the eighteenth-century New England styles, he is characteristic in his belief that the composers should emulate the model provided by *The Sacred Harp*. "As the book says, 'Seek the old paths and walk therein,'" he insisted in 2006. "Change can't improve a great traditional style."<sup>7</sup>

An unusually prolific Sacred Harp composer, Hamrick wrote hundreds of songs over a sixty-plus-year period. He wrote of constantly having "music of various types running thru my mind," remarking that "occasionally the urge to write becomes so strong that [a song] practically writes itself." As Shaun Jex writes elsewhere in this issue, Hamrick attributed this urge to the Divine Spirit, and found that its presence ebbed and flowed across his life. Following the uniform practice of Sacred Harp composers stretching back to the book's publication, Hamrick always began by composing the melody, or tenor line, followed by the bass, treble, and finally the alto, which, "being the least important, can then be dealt with." Yet his music is notable for the flowing and melodic quality of all four parts, a characteristic Hamrick adopted



Raymond C. Hamrick sketched a draft of his alto part to STAFFORD on the back of the envelope from the letter inviting him to write the part. Box 3, Folder 13, Raymond Hamrick Papers, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

at the advice of older composers who instructed “that each part should be a singable tune of its own.”<sup>8</sup> Sacred Harp singer and music theorist Robert Kelley finds “Hamrick’s very melodic bass parts,” full of flowing lines comprised of step-wise motion in contrast with much music in which “the basses skip around,” among the most distinctive and enjoyable features of his music.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, even Hamrick’s alto lines are remarkable for their wide range and melodic interest. Hamrick attributes his

commitment to writing melodic alto lines to an admonition from legendary Sacred Harp leader (and alto singer) Ruth Denson Edwards, who, after singing an especially boring alto part out of *The Sacred Harp*, remarked to Hamrick, “Don’t you ever write an alto line like that!”<sup>10</sup>

In addition to MILLARD, his song included in the 1960 *Original Sacred Harp*, Hamrick contributed two songs to the 1966 edition of the tunebook, “A PARTING PRAYER” and PENITENCE

(p. 571). Five more of Hamrick’s compositions appear in the most recent *1991 Edition*: CHRISTIAN’S FAREWELL, INVOCATION (Second), LLOYD, NIDRAH, and EMMAUS (pp. 347, 492, 503, 540, and 569t). Although Hamrick was particularly fond of some of his earlier tunes, he judged many of his later efforts more favorably. At his own urging, MILLARD was removed from the tunebook in 1966 and A PARTING PRAYER replaced with EMMAUS in 1991. His songs added to the *1991 Edition* are



Raymond C. Hamrick, Horace Hamrick, and Oscar McGuire, at a Sacred Harp singing in 1988. *Courtesy of Patti Hamrick Dancy.*

popular and much loved by Sacred Harp singers. CHRISTIAN'S FAREWELL, for example, is now the second most widely used song to take the parting hand at the end of a singing, trailing only William Walker's eponymous PARTING HAND (p. 62). Hamrick's INVOCATION, NIDRAH, and EMMAUS have steadily increased in popularity since their publication, climbing from practically unknown to comfortably enmeshed in singers' repertoires.

Yet one song of Hamrick's stands alone. Hamrick tells of awaking one night, in the middle of a dream that featured an angelic choir of singers, stretching "as far as the eye could see," singing a beautiful melody. Finding a pen and paper, he jotted down what he remembered of the tune before falling back to sleep.<sup>12</sup> He harmonized the melody after waking and titled it LLOYD, a dedication to two Sacred Harp singing friends (Lloyd Redding [1915–1985] and

J. Loyd Landrum [1931–2016]) and to Benjamin Lloyd, compiler in 1841 of *Primitive Hymns*, a collection from which Hamrick drew many of the hymn texts that accompany his music. LLOYD regularly ranks among the most popular songs sung at Sacred Harp singings; in 2010, it was the most popular of all, outpacing perennial favorites such as HALLELUJAH, NEW BRITAIN, and NORTHFIELD (pp. 146, 45t, and 155).<sup>13</sup> As Hamrick has said, "the singers just took that one up and made it their own."<sup>14</sup>

Hamrick has also contributed to *The Sacred Harp* through participating in the tunebook's revision process and serving the non-profit that keeps it in print. Hamrick was a member of the music committee that edited *The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition*. From 1986 to 2002 he served as president of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company. In his role as committee member for the *1991 Edition*, and as a respected advisor to members of

the 1960 and 1966 committees, Hamrick shaped the content of the book, drawing on his own interests and background. He suggested several compositions by eighteenth-century New England writers that were later added to the tunebook, including favorites such as BENEFICENCE and PORTLAND (pp. 486 and 556). He contributed the alto part added to STAFFORD (p. 78). Hamrick also encouraged the addition of compositions meaningful to other South Georgia Sacred Harp singers, strengthening ties between the communities he and McGraw represented; relations had frayed after the removal of a much-loved song from the 1936 *Original Sacred Harp: Denson Revision*. Hamrick and McGraw ensured that the song, Elphrey Heritage's THE SAVIOR'S CALL (p. 489), was restored to *Original Sacred Harp* in 1960.<sup>15</sup> Hamrick also facilitated the inclusion of tunes in the *1991 Edition* attributed to South Georgia singers J.



Hamrick leads from a draft version of *The Georgian Harmony* at Camp Fasola, Anniston Alabama, July 2008. Photograph by Aldo Ceresa.

Monroe Denton (LEBANON, p. 354t), David Grant (HUMILITY, p. 50b), and Joyce Harrison (HAYNES CREEK, p. 466). Hamrick wrote about the process of editing the 1991 *Edition* in a previously unpublished essay meant to describe the process for the benefit of future generations of singers. His cleverly titled “The Ins and Outs of Sacred Harp Revision,” the first and only essay on the revision of *The Sacred Harp* written by a music committee member, is included in this issue of the *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter*.

In September 2005, at the annual Sacred Harp singing at Haynes Creek Church in Loganville, Georgia, several singers were talking with Hamrick about how much they liked his music in *The Sacred Harp* when he volunteered that he had many songs he had written that had not previously been published. As Sacred Harp and Christian Harmony

singer John Hollingsworth recounts elsewhere in this issue, he immediately offered to typeset these songs if Hamrick were willing to provide them. Hamrick agreed to give Hollingsworth a few songs, which Hollingsworth then typeset and brought to various South Georgia singings, where the gathered singers took some time at the end of the day to sight-read them. [John Hollingsworth recounts the process of compiling *The Georgian Harmony* in detail on p. 46 of this issue.—Ed.] Hamrick continued to share compositions in small batches, and in short order, the South Georgia Sacred Harp Singing Convention voted to compile and publish these songs in a collection to make them more widely available to Sacred Harp singers. The resulting tunebook, *The Georgian Harmony*, debuted at a singing in September 2010 at Liberty Hill Church near Barnesville, Georgia, attended by

Hamrick and a large group of singers from across the United States. This first edition of *The Georgian Harmony* includes ninety-two of Hamrick’s songs (including the six also published in *The Sacred Harp*). A compact disc recording of the debut singing, edited by John’s son Bill Hollingsworth, was published in early 2011.

In the summer of 2011 Hamrick gave Hollingsworth a second batch of around 100 unpublished tunes written across Hamrick’s entire period of compositional activity and embracing an even wider stylistic range than the songs included in the first edition of *The Georgian Harmony*. A community of singers inspired by Hamrick’s creativity, generosity, and talent assisted the composer, whose energy had declined since the publication of the first edition, in ensuring that all the songs met Hamrick’s own high standards. Singers again began meeting regularly to workshop the songs, this time taking notes on their copies of the sheet music which Hollingsworth compiled and shared with Hamrick, who then drew on the suggestions in editing songs and preparing them for publication. The South Georgia Sacred Harp Convention published an enlarged second edition of *The Georgian Harmony*, featuring a total of 179 songs, in the fall of 2012.

The process of compiling *The Georgian Harmony* catalyzed a great burst of inspiration in Hamrick, yet coincided with a period when the singer, then in his mid-90s, saw his work-life and participation in Sacred Harp singing “tapering off—regretfully.”<sup>16</sup> Hamrick composed over 40 percent of the music in the first edition of *The Georgian Harmony* after he had turned ninety; he wrote many of the songs after the editing process was already underway. Yet the new second edition contained relatively few new songs, and as the project drew to a close, Hamrick’s output waned. He remained an active participant at Sacred Harp singings into the fall of 2014, traveling to a gradually diminishing range of singings as getting around became more challenging in his late 90s. Nonetheless, Hamrick

continued working a few hours a day, three days a week, at Andersen's Jewelers in Macon, into the early 2010s, a shop he owned for fifty years before finally selling it to an apprentice.

Singers embraced *The Georgian Harmony*. The South Georgia singers, with Hamrick's consent, established five annual singings from the book, and singers gathered across the country—in Maine, New York, and the Pacific Northwest among other locales—to try out the songbook's tunes. Among the South Georgia annual singings from *The Georgian Harmony* was a birthday singing, established in 2012, and held on the Saturday before the second Sunday in June. In 2014, the event was moved one week later so that it would fall on June 14, Hamrick's actual ninety-ninth birthday, and occur during a weekend when singers who had traveled to Alabama for Camp Fasola and the National Sacred Harp Singing Convention would be able to drive to the event. Hamrick was in great spirits at his ninety-ninth birthday singing, joined by an extraordinary class of more than sixty singers from across the United States and beyond. He was touched by the love singers showed in including the day in their plans and impressed with the quality of the singing, perhaps the largest and best yet held out of the tunebook.

Hamrick had extraordinary foresight in preserving the legacy that his many decades of experience singing, thinking, collecting, and writing about Sacred Harp represents. He donated his tunebook collection, correspondence, and papers to Emory University's Pitts Theology Library, where they enhance a collection of English and American hymnody and psalmody that is the second largest in the country. He continued to serve as a mentor, as Shaun Jex demonstrates, exchanging letters and sharing information in person with any interested singer. I visited Hamrick in the spring of 2014 to record an oral history interview as part of the fieldwork for my dissertation. During a conversation that stretched to over four hours and is now preserved at the Sacred Harp Museum and the Berea College



John Plunkett with Patti Hamrick Dancy and her son Josh Byrd at the presentation of a Sacred Harp Publishing Company posthumous citation in Raymond C. Hamrick's honor, at the 2015 Middle Georgia Singing, Goggans, Georgia.

Appalachian Sound Archives, Hamrick shared an extraordinarily broad range of insights on the early New England composers, the history of shape-note music, and Sacred Harp performance practice, as well as about composition and his own deep involvement in the style. When he had difficulty recalling a name or date, he consulted notebooks where he had kept "a notice of just about everything that I think I [may] have to go back and look up," recording much of his personal involvement in Sacred Harp and the information he had collected through correspondence and consulting his tunebook collection.<sup>17</sup>

Hamrick died on November 24, 2014. The Sacred Harp Publishing Company awarded him its posthumous citation, designed 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." John Plunkett presented the citation to his daughter Patti at the 2015 Middle Georgia Sacred Harp singing, an event dedicated to Hamrick's memory. Other singers in the South Georgia Convention shared remembrances of Hamrick at singings throughout the year. A great class of more than fifty singers from across Georgia and Alabama sang favorite songs of Hamrick's from *The Sacred Harp* as well as his own compositions in that book and *The Georgian Harmony* at his funeral in Macon. Hamrick was memorialized by others beyond the Sacred Harp community as well. The UK newspaper *The Guardian* and *Georgia Music* published obituaries, and Alan Lomax's Association for Cultural Equity, honored Hamrick by publishing a video of him leading at the 1982 Holly Springs singing. Long a kind and humble



Display of the presidents of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company at the Headquarters and Museum in Carrollton, Georgia. Hamrick served as president from 1988–96. Photograph by Nathan Rees.

mentor to Sacred Harp singers and aspiring composers, Hamrick was, with his gentle wit, remarkable memory, and disarming charm, a delightful presence at singings and a treasure to the many people in the Sacred Harp world and beyond who made his acquaintance. ■

#### Acknowledgments

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Madera and M. Patrick Graham of the Pitts Theology Library of Emory University for their assistance in accessing Hamrick’s materials in these two archives.

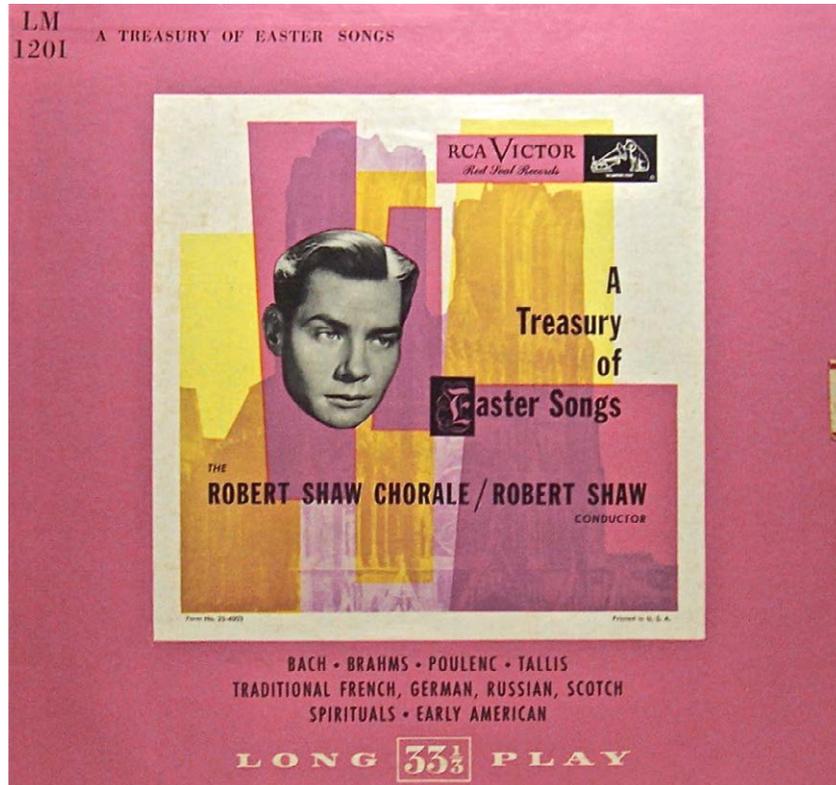
#### Endnotes

- 1 Jerome de Gratigny, *Composing Sacred Harp Music with Raymond Hamrick, YouTube video* (Macon, GA: Image 9 Media, 2010), <http://singwithunderstanding.com/media/>.
- 2 George Pullen Jackson to Raymond C. Hamrick, ca. November 1950, Box 3, Folder 3, Raymond Hamrick Papers, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.
- 3 Raymond C. Hamrick, “The Curious History of Shape-Notes,” *Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News* 2, no. 4 (September 20, 1965): 4.
- 4 A. M. Cagle et al., eds., *Original Sacred Harp: Denson Revision, 1960 Supplement* (Cullman, AL: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1960), 572t.
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- 6 Raymond Hamrick, personal communication, April 23, 2006.
- 7 Raymond Hamrick, personal communication, July 30, 2006.
- 8 Raymond Hamrick, personal communication, March 21, 2007.
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- 11 Hugh McGraw et al., eds., *Original Sacred Harp: Denson Revision, 1966 Edition* (Cullman, AL: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1967), 569t.
- 12 Matt Hinton and Erica Hinton, *Awake My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp, DVD* (Atlanta, GA: Awake Productions, 2006).
- 13 Judy Caudle, et al., eds., “Song Use in The Sacred Harp, 1995–2015,” *Fasola.org*, January 2015, <http://fasola.org/minutes/stats/>.
- 14 Hinton and Hinton, *Awake My Soul*.
- 15 On “The Savior’s Call” and its composer, Elphrey Heritage, see Jesse P. Karlsberg and Christopher Sawula, “Elphrey Heritage: Northern Contributor to the Nineteenth-Century Sacred Harp,” *Sacred Harp Publishing Company Newsletter* 3, no. 2 (November 12, 2014).
- 16 Raymond Hamrick, personal communication, November 21, 2005.
- 17 Raymond Hamrick, interview with the author, Macon, GA, April 3, 2014.

Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*, Harpeth Valley News

## The Twentieth Century Looks at William Billings

Raymond C. Hamrick | Macon, Georgia



Album cover of the Robert Shaw Chorale's *A Treasury of Easter Songs*, which includes "Easter Anthem" exactly as written by William Billings.

**Editor's Note:** When Raymond C. Hamrick returned to Sacred Harp singing after World War II he was immediately drawn to the music of the eighteenth-century New England composer, William Billings. Billings also piqued Hamrick's scholarly curiosity as this article—first published in *The Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News* 1, no. (May 7, 1965)—demonstrates. In it, Hamrick champions Billings by reviewing then-recent scholarly writing which had initiated a positive reappraisal of Billings's work, following a century and a half during which the composer was largely ignored or maligned.

Hamrick's love of Billings's music, and his awareness of its increasingly celebrated status, influenced *The Sacred Harp* tunebook and efforts to promote Sacred Harp singing. In 1965, Billings's *CHESTER* (p. 479 in *The Sacred Harp*)

was only included in Joseph Stephen James's 1911 *Original Sacred Harp*, the tunebook Hamrick's *South Georgia Sacred Harp Singing Convention* then used, not in the more popular *Original Sacred Harp: Denson Revision*. At Hamrick's urging, the song was restored to the *Denson Revision* the following year. Hugh McGraw, who headed the 1966 music committee, regularly led *CHESTER* and other Billings songs when promoting Sacred Harp at folk festivals over course of the next decade, particularly at the Bicentennial Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in 1976, when McGraw frequently retold the story Hamrick recounts below about the song's popularity during the American Revolutionary War. Hamrick again wrote about Billings in 1996 in an article reprinted elsewhere in this issue of the Newsletter.

SINCE the first years of my association with Sacred Harp music, the few pieces therein that bear the name of William Billings as composer have excited my interest and stirred a curiosity about the man that has only been satisfied in recent years. Highly qualified researchers have explored the American scene in detail and a picture of the man and his times has emerged—a picture that changes some previously held ideas and provides a fascinating array of newly-discovered facets of Billings the melodist, the poet, and the man.

William Billings was born in Boston in 1746. He wrote and published his first book of music in 1770 at the age of twenty-four. This was the *New-England Psalm-Singer*, printed by Paul Revere. The advent of the Revolutionary War disrupted his musical activities for a time, but one of his tunes, *CHESTER* (found in the James edition of the *Harp*), became the most popular song sung by the American soldiers. The words used were not those with which we are familiar today but were strongly martial in feelings. The [second] verse will give a clear picture:

*Howe and Burgoyne and Clinton too,  
With Prescott and Cornwallis join'd  
Together plot our Overtthrow,  
In one Infernal league combin'd.*

The Preface to the *New-England Psalm-Singer* contains the following statement:

*To the generous subscribers to this book. The author, to his great loss, having deferred the publication of these sheets for 18 months to have them put upon American paper hopes the delay will be pardoned; and the good ladies, heads of the families, into whose hands they may fall, will zealously endeavor to furnish the paper mills with all the fragments of linen they can possibly afford. Paper being the vehicle of literature and literature the spring and security of human happiness.<sup>1</sup>*



Frontispiece of William Billings's *New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770).  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Thus we see Billings at the age of twenty-four, a dedicated patriot, a poet, and musician. Added to these were the undisputed physical infirmities that beset him—the withered arm, the lame leg, the partly blind eye, and the rasping unmusical voice. Add to this an unflagging ambition and enthusiasm and we have a picture of Billings the man.

