

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

**Holy Manna: How Old Harp Singing in East Tennessee
is Surviving in a New Wilderness**

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Abstract

This project explores the identity and sustainability of the shaped note singing tradition among the community of the Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia*. A pattern emerged in fieldwork of song ownership, songs that each member considered to be “theirs.” Songs of ownership intertwine with education, preservation, and mediation of multiple realities to provide a link between identity and preservation and between the past, present, and future. The community actively preserves their musical tradition through song ownership.

The sustainability and survival of songs of ownership is emphasized in two ways: an emphasis on participation, not performance, and an emphasis on rudiment education. Participation and education are ways the old harp community is disrupting the current narrative that exists about mountain music and identity. This “end of the line” narrative of mountain music and identity is problematic because it distances the observer from the tradition, keeping it observed in the past instead of relevantly engaged in the present.

A phenomenon of tune variation presented itself in the fieldwork. Hood’s bi-musicality model worked for basic acquisition of harp singing. However, due to the minutia of tune variations within the community, the fact that there is not creative agency to prove fluency per Hood, and the variations were not necessarily set systems but socially predicated variants, a companion model was needed to account for the variants within systems, especially the ones creating sub-cultures and communities. The term chosen for these variations is socio-musical variation.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Dr. Ronald D. Rogers, who bought my first copy of Bruno Nettl's *Ethnomusicology* when I was a nineteen-year-old college music student because he believed in my dream. He passed away two weeks before I began this program, and his presence is felt every time I step to the center of the singing square.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. George McDow, for his guidance and wisdom throughout the process of this project, especially when I had to pivot topics very quickly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I would also like to extend gratitude to Dr. Douglas Anthony, the second member of my committee, whose invaluable advice of “let the people tell their story” helped me to navigate the fieldwork landscape many times. This thesis would not exist if it had not been for my friend, Sharee Green, a lifelong traditional harp singer, who faithfully invited me to harp singings and encouraged me to come sing. I am so thankful I finally listened to her. And finally, this project would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of David Sarten, president of the Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia*, and Andrew Whaley, vice-president of the Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia*, and all the current members who so graciously welcomed me, shared their stories and families, taught me the rudiments and encouraged me to step to the center and “feel” the music.

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Glossary¹

Annual Singing: a yearly singing gathering attached to a specific church or location that draws a large crowd from the local community and surrounding communities (often from other states as well). An annual singing usually begins with dinner on the grounds and fellowship an hour before the singing is scheduled to begin. There are enough annual singings that during the spring and summer months there is a monthly annual singing in addition to any local, smaller practice singings. (see Practice Singing)

Alto: one of the four harmony parts in harp singing; the second score or line of music; intended for the female voice.

Bass: one of the four harmony parts in harp singing; the fourth and bottom score or line of music; intended for the male voice.

Call: the act of picking a number from the tunebook for the singers to sing; i.e., to call a song, or “Joe, would you like to call the next one [tune or number in the tunebook]?”

Doremi: a word coined from solfedge syllables Do, Re, and Mi and used to refer to seven-note Singing.

“End of the Line” Narrative: the narrative that exists in culture and somewhat still in academia that in leaving the modern, urban centers and following roads out of civilization which become more and more narrow and obscure until ending in a back country, idyllic location one can still discover a primitive lifestyle unscathed by the complexities and atrocities of modern life.

Fasola: a word coined from the solfedge syllables Fa, Sol, and La and used to refer to four-note singing.

Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia*: the Sevier County organization of old harp singers. The community of singers in which I conducted the fieldwork for this study.

Harp Singing/Singers: the act of and those who participate in the shaped note singing. A harp singer can sing from any tunebook (*The Sacred Harp*, *Southern Harmony*, *The New Harp of Columbia*).

High: one of the four harmony parts in harp singing; the first score or line of music, intended for high female or male voice (e.g. soprano or tenor).