But what of Billings the composer? What of the charges that his music was crude, archaic, illiterate; his fusing tunes pitiful imitations of the classic fugue, merely an American innovation without roots or culture? Dr. J. Murray Barbour, in his excellent book, *Church Music of William Billings*, has this to say in rebuttal:

*Just how illiterate was Billings? It is the opinion of the present writer that Billings' detractors are almost totally wrong in their criticisms. His works do contain certain glaring faults and weaknesses, but they are seldom those of which he has been accused. To call him illiterate betrays a lack of familiarity with his music or else a failure to comprehend what musical illiteracy is. Even his spelling was good—excellent for the time and place. He used correctly eleven Italian terms for temp and mood:*

*Adagio, Allegro, Affettuoso, Divoto, Grave, Lamentations, Largo, Maestoso, Presto, Vigoroso, and Vivace . . . his metrical signatures include 6/8, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/4, 2/2, and 3/2; these were almost always used correctly, especially in his latest works. It is true that Billings' first collection, the New-England Psalm-Singer, contained many errors of notation, the most heinous being the omission of accidentals, but for this the engraver was at least partly to blame. He was Paul Revere who probably does deserve to be called musically illiterate, however skilled he may have been in equitation. . . . The true Billings deserves our respect. The texts for his psalm tunes form a first-rate anthology of 18<sup>th</sup> century religious poetry. For his anthems he was equally skilled at choosing texts and, at times, had what amounted to a genius at constructing them, an act of creation and synthesis in which he far excelled his colleagues on either side of the Atlantic.<sup>2</sup>*

Criticisms of Billings' music frequently refer to his habit of changing time values within the framework of the tune. The custom of the time was to use one metrical signature for an entire tune, and the rhythm adhered strictly to this signature. In the anthems, major

divisions were shown by a change in the signature, but hardly ever was the changing rhythm of a short phrase or word so marked. Billings was the exception, and it was this attention to the minute details of his music that lends it so much appeal to the singer—and the listener.

As to the fuguig tune complaint, the idea that the idiom was conceived and carried out almost entirely by Billings is without foundation in fact. "Fuguig" or "Fuging Tune" is a shortened version of the original term "Fuging Psalm Tune" which was used in eighteenth-century England. This type of music bears no family relationship to the classical fugue form nor was it intended to have such. "Fuguig," or imitative writing was the normal musical language of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. It appeared in the works of the masters of the period—Tallis, Tye, Byrd and also in the congregational hymn books of England and Scotland. The Puritan rise in England brought an end to its spread but in later years it took root in the American colonies and by the time Billings arrived on the scene, the English fuguig tune had been familiar for longer than a decade. Billings poured his ideas into a familiar mold. Of his six books only thirty-six fuguig tunes appeared in them. This was a very small part—8 percent—of his output. So, it can be clearly stated that he was neither the originator nor the leading exponent of the style.<sup>3</sup>

As to the "uncouth, archaic" definition, Billings wrote four "singable" parts—for the singers. He saw harmony as counterpoint, not as vertical blocks of chords. His melodies were strong and tuneful, and while his harmony was strongly diatonic and triadic (6 percent of his chords were sevenths), yet his melodious part-writing gave rise to combinations of notes that were quite complex.

We have seen in recent years a rising interest in Billings' works, both by composers and conductors. That which was once labeled crude and uncouth has become valued for the very qualities once derided. The Robert Shaw Chorale has recorded several

CHESTER. L.M.

And Slavery clank her galling chains, New-England's God forever reigns.  
Let tyrants shake their iron rod, We fear them not we trust in God.

Howe and Burgoyne and Clinton too,  
With Prescott and Cornwallis join'd,  
Together plot our overthrow,  
In one infernal league combin'd.

When God inspir'd us for the fight,  
Their ranks were broke their lines were forc'd,  
Their Ships were Shatter'd on our sight,  
To swiftly driven from our Coast.

The foe comes on with haughty stride,  
Our troops advance with martial noise,  
Their Veterans flee before our Youth,  
And Generals yield to beardless Boys.

What grateful Offering shall we bring,  
What shall we render to the Lord?  
Loud Halleluiah let us sing,  
And praise his name on ev'ry Chord.

The first printing of William Billings's CHESTER, with his Revolutionary War-era lyrics included. In *The Singing Master's Assistant* (1781). Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

tunes exactly as written—ROSE OF SHARON, EASTER ANTHEM, WHEN JESUS WEPT, SHEPHERDS CAROL, A VIRGIN UNSPOTTED, and THE BIRD. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir has recorded DAVID'S LAMENTATION. Sheet music of most of these is now available and church choir directors often make use of them. This writer had the pleasure recently of singing in a large church choir which was presenting EASTER ANTHEM as special seasonal music. Crude and archaic it may or may not be, but after nearly 200 years its audience appeal is still undeniably strong.

As with many things in this world of ours, time has brought belated appreciation of Billings' genius. This is not to imply that he was a great composer, but, to quote Barbour, "he had perhaps more genius than talent."<sup>4</sup> Also, he had enthusiasm—an enthusiasm that helped lift the church music of his day from the pitiful state into which it had fallen; an enthusiasm that is as apparent today as when he first set pen to paper.

Hans Nathan says, "There is freshness, a naive vigor about it ... the melodic style had popular appeal since it included familiar elements while preserving a measure of uniqueness. Thus, we hear reminiscences of Irish jigs, English and Scotch folk song, English tunes of fashion, eighteenth-century dance patterns, and even elements of eighteenth-century art music. The 6/4 and 6/8 "moods" ... inspired him to write cheerful and festive tunes—perhaps his best—that resemble English carols."<sup>5</sup> What he contributed made him a representative American of whom we can be very proud. ■

#### Endnotes

- 1 William Billings, *The New-England Psalm-Singer: Or, American Chorister* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1770).
- 2 James Murray Barbour, *The Church Music of William Billings* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), xiii, 13.
- 3 Irving Lowens, "The Origins of the American Fuging Tune," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 1953): 43–52.
- 4 Barbour, *The Church Music of William Billings*, 138. [Barbour's comment echoes that of Billings's friend contemporary, Reverend William Bentley, who described Billings as having "more genius than taste."—Ed.]
- 5 Hans Nathan, "Introduction," in *The Continental Harmony*, by William Billings, ed. Hans Nathan (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), xvii.

Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*, Harpeth Valley News

## The Curious History of Shape-Notes

Raymond C. Hamrick | Macon, Georgia



"Lessons for the Tuning of the Voice" from a 1626 copy of John Tufts's *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*. Tufts used the letters associated with the different note names to create a new system for sight-reading. Courtesy of the Rosenbach Museum and Library of the Free Library of Philadelphia.

**Editor's Note:** In this essay, first published in *The Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News* 2, no. 4 (September 20, 1965), Hamrick places shape-notes in the context of American vocal music history, from their advent in the colonial era through the twentieth century. Hamrick's evocative retelling of this story capitalizes on what at the time was a "growing recognition [of the value of shape-notes] being extended by music educators, musicologists, musicians, and academic communities." Hamrick took pleasure in reporting this newfound appreciation, yet noted that it "merely confirms what [Sacred Harp singers] have known all along."

This version of Hamrick's essay draws on the author's original typescript, preserved in the Raymond Hamrick Papers at Emory University's Pitts Theology Library, as well as the published version, which was edited by Priestley Miller. Where the two versions differ substantively, this version generally retains Hamrick's original language. On matters of punctuation and style it generally adopts Miller's changes and a handful of our own. We have included both 1965 versions of the essay on our website as downloadable PDF files.

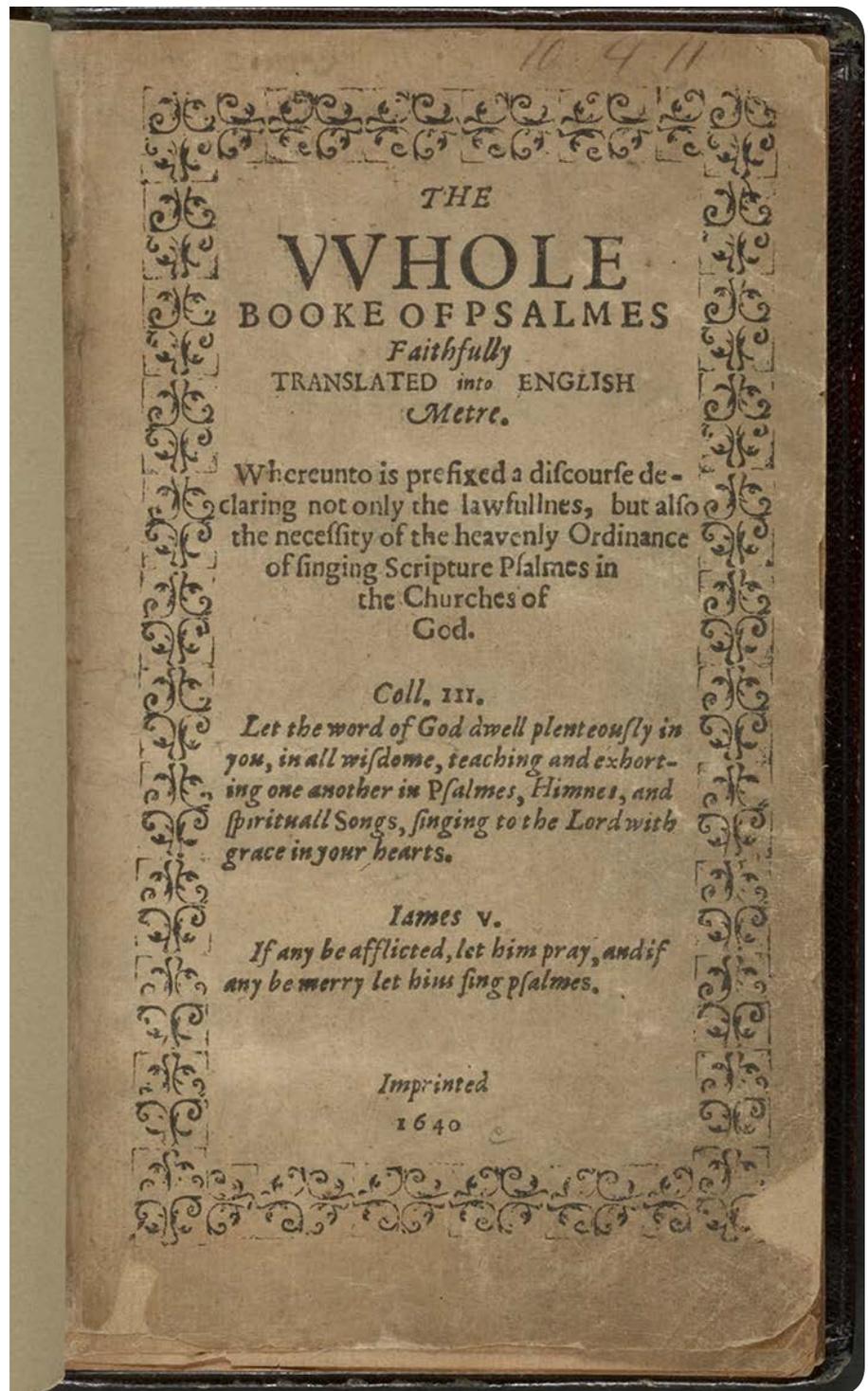
ONE facet of Sacred Harp music that seems to intrigue the newcomer to our midst is the peculiar (to them) shapes that decorate the note-heads. All other familiar signs of standard notation are the same, but the squares, triangles, ovals, and diamonds adorning the staff are somewhat puzzling to the musician who cut his teeth on round notes. The attempt to explain just how the shapes promote rapid, accurate sight reading—even in children with no previous training in music—evokes a blank look or an amused shake of the head and

sometimes the condescending, “It can’t be done.” All vastly frustrating to the Sacred Harper who knows that it *can be*—and *is*—done. This article [offers] ammunition for those who may need an array of facts to hurl at the scoffer of the future.

To understand the “Why,” the *need* for a teaching aid that would be easily applicable to even the least musically trained among us, we must go back to the days of colonial America and consider the conditions prevailing then. It is truly said that “necessity is the mother of invention” and necessity certainly existed in the infant days of the Republic. There are many documents which testify to the fact that our Pilgrim father could and did sing in four-part harmony, often accompanied by lute, viol, virginal, or psaltery. The first edition of the Bay Psalm Book (Cambridge 1640), the first book printed in the colonies, contained no music. Its users were referred to Ravenscroft’s Psalter (London 1621) for the many tunes to which metrical versions of the psalms could be sung. Also in use was the Sternhold and Hopkins’ *Whole Booke of Psalmes* (London 1562).<sup>1</sup>

However, later generations, forced to endure privation during the westward surge, with small settlements and a pioneer-type existence, were left little time or opportunity for the cultivation of music. Itinerant preachers traveled from settlement to settlement where they preached and then spent a few days trying to teach the people to sing. The ability to read music became so neglected that the practice of “lining-out” hymns came into being, wherein the congregations were taught to sing religious songs by “rote” rather than by “note.” The lining-out was done by a deacon or “reader” who read one or two lines of the psalm and then led the congregation in singing what had been read. Thomas Walter, in his book, *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained* (Boston 1721), made this complaint:

*Once the tunes were sung to the rules of musick, but are now miserably tortured and twisted ... there are no two churches that sing alike ... somebody or other did*



Title page of the first edition of the Bay Psalm Book (1640), the first book printed in the American colonies. Courtesy of the Library of Congress and David Rubenstein.

BUNKER-HILL. Flat Key on A. 1 34

Why should mortals tremble & fight of Death & destruction in the field of battle, Where blood and carnage and carnage clothe & in crimson, founding in death groans.

Continued. MEAR. C. M. Sharp Key on G.

Lorn roaring tide Lorn &c

38 Cheerful. MEAR. No. 11.

In God's own house pronounce his praise, His grace he there reveals; To heaven your joy and wonders raise For there his glory dwells.

Moderate. WOODBRIDGE. No. 12.

Ye humble souls rejoice, And cheerful praises sing; Wake all your harmony of voice, For Jesus is your king.

"Mear" in the first edition of William Little and William Smith's *The Easy Instructor* (1801), the first book to use shape-notes (top) and in Andrew Law's 1803 *Art of Singing*, which used a variant on Little and Smith's shape-note system (bottom).  
 Courtesy of the Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

*compose our tunes and did they, think ye?, compose them by rule or by rote? If the latter, how came they prick'd down in our Psalm books? ... For want of exactitude, I have observed in many places one man is upon a note while another a note behind, which produces something hideous and beyond expression bad.*<sup>2</sup>

The Reverend John Tufts spearheaded a movement to establish singing schools with the publication in 1721 of his *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*. This book also contained the first published set of rudiments for teaching, covering such points as tuning the voice, notation, intervals, scales, clefs, and time signatures. This was the first American music textbook and the teaching section was to be picked up by other compilers and used with little change for many years thereafter.

Tufts introduced a system of sight-reading based on the placing of the first letter of each syllable on the staff in place of the note; i.e., “F” for fa, “s” for sol, “L” for la, “M” for mi. The length of the note was shown by dots placed to the right of each letter, two dots for a breve, one dot for a semi-breve, and no dot for the quarter. For past centuries, many books in Europe had placed the letter representing the syllable next to each note, but Tufts’ idea was to eliminate the note entirely and use only the letter. As an instructional device it was useful and practical when applied to simple music, but even mildly florid tunes showed its obvious limitations. Nevertheless, Tufts’ work on behalf of better singing was to have revolutionary consequences. From it developed a most remarkable new social institution, the New England singing school, which was to control the destinies of native American music for well over a hundred years. Thanks to the singing-school movement and the teacher-composers who were its product, the last two decades of the eighteenth century were to see a tremendous upsurge of musical creativity, the uniqueness and vitality of which is only now beginning to be realized.<sup>3</sup>

In the year 1802, two New England singing-school teachers, William Little and William Smith, brought forth a

book called *The Easy Instructor* in which the ultimate in simplicity of music-reading was achieved.<sup>4</sup> Their system uses four characteristic notes whose shape at once determines their position on the scale and their relative quantity.<sup>5</sup> George Pullen Jackson says of this system that it was accepted instantly, without question, in much the same way that people accept the Bible.<sup>6</sup> So complete was the acceptance that it was not until 1848 that any compiler using the shapes even mentioned the inventors. William Hauser’s *Hesperian Harp* preface states:

*The French sing ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, se. The Italians do, re, me, fa, sol, la, si. The English fa, sol, la, mi. But the present race of teachers, American and English, are aping the Italians in the use of do, re, mi, etc. And some of them gravely assert that the seven musical sounds cannot be expressed without using seven distinct syllables as do, re, mi, etc. But if this doctrine be true, all songs and hymns sung must be incorrect for our poets have been too far behind in this age of light, or so stupid in the full blaze of it, as not to have woven those almighty syllables into their songs. Nay, I contend that the four old syllables mi, fa, sol, la, are fully adequate to the expression of every musical sound in the scale; and that four shapes, the glorious patent notes of William Little and William Smith are “just the thing.”*<sup>7</sup>

If we are to believe that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,” then Andrew Law, prominent singing school teacher, compiler, and composer, evidently had an instant and wholehearted admiration for shape notes. The 1803 edition of his *Art of Singing* used the same shapes but with the “la” and “fa” reversed, probably to avoid charges of plagiarism. He went one step further by dispensing entirely with the staff lines, arranging his notes above and below the keynote position so as to give a fair idea of the interval involved. Under these conditions it was absolutely mandatory that the music be sung by the shapes.<sup>8</sup>

Other imitators sprang up, particularly those who favored a seven-shape

notation. In the year 1853, Professor Jesse B. Aiken in his *Christian Minstrel* first used the shapes of his own device that are the same seven shapes used today.<sup>9</sup> In later years, around 1870, the beginnings of the gospel style music began to appear in this notation—but that is another field entirely.

Also brought forth during these early years was a numerical notation system wherein the note-heads were replaced with numbers showing the position of the tone in the scale. This system also appeared with and without staff lines. It enjoyed wide popularity for a time but finally passed into oblivion.<sup>10</sup>

The period surrounding the year 1800 saw also the development of movable music type for printing song books, an innovation that did away with the laborious hand engraving of plates that had previously been necessary. This, coupled with the invention of a music-reading system that simplified music teaching to suit the limited abilities of the masses, created a boom in the printing of tune books. At least 154 individual tune books are known to have been printed by the close of the eighteenth century. After 1800, the number increased greatly and it is conservatively estimated that more than a thousand were published during the nineteenth century, some of which ran into many editions. A good example is William Walker’s *Southern Harmony*, first published in 1835 using four-shaped notes. It sold over 600,000 copies and this was but one of many.