Hillbilly: a culturally constructed image of the Appalachian mountaineer as a sloppy, uneducated, lazy man whose days are consumed with hunting, feuding, making moonshine, and making love to his wife with whom he has numerous children; but who

¹ Unless otherwise footnoted, all terms and definitions were gleaned from participatory observation in singings and from being a resident of Sevier County, Tennessee.

has a deep homespun wisdom and faith and is gifted musically. The female version is also uneducated, buxom, often pregnant, scantily clad and often has many children in tow. She also is known for her homespun wisdom, in addition to her spiritual insights and faith in God. (see Mountaineer)

Lead (direct): the act of standing in the center of the square and first pitching the group, and then directing the group by indicating when to sing the shapes and when to sing the poetry; the lead is also expected to keep time for the group by beating simple patterns in duple or triple meter.

Lead (melody): one of the four harmony parts in harp singing; the third score or line of music; intended for female or male voices; always contains the melody.

Mountaineer: the identifier residents of the mountain counties of East Tennessee use to define themselves and is gender neutral. Characteristics of the mountaineer include strength and fortitude to face whatever the mountain climes may deliver, deeply rooted faith in God, and strong loyalty to family and neighbors; all of which enable him/her to survive. (see Hillbilly)

Non-Traditional Singer: an old harp singer who entered the tradition as an adult with no previous family ties or previous experience in the tradition.

Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee: the local community of shaped note singers in the mountain counties of East Tennessee (Sevier, Blount, and Cocke) which uses *The New Harp of Columbia*, meets on a regular basis at different host churches for practice singings, and hosts large annual singings and occasional singing schools (oldharp.org).

Parkway: a post-World War II mountain town phenomenon that began to take shape in Appalachian towns for the purpose of providing lodging, restaurants, and entertainment to tourists.

Poetry: texts that are set to the tunes; the same poetry can be used for many different tunes.

Pitching: the act of providing starting pitches either from a pitch pipe or from memory to the group; once everyone has their pitch they sing the first chord on their given syllable and hold it until the leader is satisfied and gives the next instruction.

Practice Singing: a monthly singing gathering for the purpose of practicing the tunes and learning new tunes. More emphasis is placed on the rudiments at these singings than at the annual singings. (see Annual Singing).

Shaped Notes/Shapes: refers to the noteheads in staff notation where each of the seven pitches in a scale has its own designated shape; upon sight of the shape the singer knows the corresponding pitch to sing (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do).²

² M. L. Swan and W. H. Swan, *The New Harp of Columbia A System of Musical Notation, With a Note for each Sound, and a Shape for Each Note; Containing a Variety of Most Excellent Psalm and Hymn Tunes, Odes and*

Si: the syllable harp singers use for the seventh scale degree; as opposed to traditional Western “ti.”

Singing: a singing is an event where harp singers gather to sing from the tunebook of their chosen tradition; definite protocols and rules are used in the proceedings at a singing. Practice singings are regular monthly gatherings, usually an hour to an hour and a half where singers can hone their skill or practice new tunes. Annual singings are held once a year and are day-long events that include hours of singing and big dinners on the ground. Both are hallmarked by prayer and fellowship.

Singing School: a weeklong or weekend event held every few years for the purpose of teaching newcomers how to sing in the tradition. Students are taught the history, the shapes, how to lead, and are given opportunity to showcase their knowledge in small singing squares of their fellow peers. The event culminates in a gigantic singing square that can last for hours. Dinners and fellowships abound at these schools.³

Singing Square: the shape singers sit in during singings; depending on numbers assigned sides of the square vary, but typically altos sit “north,” basses sit “east,” leads sit “south,” and highs sit “west.” The member leading the tune stands in the center of the square.

Solmization: the act of singing syllables on pitches instead of words. Some harp traditions only use four syllables (fa, sol, la, mi). The Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee use a seven syllable system (see Shaped Notes).⁴

Traditional Singer: an old harp singer who has grown up in the tradition and has generational ties to the tradition.

Tunebook: the oblong songbooks used in harp singing, the most well-known and popular being *The Sacred Harp*. Other well-known tunebooks include *Southern Harmony*, *The Hesperian Harp*, *Christian Harmony*, *The Harp of Columbia*, and *The New Harp of Columbia*. The Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee use *The New Harp of Columbia* tunebook.

Younger Generation: term used by the old harp singing community to refer to anyone who is a child, teen, or twenty-something.

Anthems, Happily Adapted to Church Service, Singin-Schools and Societies (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 4.

³ Ron Petersen and Candra Phillips, “East Tennessee Harp Singing,” in *The New Harp of Columbia* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), xxiii-xxiv.

⁴ Ibid.; Dorothy Horn, “*The New Harp of Columbia* and its Music in the Singing-School Tradition,” in *The New Harp of Columbia* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), viii and x.

Chapter 1: Discovering Harp Singing

The Great Smoky Mountain National Park is at the heart of Sevier County, making it one of our country's biggest tourist economies. The Great Smoky Mountain National Park attracted twelve million visitors from around the globe in 2019.⁵ The townships that border the national park are Sevierville, Pigeon Forge, and Gatlinburg; they offer hotels, restaurants, distilleries, breweries, family fun attractions (complete with every mini-golf theme that can be imagined), shopping, and dinner theater floor shows that run along both sides of an almost twenty-four-mile parkway. At every stop along the way, in the thirteen dinner shows available, and at the Dollywood theme park (that averages almost three million visitors annually⁶), what seems to be authentic mountain music is being played by live musicians or piped in through speakers. Local, authentic mountain experiences and music are what tourists seek, and it is what makes the local industries thrive.

After moving here in 2013, I, too, was in search of authentic mountain music and art forms to feel more connected to my grandparents and heritage. I spent weekends exploring local mountain heritage centers and attended every mountain craft and music demonstration possible. Immediately, I was curious about the phenomenon of the tourist parkway that ran through Sevierville, Pigeon Forge, and Gatlinburg, Tennessee. A discrepancy began to emerge between the parkway portrayal of the mountaineer sold to the greater American consciousness as a "hillbilly" and his crafts and the actual mountaineer and his crafts that were carefully depicted and documented at the heritage centers and museums.

⁵"Smokies all-time visitation record already shattered with one month left to go in 2019," accessed November 12, 2020, <https://www.wbir.com/article/entertainment/places/great-smoky-mountains-national-park/record-smokies-visitation-in-2019/51-c91a8ea4-2389-4eb5-a4b7-36f61cf32804>,

⁶ "10 Basic Facts About Dollywood Everyone Should Know," accessed November 12, 2020, visitmysmokies.com.

A musical culture which performs “mountain “hillbilly” identity exists along the parkways of many mountain tourist towns. Appalachia is extraordinarily rich in folk arts and music, but since the Civil War these traditional, family and church-based arts have become outlandishly commercialized and tourist-centric.⁷ The personal and communal intention of making art—music, painting, story-telling, dancing, and other various handicrafts—have all bent their will to providing an escape from the urban, urbane life of the tourist seeking a “genuine” hillbilly experience.⁸ The negative effects of this thriving tourist economy on local arts appears to be two-fold: artistic suppression and generational disconnect.

According to Jean Haskell Speer, folk culture has become a commodity along the parkways of Appalachia that is rooted in the mythology of Appalachia.⁹ This mythology born of generations of post-war “local color” writing¹⁰ constructed two images in the American consciousness: the mountaineer as a hillbilly buffoon and the mountaineer as a romantic, mythic hero.¹¹ While the image of hillbilly stuck to Parkway tourism, the image of the mountaineer as a romantic hero affected the folk arts, music, and crafts of the region. C. Brenden Martin’s work follows the cultural shift and arguable suppression in mountain identity that these mythologies produced: “As the bucolic conditions that initially attracted tourists increasingly gave way to commercial development, visitors proved to be quite content with contrived versions of local color that packaged easily recognizable stereotypes. To fulfill the visitor’s preconceived expectations of the regions, mountain residents often readily agreed to play to the

⁷ Jean Haskell Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” in *Parkways: Past, Present, and Future* (Boone, NC: Appalachian State University, 1987), 212-20.

⁸ C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Doubled-Edged Sword* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), xvi-xix.

⁹ Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” 212.

¹⁰ Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Doubled-Edged Sword*, xv.