The compilers of these books were all singing school teachers and many were composers. During the Revolutionary War and for twenty or thirty years thereafter, the music of these composers enjoyed an almost universal acceptance. Their music was as distinctively American as our speech, or political economy, and all other aspects of our culture had become. It represented a combining of cultural legacies from Europe with elements peculiar to the new land. During the early 1800s this music was gradually displaced in the Northeast by English and Continental music introduced by the many musicians

of foreign birth who took over positions as organists and music teachers in the large urban centers and trained vast numbers of pupils to follow in their footsteps. The original American music and its notational system survives today only in the South. Dr. Allen P. Britton, head of the music department of the University of Michigan, puts it this way:

*The doom of the tune book, the singing school in which it was used, and the music it represented was compounded by the gradual introduction of music education in the public schools. The first music educators were of foreign birth or indoctrination. In the field of teaching music they showed a desire to discard American methods of proven value in favor of imported philosophies. In the first place, they would have nothing to do with the shape-note system of musical notation then in almost universal use in churches and singing schools. The shape-note system provides the most effective means yet devised to teach music reading. Entirely an American invention, it is intriguing to the learner and it embodies none of the inherent disadvantages of such special notations as the Tonic-sol-fa so popular in England. Yet it was rejected largely because of its identification with the rejected American idiom, and partly, perhaps, on account of its very Americanness—it was not known in Europe.<sup>11</sup>*

We find today, in the academic communities, a growing interest in the early American idiom. We are coming into an age of appreciation of things American and the old inherent concept of European superiority in all things cultural is fast fading. We do not anticipate a return to the teaching of shape-note music reading on a grand scale, but it is being taught in many colleges and universities. In the meantime, we who sing in *The Sacred Harp* are still the guardians and perpetuators of a uniquely American cultural heritage. The growing recognition being extended by music educators, musicologists, musicians, and academic communities merely confirms what we have known all along—that we are on solid ground. ■

### Endnotes

- 1 W. Thomas Marrocco, "The Notation in American Sacred Music Collections," *Acta Musicologica* 36, no. 2/3 (1964): 137. Hamrick aiding Marrocco in researching his *Acta Musicologica* article, loaning him several tunebooks from his collection.—Ed.
- 2 Quoted in *Ibid.*
- 3 Irving Lowens, "John Tufts' 'Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes' (1721-1744): The First American Music Textbook," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 2, no. 2 (1954): 89-102, doi:10.2307/3343691.
- 4 *The first edition of The Easy Instructor is now thought to have been published in 1801, rather than 1802, but the best evidence in 1965 pointed to the 1802 date Hamrick provides.*—Ed.
- 5 Priestley Miller, in editing this article for inclusion in the September 20, 1965 issue of the Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News 2, no. 4, inserted the following elaboration of the utility of the shape-note system:  
  
After learning the scale intervals thoroughly as related to the shapes, it is then possible to read any part of any tune written in shape-notes with amazing ease and accuracy. The sharps and flats in the signature do not concern the singer. The keynote, "fa" is given by the person doing the pitching and from that point the shapes automatically convey the position of the half-steps. If the demands of melody require additional half-steps, an accidental is inserted, but in Sacred Harp music these are rare. After ascertaining the tonic, or keynote, of a piece of music, the singer knows instantly from both the shape of the succeeding note, and from its approximate distance from the keynote, just what the degree is, whether it be a third, sixth, fifth, octave, etc. The fact that three of the four shapes are used twice within the octave is no problem inasmuch as, for example, the sixth, "la", is an easily recognizable distance from the key-note than is the "la" representing the third. This is likewise true of "fa" whose triangle shape appears as the first, the keynote, as well as the fourth and the eighth, the octave. Also, the ovals, "sol", which appear as the second and the fifth are easily distinguished. The diamond, "mi", appears only once, as the seventh.  
  
—Ed.
- 6 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).
- 7 William Hauser, *The Hesperian Harp* (Philadelphia: T. K. & P. G. Collins, 1848).
- 8 Andrew Law, *The Art of Singing: In Three Parts* (Cambridge, MA: W. Hilliard, 1803).
- 9 J. B. Aikin, ed., *The Christian Minstrel: A New System of Musical Notation, 12th Ed.* (Philadelphia: T. K. Collins, 1853 [1846]).
- 10 Marrocco, "The Notation in American Sacred Music Collections," 141.
- 11 Allen P. Britton, "Music in Early American Public Education: A Historical Critique," *Yearbook of the National Society for Study of Education* 57 (1958): 195-211.

Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*The Matter of Tempo in *The Sacred Harp*

Raymond C. Hamrick | Macon, Georgia



Raymond C. Hamrick's unique copy of *Village Harmony* (1818). Courtesy of the Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

**Editor's Note:** *A watch and clock repairman and jeweler by trade, Raymond C.*

*Hamrick had an excellent sense of time. In combination with his inquisitive approach to the tradition he loved so much, it's little surprise that "the question of proper tempo in Sacred Harp music" so aroused his curiosity. In this previously unpublished 1972 paper, Hamrick draws on rudiments of music from his vast collection of tunebooks, oral histories collected from leading twentieth-century singers, and his own careful measurements of tempo in different regions across Georgia and Alabama over a twenty-year period among groups using different editions of *The Sacred Harp*.<sup>1</sup> Hamrick marshals this impressive breadth and depth of resources to provide a nuanced and thorough first account of tempo at Sacred Harp singings informed by actual observation. An engagingly written and historically contextualized account in which Hamrick's own preference for tempered tempos occasionally (and delightfully) breaks through, this essay is a valuable source of information on singers' changing perspectives on "proper tempo" over the decades.*

THE question of proper tempo in Sacred Harp music has given rise to much discussion, much dissension, and, on my part, much curiosity as to the reasons for the differences in speed in various areas. Mention is made by some writers of the "characteristic trotting motion" of the 4/4 tunes. In an endeavor to discover just how "characteristic" the motion is, I approached the earliest sources of information at my disposal—the prefaces of the tune books of the 18th and 19th century.

The first such was the initial effort of William Billings of Boston (1746–1800). This book was the *New England Psalm-Singer* (1770). Billings went to great lengths to explain the conditions that prevailed in church music of his day so that the reader might more readily sympathize with his desire to make the changes he advocated;

*Double bars in psalm tunes are placed at the end of the lines for the benefit of the sight to direct the performer where to stop, in congregations where they keep up that absurd practice of reading between the lines, which is so destructive to harmony, and is a work of so much time that unless the performers have very good memories they are apt to forget the tune while the line is reading. I defy the*

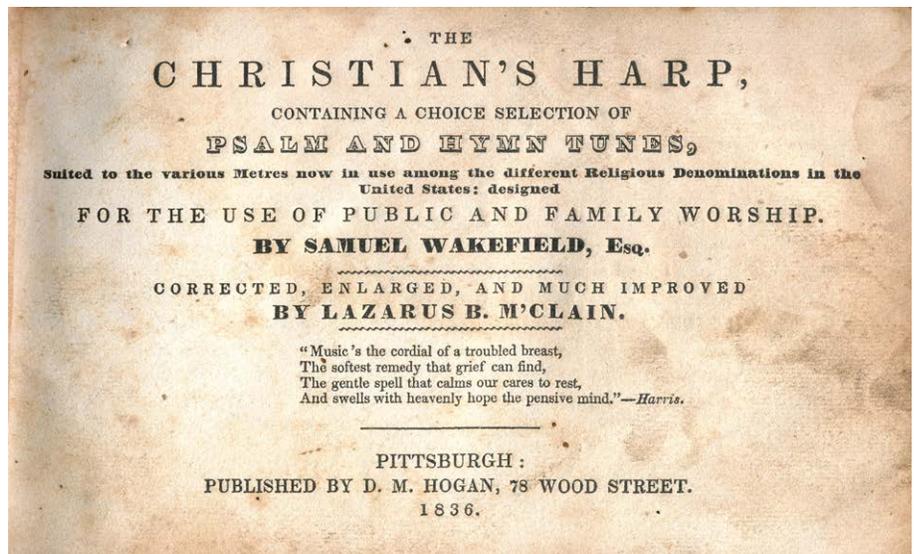
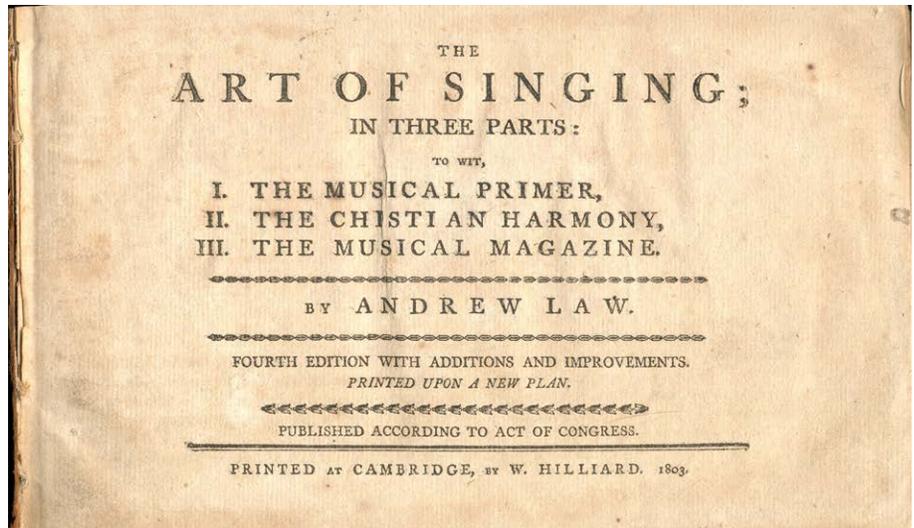
*greatest advocates for reading between the lines to produce one word of Scripture for it and I will leave it to all judicious people whether it is founded on reason, and certainly where it is founded on neither reason nor religion had better be omitted. The practise of reading the Psalms line by line was introduced so long ago as when very few people had the knowledge of reading; therefore a reader was substituted for the whole congregation who as called a clerk, but at this time when every man is capable of reading for himself, and when we consider the confusion that is caused in the music by reading the lines, and the destruction it occasions to the sense of the Psalms, I can see no reason for keeping up so absurd a practise. Consider further, that according to the practise in country churches the Psalm is three times repeated. First, the minister reads it audibly alone, secondly, the clerk or deacon line by line, and thirdly it is sung by the congregation; now if we are obliged to repeat the Psalm three times over, why are we not obliged to repeat our prayers as often before they are deemed to be acceptable? I expect this doctrine will meet with some opposition in the country, but let who will concur or differ, I think myself highly honored in having the approbation of the pious*

and learned Dr. Watts (that great man of divine song) who in his writings has delivered himself of the same opinion.

This, then, was the condition of religious music among the Protestants during that period when the germs of what we know today as Sacred Harp music were incubating. Many years of wrangling and dissatisfaction on the same subject evidently preceded this period as witness the quotation from Isaac Watts (1674–1748). For those who may have trouble in comprehending the actual conditions described above, there are living examples surviving today. Dr. Vernon Taylor of Southwestern University, in the course of a field trip through the Kentucky mountains for the Southern Appalachian culture survey, recorded a church service among the “Regular” Baptists in Viper, Kentucky, at which the song service was almost a replica of the conditions described by Billings as being extant in Boston in 1770. This survival is found elsewhere too as I have a report of much the same musical condition in a church near Somerville, Georgia. This church was constituted in the early 1700s according to my information and the practice of lining hymns is adhered to. The minister reads two lines, the congregation drones through them, he reads two more, etc.

This was a general condition in New England in early years and Billings was determined to bring about a change. He promulgated three ideas as being essential to the uplifting of church music. First, he introduced the use of the pitch pipe as a means of correctly keying the music. Next, he advocated the complete abolishment of “lining.” Third, he brought forth a complete set of “rules for singing.” These, he freely admitted, were not his own but were written for him by “a learned man who preferred to remain anonymous.” They were as follows;

*Concerning common time, the first of these moods is called adagio, which is a very slow movement. A semi-breve (full note) in this mood is precisely four seconds.*



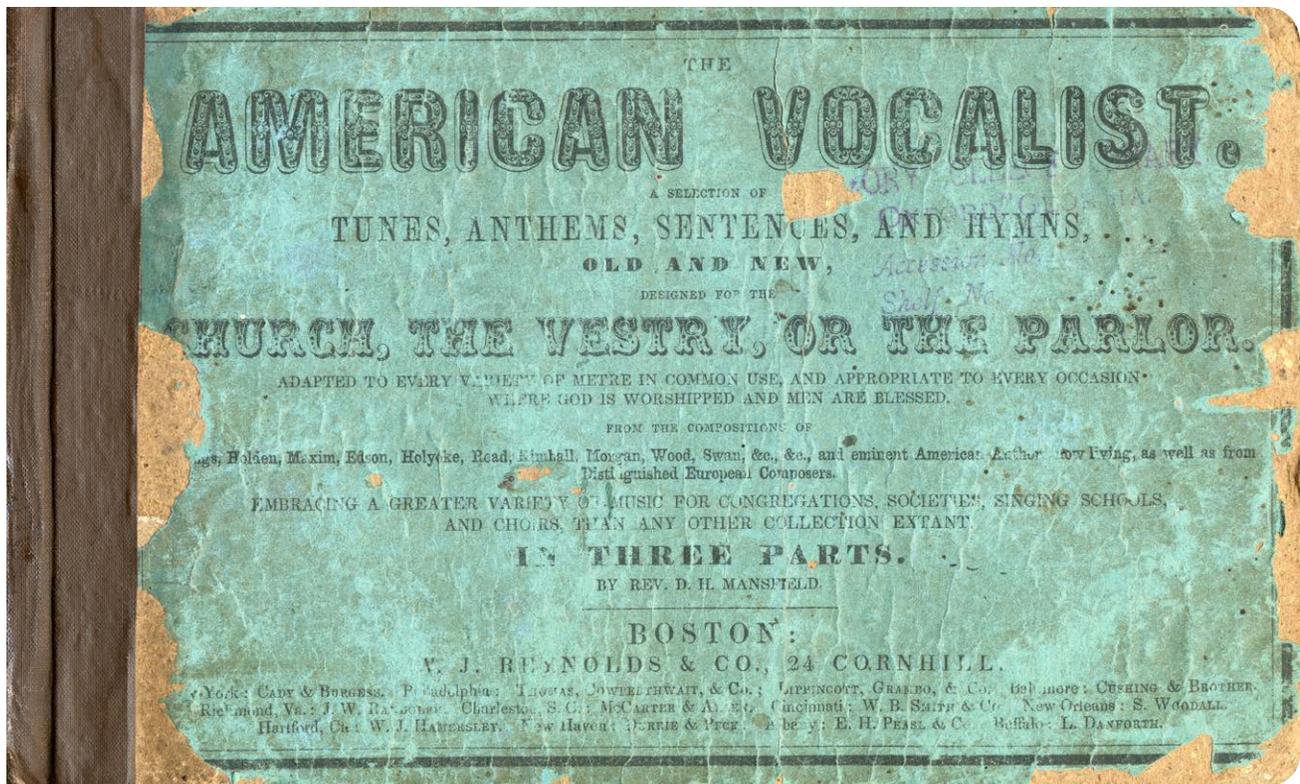
Top: Title page of Andrew Law's *The Art of Singing* (1803).

Bottom: Raymond C. Hamrick's copy of *The Christian's Harp* (1836). Courtesy of the Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

*The second mood or mark is called the largo mood, being half as quick again as in the former so that three minims (half-notes) in this mood are sure to be performed in the same time as two minims are in the adagio mood, but it is often fixed to psalm tunes in which the crotchet (quarter note) and all other notes in proportion are sung in the time of seconds so as to make no distinction between this and the adagio mood, except in the anthems and other brisk pieces of music.*

*The third mood or mark is called the allegro mood, being as quick again as the first so that minims in this mood are sung to the time of seconds. This is a very beautiful movement and if rightly performed carries great life and spirit with it.*

*There is another mood sometimes used in psalmody and it is called 2 from 4, each bar containing two crotchets, to be beat one down, one up. And crotchets in this time must be as quick as crotchets in the allegro mood.*



Front cover of D. H. Mansfield's *American Vocalist* (1849). Courtesy of the Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

Thus the rules for singing as laid down in 1774. Revolutionary to be sure, when compared with established practice but these were revolutionary times and the seed, thus broadcast, sprouted and grew and opposition was not long in arising. This can best be shown by excerpts from the prefaces of other music books, some that were church music books and others that were used perhaps both in and out of the church. Andrew Law was an ordained minister and a book compiler;

*It will not, perhaps, have escaped the observation of any one of you that very much of the music in vogue is miserable indeed. Hence, the man of piety and principle, of taste and discernment in music, and hence, indeed all who entertain a sense of decency and decorum in devotion are oftentimes offended with that lifeless and insipid, or that frivolous and frolicsome succession and combination of sounds so frequently introduced into churches where all should be serious, animated and devout.*

—Art of Singing, 1803

*Classical European tunes have been substituted for some of a less perfect character, and the valuable foreign music which is retained, and which the public has not ceased to venerate and admire, is still preserved in this collection, secure from the touch of American innovation.*

—Village Harmony, 1818

*Young people whose taste is as yet crude and uninformed, almost universally prefer the rapid and fuguing music of American composuists, to such airs as compose this selection; but as their taste becomes more delicate, their relish more just, and their judgment better informed, music of the former class becomes cloying and insipid, and having passed through the different grades of improvement, the feelings and the ear rest with the greatest delight on tunes like Egypt, Old Ham, Old Hundred, and St. Michael's.*

—Samuel Wakefield,  
Christian's Harp, 1837

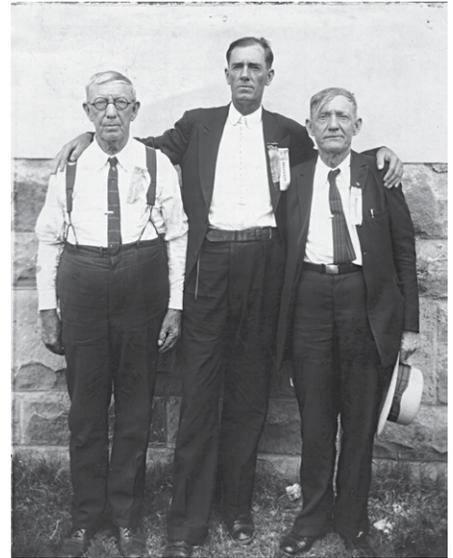
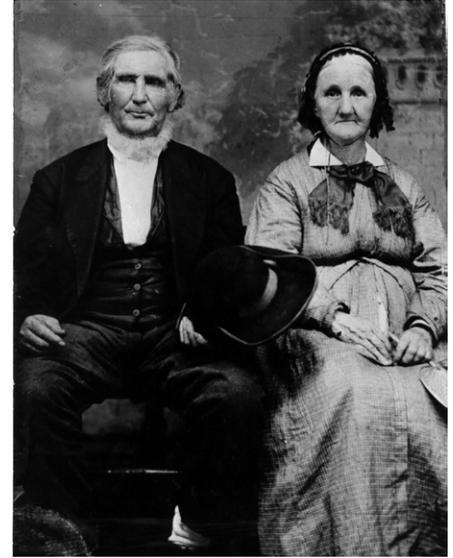
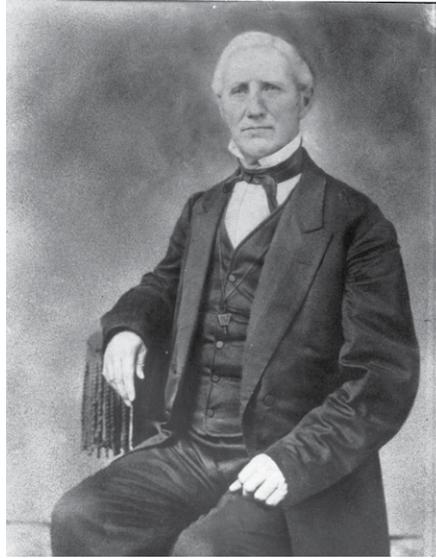
Not all were in accord with these writers however as witness the voice of Daniel Mansfield, raised in his *American Vocalist* (1849);

*In every part of the United States, even where new music is sung in the public congregation because it is fashionable, let anyone mingle with the devout worshippers of God in their social meetings and he will hear—not the scientific gingling of imported discord, but the simple harmony of old "Turner," "Northfields," "The Union Hymn," or something that moves the heart of good men if it does not tickle the fastidious fancy of infidels.*

So—the schism on tempo is by no means peculiar to our generation. Nor will it die with our generation...

To return to early days—

**Top Left:** William Walker, compiler of four shape-note tunebooks including *The Southern Harmony* (1835) and *The Christian Harmony* (1867). *Courtesy of the grandchildren of George Pullen Jackson.* **Top Right:** Benjamin Franklin White, “senior author” of *The Sacred Harp*, and his wife Thurza Golightly White. *Courtesy of the grandchildren of George Pullen Jackson.* **Bottom Left:** Alfred Marcus Cagle, student of Thomas Jackson Denson, who observed an increase in Sacred Harp tempos during the first half of the twentieth century. **Bottom Right:** Thomas Jackson Denson (right), with his brother Seaborn McDaniel Denson (left) and S. M.’s son S. Whitt Denson (center), at the Young People’s Interstate Sacred Harp Convention, Mineral Wells, Texas, 1930. T. J. Denson favored brisker tempos than those advocated by B. F. White in *The Sacred Harp’s* original rudiments of music. As a leading singing school teacher, his preferences precipitated an increase in tempo during (and after) his decades of influence. *Photograph by George Pullen Jackson, courtesy of the grandchildren of George Pullen Jackson.*



However the feeling against the new concept went, one thing took root and was faithfully reproduced in tune books for the next fifty years with very little change—the musical rudiments. The *Easy Instructor* of Smith and Little (180[1]), using their newly invented shape note system, had this to say on tempo:

*There are four moods of common time;*  
*1st C—Has a semi-breve or its quantity in a measure; sung in the time of four seconds—two beats to the bar—two down, two up.*  
*2nd—[C with bar through it]—Has same measure note, beat in the same manner, only half as quick again (3 seconds)*  
*3rd—[Backwards C]—Has same measure note, and sung as quick again as the first, two beats to the bar—one down, one up. (2 seconds)*  
*4th—2/4—has the minim in a measure and beats as the third mood only a third quicker (1 and 1/3 seconds)*

Andrew Law in his *Art of Singing* (1803) made the following recommendations:

Modes	Length of beat	Length of measure
very slow	1 1/2 seconds	6 seconds
slow	1 1/4 “	5 “
moderate	1 “	4 “
cheerful	7/8 “	3 1/2 “
lively	2/3 “	2 and 2/3 seconds
quick	5/8 “	2 1/2 “
very quick	1/2 “	2 “

It seems that Law subscribed to the idea of “something for everyone.”

Allen Carden's widely-used *Missouri Harmony*, first published around 1820 and for a quarter century thereafter used the precise rules as quoted above from the *Easy Instructor*.

The first change came in 1835 when William Walker published the *Southern Harmony*,

*The first mood is known by a plain "C" and has a semi-breve or its quantity in a measure, sung in the time of four seconds, four beats in a bar, two down and two up.*

*The second mood is known by a "C" with a bar through it, has the same measure note, sung in the time of three seconds—four beats to the bar, two down and two up.*

*The third mood is known by a "C" inverted, sometimes with a bar through it, has the same measure as the first two, sung in the time of two seconds—two beats to the bar. **This mood is sometimes marked with the figure 4 above 4, thus 4/4.***

*The fourth mood is known by the figure 2 over a figure 4, has a minim for a measure note, sung in the time of one second—two beats to the bar, one down and one up.*

B. F. White in 1844 published [the] famous and still-living *Sacred Harp*. Here, too, occurred another significant change in the rudiments that had held firm for so long.

*The first mood of common time is known by a figure 2 over a figure 2, having a semi-breve or whole note for a measure note or its equivalent in every measure; sung in the time of three seconds to the measure, two beats with the hand, one down, one up.*

*The second mood is known by a figure 4 over a figure 4 having a minim or half note as the measure note; sung in the time of 2 1/2 seconds to the measure, two beats as in the first mood.*

*The third mood is known by the figure 2 over a figure 4, having a minim or half note as the measure note; sung in the time of 1 1/2 seconds to the measure and beat as in the other two moods.*

It will be noticed that White had reduced the moods of common time from the usual four to three; eliminated the use of the letter "C" from the signature, assigning a numerical signature to each; and slowed down 4/4 music from the previous speed of 2 seconds per measure to 2 1/2 seconds. His contemporary William Hauser, compiler of the "Hesperian Harp" (1848) evidently didn't think he slowed things down enough. In his preface he recommended 4 seconds for 4/4 time; a second mood known by "C" with a bar through it and sung in three seconds (with the added remark that this mood was of little worth); 2 seconds for 2/2 time; and one second for 2/4 time.

So much for the first 150 years of tune books. The copyright of B. F. White's book expired in 1902 and in 1911 a committee headed by Joe James of Atlanta issued a revision known as the *Original Sacred Harp* because they restored many songs that had been taken out in previous revisions by the Whites. This edition continued the rudiments as expounded by White. Then, in 193[6], when a revision committee headed by the Densons of Alabama issued the new "Denson" revision, the part dealing with tempo had been altered. Mr. Marcus Cagle, a Denson son-in-law and prominent figure in Sacred Harp circles for over fifty years, credits Tom Denson with being the advocate of a more lively rendition—this for all moods though the change was greatest in 4/4 music. Since controversy arose, all reference to tempo was omitted, leaving the matter up to the individual leader. I discussed this with Mr. Cagle several years before his death. As he explained it, Tom Denson had a small group of singers who were in the habit of meeting and singing together at various times other than the regular Sunday singings. They leaned towards a more lively rendition than was usual but to quote Mr. Cagle "nothing like as fast as they sing today." The sound of this group had its effect however and tempo gradually picked up in the areas in which the Densons operated. After the death of Tom Denson the trend continued and as Mr. Cagle phrased it "if Tom Denson

could hear how fast they sing now he would be shocked."

As usual, controversy accompanied this period and a deep rift between the "fast" and the "slow" developed. The B. F. White group would have no part of the fast tempo and had little if any contact with Denson book circles. Users of the Cooper edition seem to have been a patchwork—and still are. Some of their groups sing very slowly and others outdo their Denson brethren in speed. The South Georgia Convention, founded in 1919, and users of the 1911 James edition, were for years fairly close to the B. F. White tempo. This was primarily because South Georgia was covered by singing school teachers from the White book influence out of Atlanta rather than from farther west.

In that period immediately following the Second World War, several forces were set in motion, forces that were to exert a unifying influence over most of the Southeastern Sacred Harp groups.

In the South Georgia area, several singing schools were held regularly and from these came a fairly large group of young adult singers. These were not "passing fancy" singers but people who by background, both religious and secular, were natural inheritors of the Sacred Harp mantle. Many of them are still active today, some twenty-five years later. Being young they had a more vigorous approach to the music, and being of a generation that became accustomed to wide travel during the war years they took the initiative in visiting other conventions and actively participating. Friendships sprang up between members of this group and those in the Denson area and in the middle 1950s visiting became even more frequent. As a result, the tempo in South Georgia began to pick up. In North Georgia it had already reached epic proportions. In the first two or three years of the fifties, a reasonable estimate is that the times some 4/4 fugal music was led at a rate of one second per measure. This was so destructive of both harmony and poetry that the South Georgia singers were content to liven up their own singing but not to this



Singers on the first studio recording of Sacred Harp singing published by the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1965. Participants (left to right), **First row:** A. M. Cagle, T. B. McGraw, H. N. McGraw; **Second row:** Hugh McGraw, Toney Smith, John Kerr, Lindburg Lacy, Mrs. Roy Avery, Roy Avery, Lucis Parrish, Gladys McGraw; **Third row:** Vonie Smith, Preston Warren, Loyd Redding, Jim Ayers, Maggie Parrish, Millard McWhorter, Allie Aldridge, Ora Lee Fannin, Leonard Lacy; **Fourth row:** Walter Parker, Robert Aldridge, Ruth Denson Edwards, Kelly Beard, C. H. Gilliland, Illa V. Glenn, Jeff Sheppard, Marie Ryan Aldridge, A. L. Parker; **Fifth row:** Elmer Kitchens, Nora Parker, Ira James, Elsie McCullar Beasley, Charlene Wallace, Shelbie Sheppard, Willie Mae Latham Moon; **Sixth row:** Palmer Godsey, Buford McGraw, Lillie Bell Ayers, Mrs. C. H. Gilliland, Irene Parker, Robert E. Denson, Mary Kitchens, Barbara Lambert.

extent. In 1950 they sang a measure of 4/4 fudging music at about 2 seconds per measure. This gradually increased until in 1957 it reached 1.5 seconds per measure. This represented the peak and at present the norm is about 1.6 seconds. This group and the Denson people today have a very close and friendly relationship to the extent that much music in the James edition has been taken over into the 1960 and 1966 Denson revisions. At almost any special event to which the Denson singers are invited will be found several of the James people and vice versa.

The B. F. White groups, based in

Atlanta, have still maintained their separation although tempo is not the factor it once was. Hermon Wilkinson, a cousin of the singing family that is the backbone of the White book tribe, is today the leading light in that area. Hermon was born, raised, and learned to sing in Alabama. When he moved to Decatur and became an active member of the White group, his attempts to speed up the tempo almost proved disastrous. I have nothing but rumors to go on but it seems to be agreed that he was asked to tone down his efforts. Not wishing to create problems he agreed

and slowed down a fair amount. however, his influence has been felt and since 1955 the White book singers are doing 4/4 a measure in about 1.6 to 1.7 seconds. A fair amount of visiting between this group and the South Georgia group has almost brought this up, at times.

In Denson circles the pendulum is swinging back. The decision of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company to make a series of professionally recorded albums seems to have been the catalyst. For this project the 1960 edition of the Denson book was used. When Hugh McGraw, the director, ran through the

Dear Mr. Hamrick:

your efforts to make S.H. singing a little less  
 boisterous are in the right direction. There is,  
 as you no doubt realize, much more even than  
 tempo that separates this music from all  
 other group singing. Some of the fault lies in  
 the arrangements many of the songs have suf-  
 fered. But that is a matter which is all but  
 impossible to change. Tempo and dynamics  
 can be changed. They must be changed if  
 the business wall is ever to be knocked down.  
 There are some rumblings, even in the "fast  
 and furious" circles, of a change. But it  
 will come slowly, if ever. And the change  
 will probably come through the influence  
 of outsiders who can and will join with  
 those insiders who see the light.

You and Lee Jones of Mecon ought to  
 get together. Invite him to your next singing.  
 His street address: 274 Ryals St. He is  
 quite prominent in the Atlanta group. But  
 he has brains. and I think he would wel-  
 come any effort toward bettering the group

S.H. singing  
 Thanks for Proceedings. I'll consult it if and  
 when I go your way. And thanks for the wel-  
 come hand.

Sincerely

George Pullen Jackson  
 4002 Royal Oaks Dr.  
 Nashville 5, Tenn.

Sep. 24, 1951



Album cover of *Original Sacred Harp*, the first studio recording of Sacred Harp singing published by the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1965. Hugh McGraw decided that slower tempos would sound better, catalyzing a campaign to slow down tempos at singings.

music prior to recording, he stopped short with the realization that in order to have an excellent sound, tempo must be slowed. This was done and each record has reaffirmed the correctness of the decision.

Some of the old heads were convinced upon hearing the records and thus began a campaign by respected leaders such as Marcus Cagle, Hugh McGraw, Tom and Bud McGraw and others. Their efforts have borne fruit as showed by my last timing of their tempo in the Fall of 1971. The tempo varied from 1.4 to 1.6, depending on the leader but the 1 second per measure was conspicuously absent. In outlying areas of Alabama I am told, the tempo still reaches this figure but there is hope for the future. Singing school teachers in those areas today are generally

people like Hugh McGraw, Elmer Kitchens and others of the moderate group who instill in their pupils their own philosophy of performance.

Add to this the greater unity among the different areas as exemplified by the big state-wide conventions in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida at which groups of singers from all areas come together and quickly arrive at a common and acceptable tempo—usually in the 1.4 to 1.6 range. Little if any dissatisfaction is ever expressed.

Dr. George Pullen Jackson once said in a letter to me, quote—

*There is, as you no doubt realize, much more than tempo that separates this music from all other group singing. Some of the fault lies in the arrangements many of the songs have suffered. But that is a matter*

*that is all but impossible to change. Tempo and dynamics can be changed. They must be changed if the Chinese Wall is ever to be knocked down. There are some rumblings—even in the “fast and furious” circles—of a change. But it will come slowly, if ever. And the change will probably come through the influence of outsiders who can and will join with those insiders who see the light.<sup>2</sup>*

From the viewpoint of twelve years later it appears that the “insiders” influence has been the dominant factor. This is as it should be, since folkways, to be folkways, should be the free-flowing expression of the folk. ■

#### **Acknowledgments:**

*Copies of Raymond C. Hamrick's final manuscript for “The Matter of Tempo in the Sacred Harp” as well as a draft are preserved in Box 5, Folder 1, of Raymond Hamrick Papers, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University. An additional copy of the final typescript is held in the Raymond C. Hamrick Collection of Georgia Sacred Harp Singing at the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress (AFC 1972/019, <https://lcn.loc.gov/2009655400>). Thanks to Patti Hamrick Dancy and Susan Hamrick Hatfield for graciously permitting the Newsletter to publish this essay, to the grandchildren of George Pullen Jackson for permission to reproduce items in their grandfather's collection, to Pitts Theology Library's Debra Madera for locating and digitizing the copy of the essay in the Raymond Hamrick Papers and for digitizing other items in the library's collection, and to Pitts's director M. Patrick Graham for permitting the inclusion of Pitts material, including Hamrick's typescript, as illustrations and resources alongside this transcription.*

#### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> *Hamrick's typescript dates the paper 1962, but the inclusion of observations from the fall of 1971 and the mention of A. M. Cagle's death (which occurred in 1968) and the 1966 edition of Original Sacred Harp suggest a 1972 date instead.*
- <sup>2</sup> *George Pullen Jackson to Raymond C. Hamrick, September 24, 1951. Box 3, Folder 3, Raymond Hamrick Papers, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.*

## Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*, National Newsletter

# The Pitcher's Role in Sacred Harp Music

Raymond C. Hamrick | Macon, Georgia

Introduction by Ian Quinn | New Haven, Connecticut

**Editor's Note:** Raymond C. Hamrick's "The Pitcher's Role in Sacred Harp Music" was originally published in the National Sacred Harp Newsletter's January 1986 issue (vol. 1, no. 8). Based on data Hamrick collected at Georgia Sacred Harp singings in 1985, the article was the first comprehensive study of keying Sacred Harp music. It appears here as it was originally published, with a few typos corrected and the occasional comma added. Ian Quinn, who has recently conducted an extensive study of keying Sacred Harp music, has contributed an introduction to Hamrick's essay. Thanks to both for sharing their insights into this critical yet underexamined aspect of our music.

## Introduction

KEYING is a mysterious art, even for its practitioners. Just about all anybody can agree on is that Sacred Harp singers don't sing the songs at the written pitch, and that in this singing community perfect pitch is more of a hindrance than a help. You may have heard phrases like "keys of convenience" and "relative pitch" to explain the difference between what's written and what's sung. Perhaps you've heard a paraphrase of the famous quote from the 1698 edition of the *Bay Psalm Book*:

*Some few directions for ordering the Voice in Setting these following Tunes of the Psalms.*

*First observe of how many Notes compass the Tune is. Next, the place of your first Note; and how many Notes above & below that: so as you may begin the Tune of your first Note as the rest may be sung in the compass of your and the peoples voices, without Squeaking above, or Grumbling below.*

*Some few directions for ordering the Voice in Setting these following Tunes of the Psalms.*

**F**irst observe of how many Notes compass the Tune is. Next, the place of your first Note; and how many Notes above & below that: so as you may begin the Tune of your first Note as the rest may be sung in the compass of your and the peoples voices, without Squeaking above, or Grumbling below.

"Some few directions for ordering the Voice in Setting these following Tunes of the Psalms," from the *Bay Psalm Book* (1698).

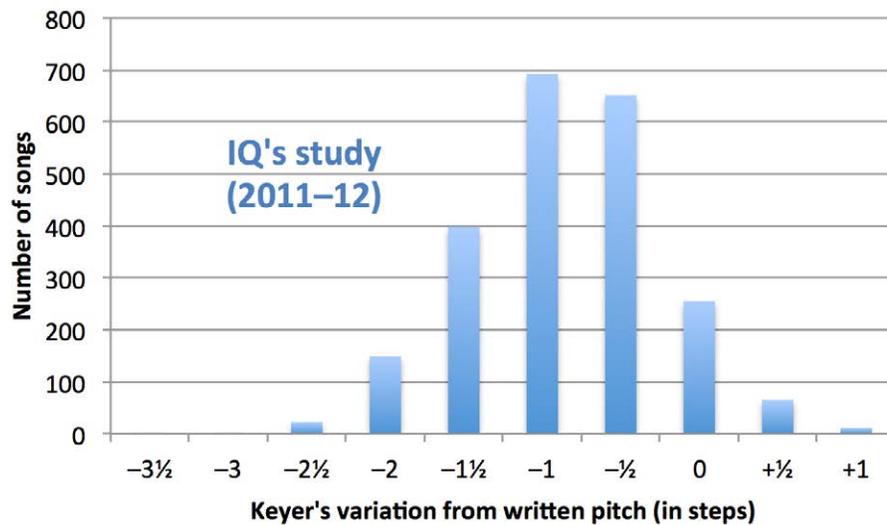
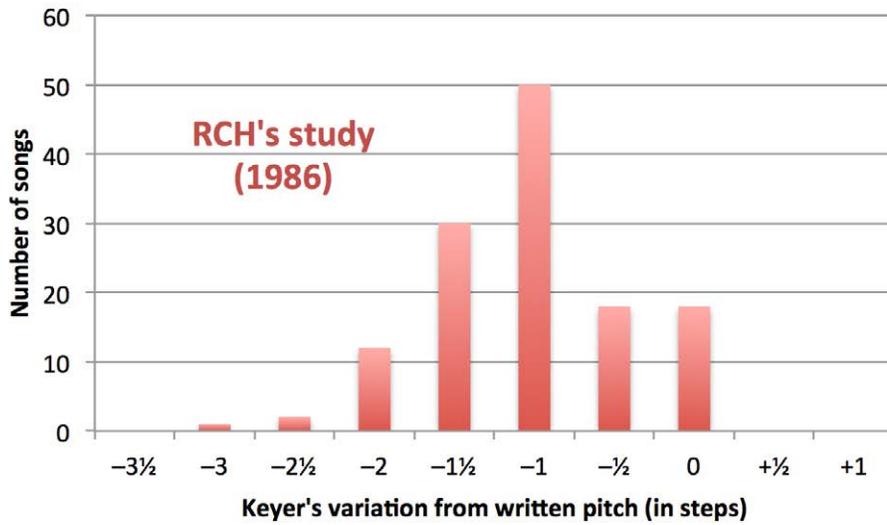
Finding the right place to pitch a tune is about more than avoiding squeaking and grumbling, though. A song keyed too low will lack energy, dragging and drooping like a wilted flower. Too high, and you'll quickly wear out your tenors and (heaven help you!) your altos. But when your songs are keyed just right, with the high notes sitting right in the trebles' sweet spot—that's when the singing really gets hot, and everybody can feel it.

So how does the keyer find that note? Ask four different keyers and you'll get four different answers. That's just what happened to Raymond Hamrick in 1986 when he asked the four main keyers in Georgia (including himself) how they found their keys.

Mr. Hamrick is a watchmaker by trade, and he likes to take a hands-on approach to figuring things out. After getting so many different answers to his question, he decided to make a

systematic study of 131 songs sung at Georgia singings. For each song, he compared the written pitch (as it would be played on a piano) with the sung pitch, and worked out the difference between them. He found that the vast majority of tunes were sung somewhere between the written key and 1-1/2 steps below, with most lying a step below piano pitch. When I made a similar study on a larger scale (about 2250 songs), I got just about the same results as Mr. Hamrick. Data from both of our studies are shown in the charts on the following page.

Will data like this help people learn to be good keyers? I don't necessarily think so. Keying is as much art as science. A good keyer listens to the class and puts the songs where the class needs them to be. Usually that's around a step beneath where the song is written, but some classes can take a higher key or need a lower key. And some songs need special



Comparison of the results of Raymond C. Hamrick's and Ian Quinn's studies of keying Sacred Harp music.

### The Pitcher's Role in Sacred Harp Music

RESEARCHERS in the field of Early American shape-note music are familiar with the description of the singing master—complete with blackboard, string pendulums, and tuning fork. Dr. Jackson mentions having seen Singing Billy Walker's tuning fork, and it may have been (although I haven't seen it documented) that all music was thus keyed in early days. Somewhere along the way Sacred Harp singers grew into the habit of pitching without the aid of a fork and in my forty years of attending singings I have yet to see any pitching aid used other than the occasional consultation with another keyer.

These "keyers" are individuals who have a particular ability to place music within the range of a singing class. They do not, as some think, have perfect pitch and they do not pitch to the indicated letter. For one reason or another the pitch as set down by the composer is generally too high. Marcus Cagle surmised that this was because the writer in composing endeavored to keep the melody within the staff lines so as to avoid ledger lines. Research in the old books backs this up. The preface to the *Social Harp* of John McCurry specifically states that the melody should be placed on the staff so the highest and lowest notes are contained within the staff. (One exception to this is the music in the back of the 1911 White edition. A good bit of it was written by professional musicians and it should be performed where written.)

The practice mentioned above leads to a situation where the treble and tenor singers are frequently faced with high "As and B flats" beyond the ranges of most of the singers—adjustments must be made. The pitcher, when learning a reference tone, will learn it a tone to a tone and a half lower than it should be. His C is more likely to be B flat or A.

Recently, on a singing trip to Atlanta to sing with the B. F. White group, I idly asked their pitcher, Hermon Wilkinson, how he arrived at his F major. The question was caused by my feeling that

treatment regardless of the class, as anybody who's keyed "Victoria" (p. 290 in *The Sacred Harp*) too high knows well!

Mr. Hamrick asked his fellow keyers how they learned to key, and none of them answered the question, not even Mr. Hamrick. When I asked keyers a similar question, many of them told me their local singing had nobody to key, so they just figured it out their own way. The best way to learn how to key, it seems, is to practice, practice, practice, and to think and listen while you're doing it! ■ —Ian Quinn



Lloyd Redding keys the music at a Sacred Harp singing near Bowdon, Georgia. From the *Franklin [Tennessee] Review*, April 15, 1971.

he was pitching consistently higher than other individuals I was accustomed to. His answer intrigued me. “F is number four,” he said. “I sound number one in my mind and run up to four.”

The more I thought about this answer the more curious I became. What variety of methods were in use by other pitchers and how did they arrive at them? To find out, I addressed letters to the three most active and prominent pitchers in Georgia: Loyd Redding of Bremen; Hugh McGraw of the same area; and Hermon Wilkinson of Oxford,

Georgia. Redding is very active in the Denson singings in West Georgia and Alabama, McGraw is the executive secretary of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company and widely known as a singer, composer, and singing school teacher. He is the conductor of the various recordings made during the last few years. Wilkinson is the mainstay of the B. F. White group around Atlanta. I do most of the pitching in South Georgia, so between the four of us we pitch practically all the singings in Georgia.

My letter asked “How did you learn to pitch Sacred Harp music and what

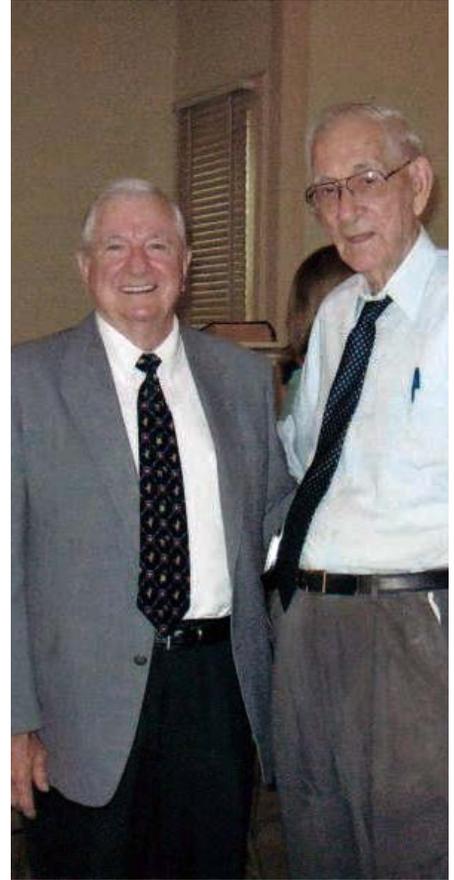
method do you use in arriving at the proper pitch?”

The first answer was from Loyd Redding.

*You asked me how I pitch music. I guess it is more or less by knowing the sound when you hear it. You know you can't pitch all the songs in the Sacred Harp on the key they are written. I try to take the highest note and the lowest note and balance to where both parts can be reached without straining the voice. I hope this makes some sense to you.*



**Left:** Hermon Wilkinson, originally from Alabama, keyed the music at J. L. White book singings in Georgia. Photograph courtesy of Michael Spencer.



**Right:** Hugh McGraw and Raymond C. Hamrick, at a Sacred Harp singing in South Georgia. Photograph courtesy of Patti Hamrick Dancy.

Next was Hugh McGraw:

*I don't know the proper way to pitch Sacred Harp nor do I know that there is a correct way to use. The method I use is as follows:*

1. *I try to remember the pitches that a song can be sung by. I try to remember the sound of page 77, Child of Grace, when I have a song to pitch in A major or minor. This sound will work.*
2. *Any song that is written in any key can be sung sometimes a half step higher to a step or step and a half lower so you will have [a] range [of] to two and a half steps to get a sound that will sing that song.*
3. *We try to pitch songs, no matter what the written key, so the treble can sing the highest note without squealing and the bass the lowest note without grunting.<sup>1</sup>*

4. *In pitching you are sometimes tired and hoarse. When the first sound, which is always the keynote, comes out you have another chan[c]e at it if it is too high or too low. You can change the pitch then if necessary. Try to avoid changing pitches after the song has been started.*

Third was Hermon Wilkinson:

*I will try the best I can to answer your request. I feel too unlearned to say anything. I learned to sing Sacred Harp when I was nine years old. At least that was when I became interested and began to learn. Elder Elmer Kitchens taught me most of what I know. He was the man who taught me to pitch. I lived in Alabama up to 1950 and learned to pitch music in 1948.*

*I try to pitch my music to the letter the music is written in. I don't by any means come up with the right pitch, as you well know, in many cases. In later years I do more adjusting of the pitch to fit the song than I once did. This below is the formula I try to use.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
c	d	e	f	g	a	b	c

*I take a song that is written in the key of C. Then I think in my mind how the number five sounds in my natural tone of voice. Then just say the number and the note is adopted to that sound. Fa in major music, La in minor. Anyone can learn to pitch music with this formula.*

*There's a sound in each one of the numbers 1 through 8 that will fit the keys as they come from middle C through the keys up to C at the top. I try to sound the keynote then sound the other parts from there. I don't know if I've said enough or too much but if this is not your answer let me know.*

To which I add my approach:

*My reference tone is A. With the built-in correction this is F or F sharp. Thus I am actually placing an F major tune in E flat approximately. I find though, that in common with the above writers, I too tend to pitch by familiarity with the music, referring to the reference tone only occasionally. Other adjustments are made at the start of a singing by pitching a little lower until the voices are "up" at which time the pitch level can gradually be raised.*

At this point we can draw some fairly obvious conclusions:

First, it is agreed that the pitch is not to the indicated letter but to a lower tone that will afford ease and singing comfort to the outside voices.

Second, reference is made when necessary to a basic tone such as A, C, F or whatever. This is not the true tone but one that is learned with some degree of accuracy and used with music that is not overly familiar to the pitcher.

Third, the main ingredient for a successful pitcher is familiarity with the music. This enables him to instinctively reach a singable pitch with very little backing and filling. It seems obvious also that in such a person as a Sacred Harp pitcher equal parts of humility and confidence must be blended.

The question that seems logical at this point is "how accurate are these people in providing a singable pitch?" To flesh out this study I decided to go about measuring the pitching patterns of the four people involved and try to come up with a reasonably accurate profile as a means of authenticating some of the conclusions drawn above.

Singings used as reference were as follows:

Church or Singing	Location	Pitcher
Cedar Creek Church	Crisp County	Lloyd Redding
Agrirama singing	Tifton, Ga.	Hugh McGraw
Georgia State Convention	Holly Springs Church	Redding
Sandy Creek Church	Flovilla, Ga.	Raymond Hamrick
Pleasant Hill Church	Warner Robbins, Ga.	Hermon Wilkinson
Holly Springs Annual Singing	Bremen, Ga.	several pitchers
Chattahoochee Convention	Holly Springs	Redding and McGraw

One hundred and thirty-one tunes were examined.

Quantity of Tunes	Variation from Written Key	Percentage of all Songs
18	no variation	13.7%
18	½ tone lower	13.7%
50	1 tone lower	38.1%
30	1 ½ tones lower	22.9%
12	2 tones lower	9.2%
2	2 ½ tones lower	1.5%
1	3 tones lower	0.8%

The few tunes pitched 2 ½ or 3 tones low had high trebles or tenors and relatively high basses. It can be seen that approximately 87% of the pitching was within the 0 to 1 ½ tone range. By contrast, the figures for the B. F. White singers showed the following:

Variation from Written Key	Percentage of all Songs
no variation	44%
½ lower	22%
1 lower	22%
1 ½ lower	11%

or 88% in the range from 0 to 1 tone lower. Also, the "o" variation in the Denson singers was 13.7% as contrasted with the 44% of the White group. This substantiates my feeling that the pitching was higher. The remarkable thing to me was the regularity with which these pitchers produced tones within the 0 to 1 ½ range. It is quite rare to have a tune re-pitched during a typical singing which will involve three to four hours and encompass from sixty to over a hundred pieces of music, some major, some minor, some simple, some complex. Another remarkable thing is that the pitch begun with was the same as the pitch at the end—a great sense of pitch retention. In conclusion, I would point out that to attempt to

come up with highly accurate figures on a subject with so many variables is obviously impossible. The sole purpose of this brief study is to gain some insight into the performance characteristics of this fascinating survival of a tradition that goes back to our cultural roots musically. It is a way of life for thousands of Southerners—now joined by ever increasing numbers of Northerners and Westerners who are experiencing a joyful reunion with a truly American folkway.

■ —Raymond C. Hamrick

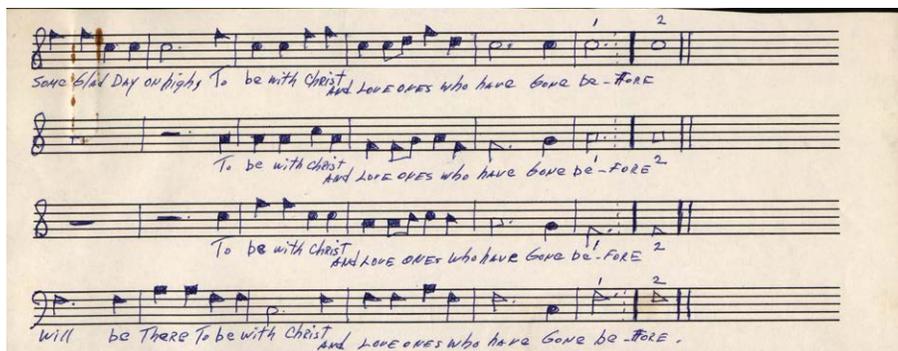
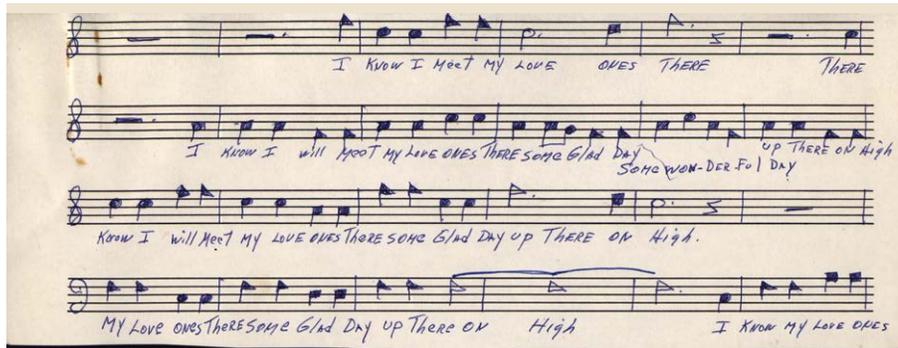
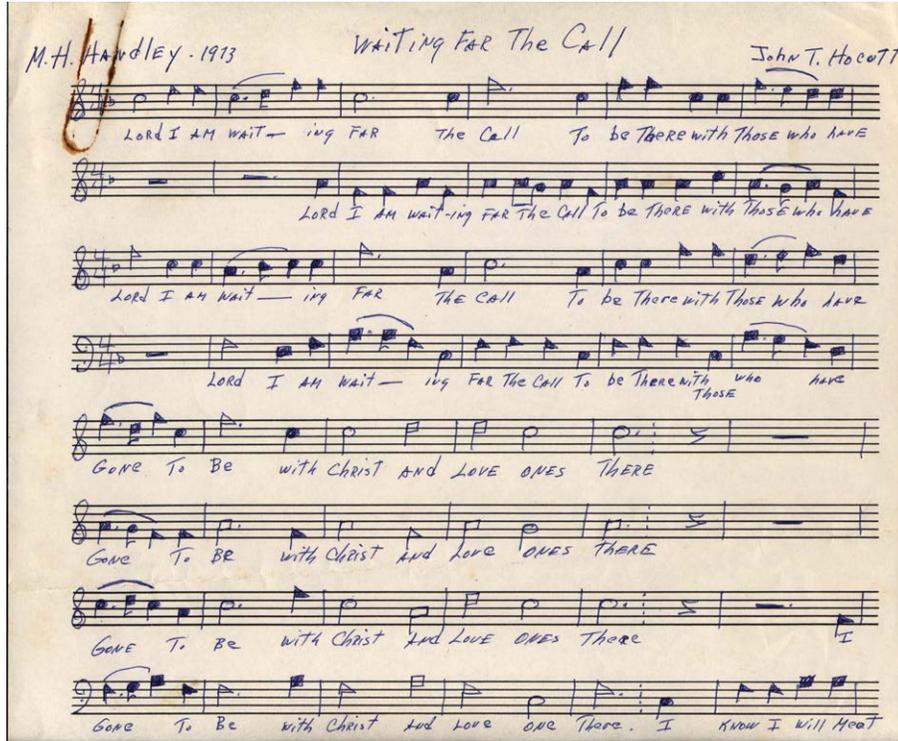
**Endnote**

1 McGraw's remark is a 300 year old repeat, as witness [the quote] from the Bay Psalm Book of 1698, [referenced in Ian Quinn's introduction].

Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*, National Newsletter

# The Composer's Debt to Shape-notes

Raymond C. Hamrick | Macon, Georgia



**Editor's Note:** In this essay, first published in the National Sacred Harp Newsletter 2, no. 6 (November 1986), Raymond Hamrick analyzes published scholarship and an interview with Hugh McGraw to argue convincingly that shape-notes aid in composition, not just in sight-singing. In addition to assembling such a compelling case, Hamrick points the way to the yet-unrealized potential to learn more "about the methods of composing shape-note tunes as practiced by ... present day composers." If any readers find themselves moved to take up Hamrick's call, the Newsletter stands ready to publish the results. Just get in touch!

ANY prolonged study of the music in the early shape-note books will impose one with the wide variety of styles. George Pullen Jackson postulated some eleven categories with several tunes not falling into any of these. We find tunes from one of Haydn's pupils, something of Mendelssohn, tunes from very early England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Germany, plus many from the first American composer. Also in profusion are pages of music by less lofty writers and it is of these that this paper deals.

Many researchers have noted that the invention of the shape-note system simplified the reading of music for the masses. Also, I think that a good case

John T. Hocutt's unpublished WAITING FOR THE CALL was composed in shape-notes and inspired by MILFORD, (p. 273 in *The Sacred Harp*). The two "fa" notes in the first measure of the treble, incorrectly placed on the staff, demonstrate that Hocutt was thinking in shapes, rather than by "lines and spaces," when writing this song. *Courtesy of the Sacred Harp Museum. [For more on John Hocutt's approach to composition, see David Wright's "The Variety of Influence," in vol. 5, no. 1 of the Newsletter.—Ed.]*



Shape-notes enabled John G. McCurry to set down and arrange folk tunes when he was compiling *The Social Harp* (1855).

can be made that the system also was, to the rural or little-trained composer, a magic key that unlocked a door to musical expression. With this hypothesis in mind, let us consider the following.

In the Spring 1960 volume of the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Dr. George Kyle of the University of California at Berkeley wrote about his experiment in teaching upper grade elementary students how to sight read music in two different ways, on the traditional format style, the other being shape-notes. For those interested in the several conclusions reached in that experiment I recommend its reading. My concern here is with the paragraph subtitled “Concomitant Learnings.”

*In addition to the measured skill in singing at sight, the experimental group seemed to excel in other ways. The students in the experimental section (those taught by shape-notes) were the only ones to develop skill in notating their own created melodies. They alone attained a grasp of the harmonic structure in music necessary to create an auto-harp accompaniment.<sup>1</sup>*

Also noted in this group was a three-fold increase in music interest as evidence[d] by a large increase in the number of students electing to study vocal music in the succeeding year.

Researchers in early American music tend to focus on the benefits of the shape-note system to the beginning singer, especially those “of mean ability” as one compiler phrased it. But I think the preceding paragraph is the key to yet another benefit of the system—the enabling of the amateur composer to create, notate, and harmonize his own tunes—or perhaps more importantly, to set down and preserve British-American folk tunes as did John McCurry in his partly secular *Social Harp*.

In reading of the early New England composers and compilers it is evident that many were fairly well versed in music. Some played instruments and they composed in round notes. After 1800, however, and especially after the movement into the South, the style of harmonization changed and homespun composers began to set folk-tunes to paper and to grace them with the hymns of Watts, Wesley, et al. thus creating some of the loveliest music in *The Sacred Harp* and other books of the period. It would be of interest to research the musical training of these early composers and have some idea of the shape-note-generated music that evolved.

In the doctoral dissertation of Mai Kelton entitled “Analysis of the Music Curriculum of Sacred Harp,” [the author interviewed] some twenty-two [singing school teachers, of which] twelve have composed songs and five of them have a total of twelve songs in *The Sacred Harp*. Also, of the twenty-two, only three are noted as having had some formal musical training.<sup>2</sup> These three are not included among those who have songs in *The Sacred Harp* so it would seem that these twelve published songs were probably composed via the shape-note method.

Very little has been written about the methods of composing shape-note tunes as practiced by these present day composers but it is hoped that this will be done while they are yet living.

In recent conversations with Hugh McGraw who has composed quite a few songs over the years, the question was asked:

“Do you compose in round or shape-note style?”

“In shapes,” was the instant answer. “If I tried to compose in round notes I’d be completely lost.”

“Do you know of any other composer of Sacred Harp tunes who composed in any other way than shape-notes?”

“None whatever.”

Mr. McGraw’s opinion bears weight since he was the chairman of the Music Committee for the 1971 Revision of *The Sacred Harp* (Denson) and was in direct contact with all individuals whose songs were considered for inclusion in that edition.

Considering the above, it seems there is a fairly strong case to be made that the benefits of the shape-note system flowed in more than one direction and in doing so made possible much of the music that has now become a tradition to be cherished.

The importance of shape-note composing can be summed up in the following quote from Buell Cobb’s fascinating book *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music*:

*Throughout the history of the Sacred Harp, the urge to improve or renew the storehouse of songs has been vital. And where this urge is lacking or where it remains unfulfilled the song tradition dies. The many and recent revisions of the Denson and Cooper books indicate the continuing strength of the Sacred Harp.<sup>3</sup> ■*

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> George H. Kyme, “An Experiment in Teaching Children to Read Music with Shape Notes,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 8, no. 1 (1960): 8, doi:10.2307/3344231.
- <sup>2</sup> Mai Hogan Kelton, “Analysis of the Music Curriculum of ‘Sacred Harp’ (American Tune-Book, 1971 Edition) and Its Continuing Traditions” (Ed.D. dissertation, The University of Alabama, 1985).
- <sup>3</sup> Buell E. Cobb, *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 125–26.

Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*

## Sojourn in the South: Billings Among the Shape-Noters

Raymond C. Hamrick | Macon, Georgia

**Editor's Note:** Raymond C. Hamrick contributed this article to a 1996 special issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 7, no. 1 devoted to eighteenth-century New England composer William Billings. In an April 2014 interview, Hamrick recalled that the journal's associate editor, Jonathan Bellman, a professor at the University of Northern Colorado where the journal was based,

wrote me and asked if I would write [about Billings], and I told him, I said, "Well, I'll do the best I can." But I thought to myself, "You know, when you're writing something for college people you're probably going to get a lot of corrections and go back and do this over." They didn't go back and correct a single word, and I thought—I was very proud of that.<sup>1</sup>

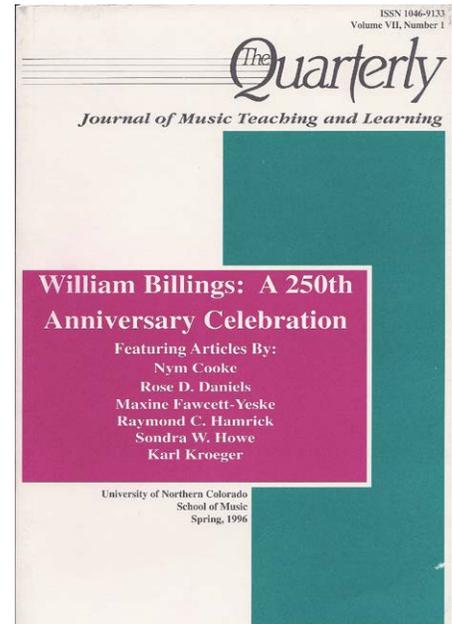
In his essay, Hamrick describes Sacred Harp singers' stewardship of Billings's music during a period when it otherwise largely fell out of favor. Indeed, Billings's popularity in *The Sacred Harp* contributed to his eventual acceptance as part of the American choral music canon. Hamrick also offers a nuanced exploration of the particular place Billings's often challenging music occupies in the texture of contemporary singings.

HISTORY tells us that in the early nineteenth century, a tide of European musical influences poured into the fledgling New England Colonies, bringing the music of the Yankee Tunesmiths into disfavor and leading to its eventual disappearance there. In the usual course of events, this music would have existed only in old musty books to be dug out now and then for a nostalgic moment. In truth, that did take place—but only in New England. I personally feel that the appearance of shape-notes from 1798 on was probably the main factor in insuring the safe retreat of early American religious music to other areas more likely to appreciate it.

First, the Midwest (via the *Missouri Harmony*)<sup>2</sup> where it eventually lost out, and then to the Southeast, where European influence was long in arriving and had little dissemination outside the cultural centers. These centers were the port cities such as New Orleans, Charleston, Savannah, and the like. The Southern population was mostly the small farmer and his family, of English, Scots, Irish, and German descent—all inherently musical people with a strong feeling for folk music.

Into this mold was poured the rejected music of the Yankee Tune-smith, that music being taken—via shape-notes—into the tunebooks of the Southern compilers, i.e., Ananias Davisson's *Kentucky Harmony* (1816), the several Tennessee books, William Walker's *Southern Harmony* (1835) in South Carolina, followed closely by B.F. White's *Sacred Harp* of Georgia (1844), and its several revisions into the 1990s. Thus was this music brought into the life of the Southern Rural.

It was accepted in part into the religious services. Most major denominations still have many *Sacred Harp* tunes in their hymnals. The



Cover of the special William Billings issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*. Courtesy of Richard Colwell.

Primitive Baptists, who use the Lloyd's Hymnal in their services, gleaned most of their tunes from this source. I was raised in a Primitive Baptist home and grew up very familiar with these tunes. The historical background caught my interest, and an early meeting with George Pullen Jackson<sup>3</sup> solidified that interest.

I noticed very early that while the "Southern Folkstyle" was by far the most popular in *The Sacred Harp*, the music bearing the name of William Billings seemed to command a higher level of attention from the singers. His pieces were used mainly when the class was composed of the best singers and leaders. Where the tunes of other New England composers such as Read, Swan, Holden, et al., were used frequently and with a casual ease, those of Billings were approached with much closer attention.

It was recognized that his music was, shall we say, “different.”

Billings’s music, I think, had two special qualities that insured it a “special” place. Charles Atkins says:

*His music was aimed at the man at the plow and the woman at the loom. He wanted everyone to sing and enjoy it. His music appealed to primitive emotions. However, it was not the highly trained, sophisticated musicians he was interested in. He wanted the singing to be the natural outpouring of the common man and woman.*<sup>4</sup>

From an article by Richard Crawford and David McKay:

*The main influence behind Billings’ music seemed to be declamation and the momentum that metrical declamation can generate. There is evidence that Billings sought in his performances to generate momentum through strict maintenance of tempo.*<sup>5</sup>

Anyone who has attended shape-note singings will recognize these qualities as basic performance characteristics.

Did Billings’s style help mold these characteristics or did it fit naturally into a pre-existing environment? Regardless, the union was permanent. In the 1991 *Sacred Harp* revision, the previous Billings tunes—ASSURANCE, EASTER ANTHEM, ROSE OF SHARON, BEAR CREEK, PETERSBURG, FUNERAL ANTHEM, PHOEBUS, VERMONT, DAVID’S LAMENTATION, MAJESTY, CHESTER, BENEFICENCE—were joined by AFRICA and JORDAN, making a total of fourteen—a sizeable contribution, bearing clear witness that Billings found a home in the South.

It is an interesting thought that the music of America’s first religious composer should have been born, and flourished, in Colonial America, withered and become extinct in its native habitat, then retreated to the South to be welcomed and nurtured for nearly 200 years, then emerged to a far greater popularity that is not only national but now international. Billings’s music is sung in Canada, and we recently mailed fifty copies of *The Sacred Harp* to



The first printing of William Billings’s “Africa,” in his tunebook *The Psalm-singer’s Amusement* (1781). Courtesy of the Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

London—at their request.

We in the Southern shape-note tradition take great pride in having served as the preservers of this uniquely American musical tradition. ■

#### Acknowledgments

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#### Endnotes

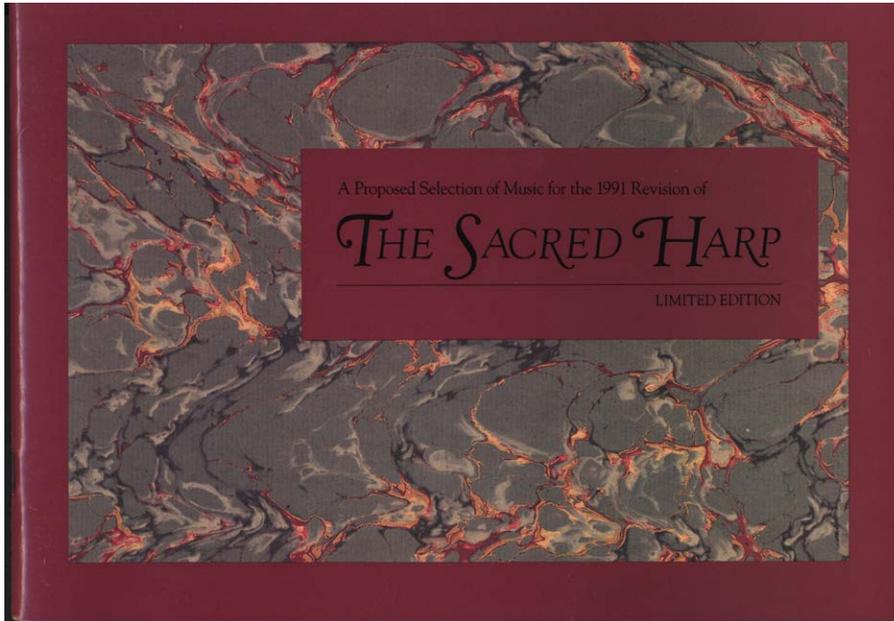
1 Raymond C. Hamrick, interview with Jesse P. Karlsberg, April 3, 2014. In his letter, Bellman notes that John Garst, editor of the “*Rudiments of Music*” in *The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition* and a professor of chemistry at the University of Georgia, had recommended Hamrick. At Garst’s urging, Bellman made a hard sell to try to entice Hamrick to contribute: “He [Garst] also said, and (don’t blame me) I quote, ‘Tell Raymond I sent you, and that he has to do it!’ Later, when I expressed reservations about delivering this kind of message, he said ‘Just tell him that I think he owes it to humanity.’” Jonathan Bellman, letter to Raymond C. Hamrick, October 13, 1995. Box 5, Folder 1, Raymond Hamrick Papers, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

- 2 Allen D. Carden, ed. *First published in 1820, The Missouri Harmony had been revised seventeen times by 1857, and was the most popular tunebook in the Midwest.* (Harry Eskew and James C. Downey, “Shape-Note Hymnody,” *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1986), 4:202.
- 3 George Pullen Jackson (1874–1953). Scholar and educator of folksong. European-educated, he published *White Spirituals* in the Southern Uplands in 1933.
- 4 Charles L. Atkins, “William Billings, His Psalm and Hymn Tunes,” in *Addresses at the International Hymnological Conference, September 10–11, 1961, New York City* (*Papers of the Hymn Society*, no. 24, 1962).
- 5 Richard Crawford and David McKay, “The Performance of William Billings’ Music,” *The Journal of Research in Music Education*, XXI (1973), 327.

## Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*

# The “Ins” and “Outs” of Revision

Raymond C. Hamrick | Macon, Georgia



Packet featuring the new songs added to the 1991 Edition.

**Editor's note:** Raymond C. Hamrick wrote this previously unpublished article on the revision and publication of *The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition* in August of 1995. He hoped that the essay—the first on the revision of any edition of *The Sacred Harp* written by a music committee member—could be useful to members of a future committee tasked with revising the songbook, remarking that “maybe someday when they’re doing another revision, they might want to know how in the world that y’all did so good on it and didn’t have any complaints.” Alan Jabbour, founding director of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, wrote to Hamrick after reading the essay that “It is just the sort of account we’d all love to have for the early revisions, but at least we have it now for the 1991 revision.”

Hamrick offers a detailed description of the extraordinary song selection and removal process the committee designed, including measures taken to avoid bias toward particular composers and to keep

from alienating singers when identifying songs to remove from the book. Hamrick reports on the committee’s strict exclusion of gospel music (a departure from mid-twentieth-century editions of the songbook), the inevitable creeping in of “some elements of modern composition,” and the deliberate inclusion of songs by northern and western singers given the “vastly increased field of endeavor” that had resulted from *Sacred Harp* singing’s then-recent spread across the United States. The essay also discusses the many aspects of revision aside from its “ins” and “outs,” such as researching the song and hymn writers, reworking the book’s “*Rudiments of Music*,” and arranging for its printing.

Hamrick was satisfied that the music committee had succeeded in its goal of “maintain[ing] the musical integrity of the book.” The continued popularity of the 1991 Edition today, twenty-five years after its publication, is a testament to his and his fellow committee members’ efforts.

WHEN first appointed to the Revision Committee for *The Sacred Harp* in 1987, I felt honored but apprehensive. I knew nothing of the problems to be faced and handled but took comfort in the fact that six other dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists were to be with me. Hugh McGraw was chairman and had had some experience in a previous minor revision in 1971. I had the greatest confidence in his abilities, the full scope of which I was to learn during the five years we spent on this project. Other members were Jeff Sheppard of Alabama, a pillar of the tradition if there ever was one; Toney Smith of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, a fine singer and a man I came to like very much; Terry Wootten of Sand Mountain, Alabama, another fine singer and a prominent member of the well-known Wootten singing family; Richard DeLong of Carrollton, Georgia, a singer all his life and a fine teacher; and David Ivey of Alabama, a young computer expert and a staunch traditionalist.

Together we brought about 200 years of experience to the task. Another plus was that we were all very compatible, most of us having been friends for many years. We also all felt that the Book was in need of a full revision, not having had one since 1935 when the Denson edition was brought forth. Also, within the past twenty years, *Sacred Harp* had spread slowly but surely out of its 150-year secluded home in the South to New England (its birthplace), to the Midwest (especially the Chicago area), and even to the West Coast, where small groups had been trying to sing the music with only a few tattered books of one sort or another. We had a vastly increased field of endeavor now and it was deemed imperative that we do what we could to ensure loyalty and love for what we were to bring forth.



Contributors to the 1991 Edition at the singing unveiling the book's new songs, Birmingham, Alabama, December 15, 1990. **Seated** (all left to right): P. Dan Brittain, Jeff Sheppard, Judy Hauff, Raymond C. Hamrick, Charlene Wallace, Joyce Harrison, Ted Mercer. **Standing, front:** John Hocutt, Glen Wright, Neely Bruce, Bruce Randall, Hugh McGraw, David Ivey. **Standing, back:** Phil A. Tabor, Ted Johnson, Richard DeLong, Terry Wootten, Toney Smith, Jim Carnes. *From the Sacred Harp Museum.*

So, the word went out—

*A revision is going to be done and you are invited to submit tunes of your composition for possible consideration. The songs must be in dispersed harmony and similar in every respect to the style found in the book already. No gospel music style!*

We had immediate response, albeit a trifle thin. Our first step was to call together a picked group of twenty-[three] singers from over the United States—people who could read shape notes like professionals. About half of the group consisted of singers from all over the country—even to California. These singers are listed at the end of this article.

We met on a Saturday morning at the Samford University music department in Birmingham, Alabama. Hugh passed out a stack of music to each participant—about ninety-three pieces

to the stack. I had suggested that all reference to composers be removed and numbers be assigned to each piece so that no personal consideration could enter into the impressions we had of the suitability of each piece. I was doubly thankful for this having been done when I discovered that Hugh had included twenty-one pieces of my composition in the package. I insisted on removing two anthems, leaving nineteen to be considered. For several years Hugh and I had indulged in composing tunes and swapping back and forth and singing them in pick-up quartets. To my surprise I found he had saved them all and put them in the pot with the rest. When I told him I didn't want all of those to be considered, he asked, "Don't you at least want to hear how they sound with a good singing group?" I had to admit that would be nice, so the nineteen songs went into the list.

All of the ninety-three songs were taped with professional equipment and the results were excellent. We ran through each song once and then taped. The ability of that group to read music cold was remarkable.

We spent all day Saturday and until 3 PM Sunday and wound up tired and hoarse, but on fire with the realization that we had an endless body of music to choose from. Each member of the group later received a copy of the tapes made at that session.

We of the Committee were directed to sit down at home, listen carefully to the tapes, and make recommendations as to which numbers we considered suitable for inclusion in the revision.

At our next meeting in Carrollton, the tapes were played and each tune assigned a number on a scale of one to ten, ten being our first choice. Anything below eight was not really considered. Early on,



Raymond C. Hamrick leads from a special packet featuring the new songs added to the *1991 Edition*, Birmingham, Alabama, December 15, 1990. *Courtesy of the Sacred Harp Museum.*

we found that we were having so many tens that an effort had to be made to cut down this figure since we would have more music than space in the new book. We therefore used “ten plus” and most of the tunes that eventually made the cut were in this category.

We found many tunes that had such an authentic sound that we had difficulty in telling whether they were new or quite old. Some elements of modern composition did creep in inevitably as some of the new composers were trained musicians rather than the amateurs of previous generations. Some of it was quite good, however, and we included it for that reason and also to give our northern and western singers an interest in the book to be published. This has proven to be the right decision.

The second and most difficult aspect of our work now appeared—what to take out of *The Sacred Harp* book so as to have room for this new material. The book was already as large as we wanted, so the weeding-out began. Computer print-outs of the minutes for the previous ten years showed what songs were never or very rarely used and from these print-outs we compiled a list of those songs

that had to go. A strong effort was made to ensure that no song that was a favorite of any living singer would be removed. Also, the pagination was not to be affected for the rest of the book.

Some changes were made that were considered beneficial to the singers, such as the printing of titles and poetry being standardized and an intensive perusal for errors in spelling and note placement, which resulted in several hundred corrections. It was suggested, and agreed upon, that the footnotes which had first been put in place by Joe James in 1911 would be left out. The material in these footnotes in many cases was incorrect and repetitive and we felt that the added space achieved could be used to put in more new music. This, I think, is probably the only step that brought some degree of criticism—mostly, I think, from academia. The singers themselves seemed not to mind.

At the time, the idea was that a “Companion to *The Sacred Harp*” be issued at a later date and these footnotes and biographies of the composers be included. To date, this has not been followed up—there having been little demand. [*Singers’ interest in a companion*

*to the songbook did build, leading eventually to the 2010 publication of David Warren Steel’s Makers of the Sacred Harp, available from the Sacred Harp Publishing Company.—Ed.]*

At any rate, the weeding-out process proceeded and some sixty pages were made available for the new music. The public was given ample opportunity to protest any tune being removed but no objections were recorded and we moved ahead with filling in the slots. Each member of the Committee was given a group of new music to study and asked to make recommendations to the full committee. Each song was played, the recommendations made, and discussion among the members took place. There was a surprising unanimity of opinions on practically all of the compositions. We finished this with most of the music selection completed. Other music had been trickling in, however, and it was decided to have a second session of recording at the headquarters building in Carrollton. At this time, a somewhat different group of singers recorded the later submissions and several of these were deemed good enough to be added to the original selections.

Raymond C. Hamrick's copy of the anonymized manuscript of his song INVOCATION (p. 492).

① INVOCATION RCB

A- Rise! My Soul, My Joy-ful Powers, AND TRIUMPH IN MY GOD; AND TRIUMPH IN MY

A- Rise! My Soul, My Joy-ful Powers, AND TRIUMPH IN MY GOD; AND TRIUMPH IN MY

GOD: A- WAKE MY VOICE AND LOUD PRO-CLAIM HIS WORD

GOD: A- WAKE MY VOICE, + WAKE MY VOICE AND LOUD PRO-CLAIM HIS WORD!

GOD: A- WAKE MY VOICE AND LOUD PRO-CLAIM HIS WORD!

GOD: A- WAKE MY VOICE AND LOUD PROCLAIM HIS WORD; A- Rise My Soul, A-

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②

AND LET ALL TUNES OF PLEASURE SING, OF PLEASURE SING, LOUD HALLELUJAH'S SHALL ADDRESS THE

AND LET ALL TUNES OF PLEASURE SING; LOUD HALLELUJAH'S SHALL ADDRESS THE

WAKE MY VOICE, AND LET ALL TUNES OF PLEASURE SING;

HON-ORS OF HER GOD.

HON-ORS OF HER GOD.

With the selection process completed, the burden then shifted to Hugh and two or three of the committee who had some experience in layout and printing. Every song, old and new, was closely checked for accuracy in spelling and in note placement. Several hundred corrections were made. Also, Dr. [Warren Steel] and Dr. [William J.] Reynolds and Mrs. [Mary Lou] Reynolds were asked to provide up-to-date corrections on composers and dates. This turned out to be a very complex and time-consuming operation—and one in which a huge vote of thanks was due these researchers. [Read Michael Hinton and David W. Music's tribute to William J. Reynolds, a recipient of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company's posthumous citation, in vol. 4, no. 1 of the Newsletter.—Ed.]

It was also felt that the rudiments needed re-working, these being somewhat jumbled and incomplete. Dr. John Garst of the University of Georgia at Athens, a widely known and knowledgeable student of early American music, was asked to do this job. His first submission was a remarkably complete treatise on music. The only drawback was that there was not space available for the complete work. Additionally, some parts were too advanced for the usual singing school. Asked to re-do it and compress it into a smaller package, he agreed and produced a model of brevity but with all the essential ingredients.

Now the emphasis was on printing, and Hugh began a long series of trips to Tennessee to choose the paper, the cover, the type, and the thousand other details that had to be settled. In this phase I began to appreciate the remarkable talents of Hugh McGraw, and the tremendous dedication of the man. He showed why his influence has been so strong throughout the years—not only in the Sacred Harp heartland, but in the emerging areas especially.

As the publication date drew near, Hugh began to formulate plans for an elaborate introduction of the new music to the singers. This was to be in the auditorium of Samford University in Birmingham. Special books containing

only the new music were printed for the approximately 350–400 singers from all over the country who were invited to attend. All contemporary composers were to be honored by leading this huge group in singing his own music. All but one composer attended and the ability of these singers to sight-read new music was phenomenal. It was professionally audio recorded and the sound is probably the best ever put on tape. Many copies were sold and singers everywhere used them to learn the new songs. It was a preparation like this that practically assured the new book of wide acceptance—and that's what happened.

The 1991 edition of *The Sacred Harp* was first used by a Sacred Harp class at an all-day singing at Jacksonville, Alabama, on February 2, 1992.

The first printing was quickly exhausted and also the second. The third printing is now half gone. Fifty books were recently shipped to London, England, as a result of a teaching trip to England in 1994 by one of our committee, Terry Wootten.<sup>3</sup>

This, then, is a brief record of a successful and extended five-year program to complete a thorough, and, I think, memorable revision of the venerable *Sacred Harp*. Our goal was to maintain the musical integrity of the book and I feel we succeeded. ■

**Appendix:** Hamrick directs readers to a list of the twenty-eight singers he reports as having gathered to sing the first batch of songs submitted for potential inclusion in the new revision of *The Sacred Harp*, but no such list is appended to the typescript of Hamrick's that is the only known surviving copy of this article. Hamrick's box of notes from the 1991 Edition revision process, however, includes these two lists of twenty-three and fifteen singers, respectively, at the singings of submitted songs held in Birmingham and Carrollton.—Ed.

**First Recording Session of Music to Be Considered for 1990 Edition  
All Attribution (Tune) Removed**

Music sung by select group of Sacred Harp singers in Birmingham, Alabama, January 16–17, 1988, at Samford University. From this music the Music Committee will choose

the music to be put into the new edition of *The Sacred Harp*.

- Texas: Tom Owens, Dr. William Reynolds
- Mississippi: Dr. Warren Steel
- Louisiana: Dr. Harry Eskew
- Chicago, [Illinois]: Ted Mercer, Ted Johnson, Marcia Johnson, Judy Hauff, Melanie Hauff, Mary Rose Ogren,<sup>4</sup> Larry Nobrwebr
- Georgia: Charlene Wallace (Waco), Richard DeLong (Carrollton), Hugh McGraw (Temple), Raymond Hamrick (Macon), Martha Ann Stegar (Atlanta)
- Virginia: Dan Brittain
- Alabama: Toney Smith (Tuscaloosa), Buell Cobb (Birmingham), Jeff Sheppard (Glencoe), Shelbie Sheppard (Glencoe), Terry Wootten [(Ider)], David Ivey [(Huntsville)]

**Second Recording Session, Music Being Considered for 1990 Edition (44 Pieces)  
[Sacred Harp Publishing Company  
Headquarters, Carrollton, Georgia,]  
October 1989**

- Treble: Buell Cobb, Richard DeLong, David Ivey
- Alto: Judy Hauff, Charlene Wallace
- Tenor: Jeff and Shelbie Sheppard, Terry Wootten, Ted Mercer, Melanie Hauff, Hugh McGraw
- Bass: Toney Smith, Dan Brittain, Ray Hamrick, Jim Carnes

**Acknowledgments:** Thanks to the Hollingsworth family for sharing the version of this essay that Raymond C. Hamrick shared with them—the only known surviving copy—enabling its publication in this issue of the Newsletter.

**Endnotes**

- 1 Raymond C. Hamrick, interview with the editor, Macon, GA, April 3, 2014.
- 2 Alan Jabbour to Raymond C. Hamrick, August 4, 1998, Box 3, Folder 7, Raymond Hamrick Papers, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.
- 3 Hamrick later added the following: "Note: in 1996, eight cases of books—a total of sixty-four books—were shipped to London."—Ed.
- 4 Hamrick notes that the group that gathered in Birmingham included singers as far from Alabama as California, yet his list of singers does not include a Californian. Hamrick may have had Mary Rose—who moved to California soon after this session—in mind.—Ed.

## Hamrick on *The Sacred Harp*

# “My Interest Was in the Background of the Music”: Raymond C. Hamrick and Alan Lomax in Conversation

Raymond C. Hamrick and Alan Lomax | Macon, Georgia and New York, New York

Raymond C. Hamrick, interviewed by Alan Lomax, Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, Bremen, Georgia, June 1982. From the Alan Lomax Collection at the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. *Courtesy of the Association for Cultural Equity.*

**Editor’s Note:** Alan Lomax interviewed Raymond C. Hamrick during a break in 1982 June memorial singing at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church in Bremen, Georgia. An outspoken and prolific folklorist, Lomax attended the convention with a large crew to record the singing and interview prominent participants for his acclaimed 1982–83 PBS series *American Patchwork*.

Never before published, Lomax’s conversation with Hamrick is notable in comparison with his interviews with other singers such as Hugh McGraw and George and Martha Woodard for its relative brevity, and for Hamrick’s subtle pushback against the priorities Lomax brought to the interaction. Lomax frequently positions himself at a comfortable intellectual distance from his interview subjects, claiming the role of interpreter and analyst. In this conversation, Hamrick subtly upends these roles, offering his own sometimes divergent assessments of Sacred Harp practices, especially in his assessment of “scooping.” Furthermore, Hamrick emphasizes his own experience as a researcher, pointing out his relationship with the folklorists and institutions that made Lomax’s own encounter with Sacred Harp singing possible.

Thanks to Nathan Salsburg, curator of the Alan Lomax Archive at the Association for Cultural Equity, for generously granting permission to publish Lomax’s interview with Hamrick.



Lomax: Mr. Hamrick, I have heard a lot about you from Hugh. Your first name is—

Hamrick: Raymond.

Lomax: Raymond. This is Raymond Hamrick who is probably the most active composer in the Sacred Harp tradition. Up until, oh all through the nineteenth century, the talented people of the southern backwoods were writing in fugal tunes in four parts to be published in the various editions of *The Sacred Harp* and other parts of the shape note literature. And Mr. Hamrick here is I understand one of the people who is still actively practicing composition in that field.

Hamrick: Yes, a good bit. It is kind of a hobby of mine.

Lomax: I have heard a lot about you from Hugh McGraw.

Hamrick: Well, I hope it is accurate,

let’s put it this way.

Lomax: When did you begin to compose? Tell us a little about your life as a composer.

Hamrick: Well, actually my interest in it was in the background of the music. I met George Pullen Jackson in 1950 and he interested me in the history of it a good bit, so we began to look into the background of the composers and the way that the composer, the performance characteristics are what intrigued me about it, so when they began to—

Lomax: What did you find out about that? Tell us.

Hamrick: Well, it would take all day to get into it. I’m still working on some phases of it. There is so much in it that most people do not even consider. The pitching, for example, is one of the performance characteristics that the general

Sacred Harp Publishing Co., Inc.

BOX 185  
BREMEN, GEORGIA 30110

1982

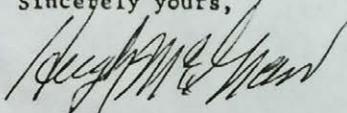
Dear Singing Friends:

On the 1st Sunday and Saturday before, in June which is June 5th and 6th, Mr. Alan Lomax will be making a one hour TV program on the Sacred Harp and its tradition. He was appointed to this project by Columbia University and the National Endowment of the Arts. This TV program will be shown all over the world and we want to make this the very best one ever made-- and with your help we can do this. He will film all the 2 day singing and he wants to interview as many people as possible at lunch, after the singing and at the motel. He will go out and interview people in their home and their place of work. A very large amount of money will be put in the making of this film. And many long hours of peoples time. I wish you would do me a great favor and try to come to HOLLY SPRINGS PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH, located at the intersection of I20 and Highway 27. 3 miles south of Bremen, Georgia. It is Exit #3 on Interstate I20. With all the help of the wonderful people of the Sacred Harp movement we will be proud of this TV program.

Mr. Chester Wootten will be leading a white book singing on Saturday Evening from 7:00 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. If you have a white book bring it with you.

See you at Holly Springs on June 5 and 6th.

Sincerely yours,



Hugh McGraw

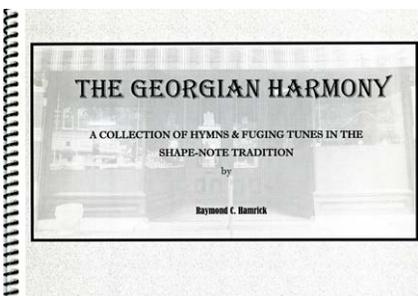
HMG/ni

- public never notices. They take it as a matter of course, but pitching is a very peculiar talent that has to be learned.
- Lomax: I've discussed this with a number of the singers. It is fascinating.
- Hamrick: It takes a lot of experience. I have arrived at one or two conclusions. First of all that it takes a familiarity with the music, a great familiarity with the music, and a feeling for the voices. You have to establish very quickly the range of your class. For example, in the morning the voices are down a bit and you pitch a little bit lower to take advantage of that. And then as the voices warm up during the day, then you gradually raise the pitch, but this music is consistently pitched a little bit lower than it is written anyway because in the early books ... if you look in *The Bay Psalm Book*, for example, they say that in pitching this music, you pitch it so that the high part doesn't squeal and the low part doesn't grunt, and they still go by that. And the habit of the composers is when they compose a tune they pick the highest and the lowest tone and place it upon the staff so that they use very little ledger lines. They don't like ledger lines. But this automatically means that the music is going to be from anywhere from a tone to a tone and a half higher than it should be. And what the pitcher does, he accommodates this tone, a tone and a half high, by lowering it that much. So when he pitches a tone that is supposed to be F, he is actually about an E flat. But he has to do this because if you don't, you'll have your high part squealing, and if you miss it very much on the low side you will have your basses grunting. So it becomes a built-in, almost automatic correction. But you'll notice that here today, for example, if they sing a hundred songs, they may re-pitch one. And it's a little unusual to even re-pitch any, so they have it down to a fine science.
- Lomax: What about the sliding notes? That's always interested me a lot.
- Hamrick: What do you mean? The swooping/scooping? Well, that's—
- Lomax: Well, Hugh calls it sliding.
- Hamrick: Well, that's entirely up to the individual. I think everybody has their own method of singing it.
- Lomax: Do you think it adds to the music a lot?
- Hamrick: Well ... yes, in some respects, I think it gives you a good bit of dissonance in some of your chords sometimes.
- Lomax: That's nice.
- Hamrick: But, uh ... if they are singing it as an individual, as a solo, it's beautiful. But I don't like to hear too much sliding in the harmony parts. Bass and treble and alto I think should be right where they are supposed to be and then let the melody slide if they will. They are going to anyway. You might as well adjust to it.
- Lomax: That's old-style West European singing.
- Hamrick: Yes, it is. It is. It's traditional. In old days, of course, they learned it by ear from older people and each person it was transmitted to put his own imprint on it.
- Lomax: Over in Ireland they call it the "blas," that you can put all of those decorations in it. It is very elaborate.
- Hamrick: And it is lovely. It really is. And you hear a lot of that here. I wasn't really so much aware of it until I listened to a recording made over at the first Sacred Harp singing in Birmingham two years ago. And they had a lady sing a song by herself just to show how she sang and it was like listening to an old English minstrel. It was beautiful.
- Lomax: You said you had written a couple of papers and something had happened to them.
- Hamrick: Well, yes, there were ... I don't think that it's a good idea to do this type of research and not write it down and put the weight on somebody else in later years to try to do it. Every little bit that you can contribute I think should be done. And these papers were written for my own amusement, and the Library of Congress saw one of them and asked if I wouldn't mind giving them copies, so I did and they tell me later that somebody paid me the ultimate compliment; they stole both of them, so I had to replace them. But I haven't sent them the last one. I just finished one of pitching, the role of the pitcher in Sacred Harp.
- Lomax: This is a part-time activity of yours.
- Hamrick: Oh, yes. Very much part-time.
- Lomax: You're a professional ... uh ...
- Hamrick: Jeweler.
- Lomax: Jeweler. That's been your life work.
- Hamrick: Oh, yes. Forty-six years of it.
- Lomax: So composing and jewelry work are sort of similar in a sense.
- Hamrick: Well, the early composers all composed, wrote music as a hobby. They all had other jobs that they made a living at. Yes. And it's a great relaxation to me, jewelry, and I am a professional watchmaker, too, and this type of work requires relaxation, and music is certainly a relaxer. ■

## Feature

# The Making of *The Georgian Harmony*

John Hollingsworth | Ila, Georgia



**Top:** Raymond C. Hamrick leads one of his songs after the 2008 singing at Andrews Chapel. *Photograph by Aldo Ceresa.*

**Bottom:** Cover of the spiral bound *Georgian Harmony*.

WE had sung both LLOYD and CHRISTIAN'S FAREWELL (pp. 503 and 347 in *The Sacred Harp*) late in the singing at Haynes Creek on the first Sunday of September, 2005, and as we left the building I told Raymond how much I had enjoyed his songs in *The Sacred Harp*, and especially those two songs. His response was something like, "yes, they have been well received." He then added that he had written a lot of music that had not "seen the light of day" and had not been sung. He said he would write a song and "throw it into a basket." I immediately blurted out "if you will give me that basket, I will typeset the music using a computer program Billy installed on my computer, and I will cause it to be published in a book."

John Plunkett was in another conversation about six feet away and had overheard our discussion. He stepped up and said "and I will help him." Those that know both of us know that I would need a lot of help and that he would be a good source.

Raymond was reluctant. He kept saying that the songs may not be any good, and he did not want to distribute a bad song. I assured him that I would just typeset them, and that John and I would not even show them to anyone until he approved.

Much later I was told that Raymond once told Harry Eskew that I harassed him unmercifully until he gave me a few songs. I don't deny that I was aggressive, and he gave me four songs, which I typeset, made a few copies, and took them to the 2006 singing at Andrews Chapel. We asked if we could distribute the copies and get the class to sing them. He said of course not! We would not interfere with a singing for that exercise. Then we asked if we could invite singers to come back inside after the singing to sing them. He agreed to that.

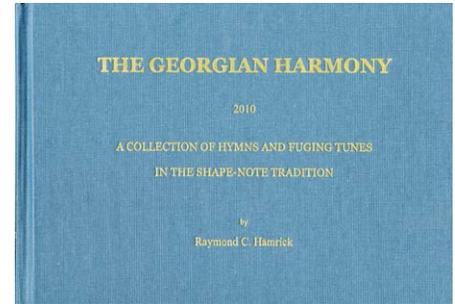
Two things surprised him. He was

astonished at the excitement of the singers, and he was surprised at how good the songs sounded. Finally, he was willing to think about typesetting his music, but he was still not confident the music merited publication. When we sang the songs, people would ask me if they could keep the copies. My answer was that they belonged to Raymond, and I could not give them away. Raymond did not want the copies to get out. In fact, a singer from afar visited Raymond and told him how much their group had enjoyed singing a particular one of these songs. It bothered him. He asked me how they got the song to sing. I became more careful.

For a couple of years, Raymond would send me a song from time to time, and I would try to typeset it. The program I was using (Mup from Arkkra) is very good and easy to use, but I didn't know what I was doing and I made a *lot* of mistakes, but I was learning, and the number of songs was increasing. John Plunkett was doing the proofing, and he can verify that there were a lot of corrections.

Throughout this process we were discussing the music with Raymond and John was helping Raymond in several ways, not the least of which was to find words for the music. One of my favorite stories, which I am sure Plunkett is tired of hearing me tell, involves song 54. The words were from hymn 337 of a book he had borrowed from John, and the notation he wrote at the top of the page was "John 337." Knowing that chapter 3 of John had only thirty-six verses and needing a title, he added the colon as a joke, so the "John" in the title JOHN 3:37 is John Plunkett.

These discussions took us to Macon fairly often to visit with Raymond and discuss the book. Those visits richly blessed the Hollingsworth family. When we traveled to see him on Sunday afternoons, Angela would go



**Left:** Raymond C. Hamrick with Hugh McGraw and Bill Hollingsworth at Hamrick's ninety-ninth birthday singing in Roberta, Georgia. *Photograph by Aldo Ceresa.*

**Above:** Cover of the second edition of *The Georgian Harmony*.

with us, and we would have great visits. Angela and Elsie were visiting (Angela sometimes took notes), Raymond would tell stories from the past, Billy was studying and asking questions about the music, and sometimes I was working on corrections. Wonderful memories!

On one occasion, we were discussing the harmony of a song and Angela volunteered that the alto line had a note she did not like to sing. He responded "Which note is that, sugar?" Then he asked "Well, what note would you like to sing?" When she told him, he thought for a bit and then said "Well, that would work," and turned to me and told me to make the change. Then he said he certainly did not want to look up and see the altos frowning.

In a different visit, he said it was very important to give each part a song the singers enjoyed singing, and that sometimes it was necessary to accept a little dissonance toward that end.

Eventually we put together a paperback book and sang from it in

several places, including the home of Mary Brownlee, Emmaus Primitive Baptist Church in Thomaston, Vineville Baptist Church in Macon, and a few other locations. Eli Hinton was a baby at the Vineville singing and Raymond titled one of his songs "Elijah" in honor of Matt, Erica, Anna, and Eli Hinton.

Once at a Sacred Harp singing, Raymond asked Elsie "Well when are we going to have another all-day singing from the *Georgian Harmony*?" She responded "When can you make it?" and he said "Well, I don't work New Year's Day," and so began our January 1 singing at our house.

At some point, it was clear that Raymond was ready for the book to appear, so I got busy trying to get things in a presentable format. I had had no idea how far my effort at that point was from a publishable standard, but we began to try.

On the last visit before submitting the document to the publisher, I was working and Elsie was visiting with

Raymond. She later told me that he told her that day that he had found some more songs, but said "I'm not giving them to John Hollingsworth; this book would never get published." On a later visit after the book appeared, I told Raymond that Elsie had told me that, and that I would like to typeset the additional songs. He had reasons not to do that. There was no point, because the book was already done. These songs had not been properly edited, and may not be any good. By this time Raymond had noticeably less energy than he had had five years earlier when the project had started, and he was still concerned about songs getting out that were not up to his standards. I assured him that I would just typeset, and not show them to others without his consent. Finally, Elsie said "Well, John is finished with *The Georgian Harmony* and *The Christian Harmony*, so he has the time to do it." Raymond laughed heartily, and said "I know what you're doing; you are just trying to get him out of your hair," and



John Plunkett with Raymond C. Hamrick, at a singing from *The Georgian Harmony* at Liberty Hill Primitive Baptist Church, February 2011. Photograph by Darrell Swarens.

he handed me a packet of songs. Wow!

The songs he had given me previously were complete and all the chords had been checked very carefully. This batch was different. Many of the songs were incomplete, many were without lyrics, and some were just fragments. He later explained that when a little run came to him, he would jot it down. Later, if he thought it had merit, he might extend it into a melody, later another part, and eventually it might have all four parts, and then he would try to find words. This batch had examples of each of those stages of development.

As promised, I just typed whatever he gave me. One song I thought especially good, and on a trip to visit, I took my computer so I could play him the midi

version of the song. Of course, the midi version is not a good rendition, and not much was said about the song, but he gave me a new composition. Elsie suggested, since I had the computer with me, that I type some of the music so Raymond could see how I did it, so I did. I told him of each keystroke and what it meant, and I typed a few measures, and hit “display” so that he could see the results. He seemed confused, and asked me about half a dozen questions (“how did you get the measure bars to align,” “how did you draw the beam lines,” etc.). The answer to each was “the computer does that automatically,” and he said “it seems to me you are telling me there is not much to this.” When I said “exactly,” he handed me another batch.

Several of the songs had all parts except alto, and at Billy’s request I asked Raymond if he would approve if Billy tried to write an alto and get Raymond to criticize, so that Billy could learn a little about composing. Raymond agreed, and Billy began studying Raymond’s altos. Eventually he wrote the alto to one of the songs, and I took it to Raymond. He studied it for a while, then said “this is good, let’s use it, but be sure to give him credit.” Billy continued studying Raymond’s music, asked a lot of questions, and ended up writing the alto for several of the songs.

Now I had more “new” songs than were in the first edition of the book, and on average I thought they were even better than the ones in the book.

There were so many that I made spiral bound, paperback work books of these songs. I made three copies, one for me, one for Raymond, and one for Billy, who was providing much of the help that John Plunkett had provided for the first edition. When we were visiting and discussing some of the songs, Raymond volunteered that he would really like to hear the class sing a couple of them. I pointed out that that would require letting people know a little bit of what we were doing, and I asked him if he wanted me to tell John Plunkett about the new songs, and if so, how many of the songs. He held out his copy of the workbook and said, "all of these." Of course, that was a great relief; I had wanted to discuss this with John for months.

Loyd Landrum had come to Roberta with Harry Eskew for one of the singings in which we sang some of these songs. John Plunkett would lead us through them, sometimes (usually, I think) singing each part and then working on whatever the problems were. After singing about a dozen of the songs, I went to Raymond to get his reaction. He said that Loyd had said that these songs were better than the ones in the book. My response was that I had been telling him that for months, and he grinned and said "Yes, but Loyd is a professional musician."

At this point it was clear to most that this music deserved publication, but the workbooks had not been scrutinized enough to meet Raymond's standard, and such scrutiny would require a lot of examination. It was not clear Raymond had the energy to attack such an undertaking. One approach would be to get the singers to sing all the songs, make comments, and record them for Raymond's listening. But this would take a lot of time. Singing through the parts and working on problems was necessary and time consuming.

We were discussing this problem at our breakfast table with Eddie Mash, and I (in jest) suggested that we convene a good class at our house on Friday night, sing Friday night, spend the night, sing Saturday, Saturday night,



Raymond C. Hamrick with Anna and Erica Hinton at Emmaus Primitive Baptist Church, Carrollton, Georgia. Photograph by Aldo Ceresa.

spend the night, and continue until we finished. Eddie immediately endorsed the idea and promised to participate and try to get others to join in also. That is not quite how it was done, but it was reasonably close. We sang at several places, including our house (Friday night through Sunday morning), and finished at Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church. My heart was full; I was very touched at the effort so many singers made to help Raymond edit his music. He was very touched as well.

The way it worked was this: I made enough copies of the workbook so each singer had a copy, on which they put their name. John Plunkett led us through the songs, usually singing the shapes for each part, then singing the song until

we did it to his satisfaction. Billy made a recording for Raymond to hear, and, for each song, each singer made comments, rated the song, and suggested any needed changes. I then collected the workbooks and copied all the comments into one book, which I gave to Raymond.

A lot of talent was assembled in these groups. Their criticisms were detailed and informed, and this was crucial to the process. Not only were the suggestions helpful, but, since the participants included such accomplished musicians (Jesse P. Karlsberg, Lauren Bock, Robert Kelley and others), this evaluation gave Raymond more confidence that we should publish this batch also.

I am reluctant to attempt to list the participants for fear that this old



Raymond Hamrick with Oscar McGuire, leading from *The Georgian Harmony* at his ninety-ninth birthday singing in Roberta, Georgia. Photograph by Aldo Ceresa.

man will forget some, but those who helped included: Raymond Hamrick, Laura Akerman, Joan Aldridge, Angela Benton, Lauren Bock, Leslie Booher, Mary Brownlee, Helen Bryson, Judy Caudle, Mildred Chandler, Michelle Cull, Beverly Dayton, Meredith Dayton, Jeannette DePoy, Molly Ellis, Harry Eskew, Wesley Haley, Sharon Hamrick, Martha Harrell, Louise Holland, Bill Hollingsworth, Elsie Hollingsworth, John Hollingsworth, Sarah Kahre, Jesse P. Karlsberg, Robert Kelley, Andreas Manz, Eddie Mash, Hugh McGraw, Katy McGuire, Oscar

McGuire, Judy Mincey, Andy Morse, Angela Myers, John Plunkett, Shannon Primm, Mary Ellen Shrock, Benjamin Smith, Margie Smith, Jane Spencer, Mike Spencer, Darrell Swarens, Stephanie Tingler, Charlene Wallace, Rosemund Watson, Chris Wilhelm, Kathy Williams, and Jonathan Wood. I apologize for omitted names.

Of course, we did not publish it all. I have some songs I thought to be pretty good on which he wrote "DO NOT USE" across the top.

I was embarrassed at all the errors in the combined book, but when I

apologized to Raymond, his response was that the errors had not kept us from singing the songs. I'm still embarrassed, but he is right.

Many people would have been happy to do the typesetting and would have done a better job, but I was retired and had the time, I was aggressive enough to get started, and I admired Raymond and his music. I am keenly aware that it was a great blessing for me and my family, and it turned out that the greatest blessing to us was not the music, but the time we spent with Raymond. ■

## Feature

## Help Me to Sing: Raymond Hamrick as Composer and Teacher

By Shaun Jex | Coppell, Texas



Raymond C. Hamrick with Hugh McGraw, at the Emory Sacred Harp Singing in Atlanta. Photograph by M. Patrick Graham.

RAYMOND Hamrick was a master craftsman. For close to eight decades, he worked as a jeweler repairing watches at Andersen's Jewelers. For most of those years, he also used this eye for detail to craft and teach the art of Sacred Harp singing. It was this willingness to instruct that first brought me into contact with Raymond.

I came to Sacred Harp music through the back door. I grew up in Texas, but I did not have family or friends who attended singings. My first exposure to the music came through the *Cold Mountain* soundtrack, and my first impression was a mix of bewilderment and intrigue. [Read more about those who found Sacred Harp through *Cold Mountain* in vol. 2, no. 3 of the Newsletter—Ed.] I was not familiar with

shape notes, and I could not understand the seeming gibberish at the beginning of each Sacred Harp recording. I was a student of traditional music, old hymns, mountain songs, and spirituals. I play a variety of instruments, learning a new one every other year or so as the interest takes hold. At first, I treated Sacred Harp in the same way. It was a musical curiosity, to be tucked away in my mental catalogue of musical forms, pulled out from time to time. It was not until I viewed Matt and Erica Hinton's *Awake, My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp* that I became truly enamored of the form.

I was particularly taken by the portions of the film featuring Raymond Hamrick. The story of an old watchmaker whose musical masterpiece came to him in a

dream seemed the stuff of folk legend, like Robert Johnson selling his soul at the crossroads. Beyond the romance of Raymond's story was the power of the music in the film. I had never heard anything with so much urgency and passion, and all in the interest of praising God, petitioning sinners, and mourning our mortality.

I began seeking out any and all recordings of singings, digging into old hymn books, and reading any scrap of history I could find on the subject. I didn't want to just learn about the form. I wanted to connect with its elder statesman. As a multi-instrumentalist who loves to dabble in various forms of American roots music, I wanted to try my hand at contributing to the tradition.

A barrage of online searches led me to



From left to right: Horace Hamrick, John Garst, Raymond C. Hamrick, and P. Dan Brittain, at a Sacred Harp singing in 1972. Photograph courtesy of Patti Hamrick Dancy and Susan Hamrick Hatfield.

Jesse P. Karlsberg's essay on Raymond. *[Read an updated version of this biographical essay on p. 4 of this issue —Ed.]* A few emails later, I had Raymond's mailing address in Macon, Georgia, and an assurance that he would welcome letters or calls regarding Sacred Harp. I sat down the same day and wrote a letter, declaring my interest in composing in the Sacred Harp style and asking advice as to how I should start. I had no idea if or how he would respond to my naive and presumptuous query.

It turns out, I needn't have worried. Raymond has spent almost as many years mentoring others as he has singing. Hugh McGraw, Sacred Harp composer and former executive secretary of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, was an early recipient of Raymond's willingness to mold aspiring composers. "I met him in about 1955 or 1956," McGraw said. "He was a good friend of mine. He and I used to compare songs and compare ideas and help one another.

He said to always have your words ready before you wrote the music, because the words had to be metered. He wanted to help everybody."

P. Dan Brittain, composer of Sacred Harp songs including COBB and MCGRAW, (pp. 313b and 353 in *The Sacred Harp*) also developed his technique in conversation with Raymond. "My first singing was the Chattahoochee in 1970. That year it was at Poplar Springs Primitive Baptist Church near Bowdon, Georgia," Brittain said. "Raymond was at that singing. I sat behind him, if I recall correctly. I started writing in this style in probably October of that year. The first few efforts were dismal. Having had training as a composer, I had not yet learned which rules to ignore and how to adapt." Brittain began attending singings on a regular basis and would often chat with Raymond about differing styles of Sacred Harp writing, gaining exposure to composers such as Leonard P. Breedlove and Edmund Dumas. As he

did with McGraw, Raymond would offer critiques and insights into areas where Brittain could refine his compositions.

Jesse P. Karlsberg, vice president of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, related similar interactions.

*I met Raymond Hamrick at the 2006 June singing at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church. I had begun corresponding with him the previous year at the suggestion of a friend who knew him. I had been trying to write Sacred Harp music for a couple of years and wanted feedback on my music and mentioned to my friend that I admired Mr. Hamrick's compositions. She suggested I send him some songs for feedback. He responded with a kind note and honest feedback, pointing out a number of ways in which my songs were unidiomatic, as well as with encouragement and the suggestion to try writing simpler music. I made plans to attend Holly Springs after a few more letters at his suggestion of a singing I*

could attend where he planned to be present. We continued to exchange letters and music for the next five years until I moved down to Georgia and was able to see him more regularly. On one occasion, I was flummoxed by a particular measure in an in-progress song of mine and wrote to Raymond for help. He sent back a handwritten music suggestion as a possible approach to the problematic spot.

Despite my own total lack of experience, Raymond was equally supportive of my inquiries into the art. "I applaud your feeling for this music," he wrote. "One either likes it or doesn't. There is no in-between. It is a subject that will embrace you more and more as you learn more about it. It is a subject that seemingly has no end as I've discovered. As to composing Sacred Harp music I must tell you I really can't offer too much good advice. I think that one's musical background is most important here. You have to immerse yourself in the music until you get a feel for the style." He closed his initial letter with a gentle suggestion that I wait to try my hand at composing. He enclosed a copy of New York City Sacred Harp singer and composer Aldo Ceresa's handout on writing Sacred Harp music from his Camp Fasola "Sacred Harp Tunewriting Workshop" and invited me to reach back out should I wish to pursue the conversation further.

Our conversation resumed roughly a month after our first correspondence, with Raymond further describing his composing process. "I have felt from the beginning that what I wrote was completely inspired," Raymond wrote. "I have been engaged in music for many years and had never experienced any desire to compose. Then suddenly my mind is flooded with tune after tune."

I would later learn that these moments of inspiration were buoyed up by relentless work and a surprising amount of technological innovation. After making *Awake, My Soul*, documentarian Matt Hinton established a friendship with Raymond that would reveal much about his composition process.

*He would take two reel to reel decks that*

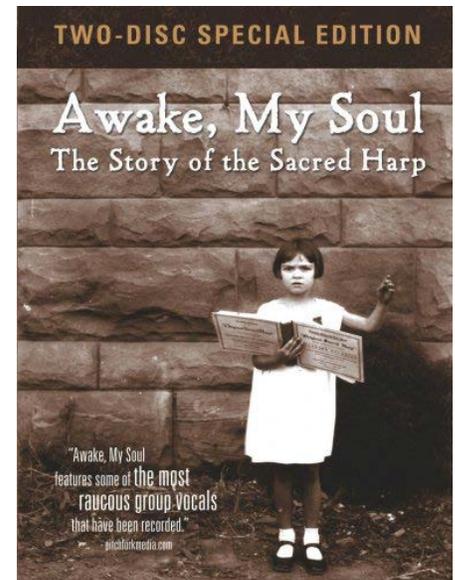
*were stereo, they had distinct signals left and right. He would link them up so that it would give him four tracks, before that was really available. He was doing that in the 1960s. He would do anywhere from two- to four-part recordings.*

Hamrick shared with Hinton the order in which he composed the various parts. "He would always start with the tenor, and ordinarily would write the bass next," Hinton said. "Then treble and then alto. I think that's pretty standard among Sacred Harp composers. Sacred Harp composition is horizontal and not vertical."

Hinton remembers him describing his approach as putting "the emphasis on a singable tune, not on blocks of chords vertically rendered. He's working on a whole tune horizontally, and then another tune horizontally."

Raymond was equally meticulous when it came to marrying words to the music. Unlike some other Sacred Harp composers who start writing music with a hymn text as inspiration, for Raymond's songs, the music typically came first. He often spent more time searching for just the right text and adapting it to the often unusual text meters in which he composed than writing the music itself. "I've always felt that every tune conveys a sense of feeling—sadness, joy, praise, etcetera," Hamrick wrote, "so, in searching for a suitable text, I looked for one that also expressed one of the above. It involved many hours of searching and in most cases I was successful. In a few cases, nothing came up and at such times felt impressed to furnish my own lyrics, although I am not a poet."

Beyond the technical, Raymond emphasized the aspect that inspiration played in his composing process. The most famous example is his experience of composing "Lloyd" (p. 503), which Raymond said he had heard in a dream, being sung by bands of white-clad angels. This sense of the ineffable movement of the spirit seems to have been ever-present in Raymond's compositions, working in ways that not even he fully understood. It came and went of its own accord, and nothing



Cover of *Awake, My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp*.  
Courtesy of Awake Productions.

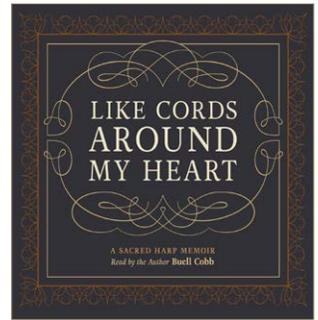
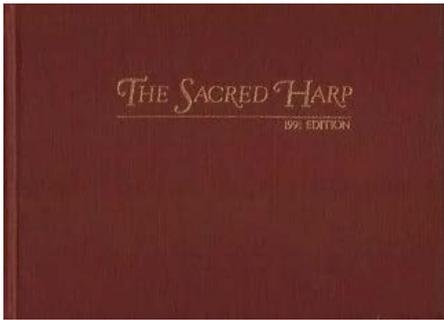
he could do could alter it. It is what gave birth the final masterwork, the *Georgian Harmony*, a collection of hymn and fusing tunes written over the course of decades. "What is odd to me is that when the *Georgian Harmony* was published any urge to compose vanished," Raymond told me. "I've been quite barren ever since then."

Several months passed before I sent a letter to Raymond again. I put aside my efforts at composing, realizing how much I still had to learn. Late in the fall of 2014, I sat down and wrote him again, plying him with more questions about the art of Sacred Harp. I did not hear from Raymond, but I was not surprised. As he told me early in our correspondence, it was at times an effort to write. "I have to get in the right frame of mind to write," he said. "That takes a bit longer at my age."

On November 24, 2014, Raymond Hamrick passed away. I don't know if he received or read my final letter. To date, I have still not completed a composition, but my passion for the tradition has grown. As Raymond predicted, the more I have learned and studied, the more it seems to give. Above all I remember his earnest counsel: "We must always remember the admonition, 'Seek the old ways, and walk therein.'" ■

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

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