¹¹ Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” 212-13.

role...reinforcing inaccurate cultural images...”¹² He goes on to say scholars agree that outsiders have shaped this constructed mythical image of “quaint mountaineers and depraved hillbillies” in regional identity.¹³

Mountain families have historically been poor by national standards and made a living and reputation for themselves by carving a life out of the land.¹⁴ The Johnson era “War on Poverty” newsreels solidified this image in the nation’s consciousness.¹⁵ With the dawn of modern tourism, the central focus of life in the mountains shifted from land, family, and church/faith-based communities to a people who carved a life out of performing their perceived “hillbilly” identity on a weekend and seasonal basis. They ceased to create art for themselves and their families and communities and instead created formulaic art for tourist consumption.

The constructed image of “mythic mountain hero” combined with an awareness of (politicized) poverty conditions gave way to the idea of the mountaineer being “our contemporary ancestors”¹⁶ now living an Old-World lifestyle frozen in time.¹⁷ The mountaineer became a living, contemporary primitive who could only be found by leaving urban centers, following state roads, to county roads, to gravel roads until finally arriving in a backcountry place, an idyllic location, untouched by the complexities of modernity where primitive ways still reign. And thus, was born the handicraft movement and the “end of line” narrative for the folk arts and mountain music, including shaped note singing. It was a newly minted “contrived version of authentic culture”¹⁸ still alive and well today, in 2021. Stephen W. Fisher refers to

¹² Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Doubled-Edged Sword*, xvi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴ Ashley York, “Hillbilly” (documentary), directed by Ashley York and Sally Rubin, November 23, 2018, 60:27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” 215.

¹⁶ Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” 214.

¹⁷ Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Doubled-Edged Sword*, 44.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

this image as the “American Gothic gone stale.”¹⁹ Speer concurs with the staleness of the image saying that visitors get a “hermetically sealed” version of the mountaineer.²⁰

This version of the mountaineer transformed mountain arts and music from being participatory act to performance art—something visitors come to see instead of something which should be entered in to and experienced. This “hermetically sealed” version of the mountaineer and his arts also acts as a type of amber which captures a particular moment in history, rather than picturing local mountain arts and music as something living, active, still growing locally, and produced by a very modern humanity. This sort of preservation in the amber of American consciousness contributes to new generations feeling disconnected at best and unaware of their heritage or ashamed of their legacy at worse.²¹ Many local college students in my classes, born and raised in Sevier County, were completely unaware of harp singing’s existence, and as I became acquainted with the harp singing community in Sevier County, concern for the absence of younger participants was almost a palpable panic.

My assumption became that the local music and arts community were having an identity crisis. Mountain arts and music seemed to have been co-opted to sell a fictitious identity to tourists. I carried this assumption that local music and arts had lost sight of their true heritage until last year, when Sharee Green (née Rich), a member of the Methodist choir for which I accompany, made an announcement at rehearsal: “My old harp group is having a singing Sunday, if anyone wants to come!”

In the early Fall of 2020, I had the opportunity to sit down with Green and discuss her involvement with harp singing. She is an active participant in harp singing in Sevier County, or

¹⁹ Stephen W. Fisher, “Identity as Symbolic Production: The Politics of Culture and Meaning in Appalachia” (PhD diss, Princeton University, 1977), 30.

²⁰ Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” 216.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

“old harp singing,” as she referred to it. She is a member of Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee and the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*, the local Sevierville organization of harp singers. The conversation turned to mountain identity and pride in the artform as she began to tell me stories of current singers in her organization. Most current members are third and fourth generation harp singers. She emotionally recounted how she became involved in harp singing as a little four-year-old girl at Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church in Sevier County after Larry Olszewski, a father figure to her and a paragon of old harp preservation to the community, took her under his wing and taught her the rudiments and joys of harp singing. Green also shared many other similar stories of current members who still sing alongside parents and grandparents at their gatherings.

I commented on how this older music form, while still active, had not been commercialized like other mountain art and music forms. At this Green excitedly told me that the current president of the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*, David Sarten, and vice president, Andrew Whaley, had been discussing how to highlight this generations-old tradition and bring some community and state attention to their tradition. She saw my thesis as an opportunity to elevate the tradition of old harp singing in our county and bring greater attention to it.

I did not take Green up on the invitation to attend a singing until October of 2020. I was to meet her at Middle Creek United Methodist Church. The evening of the singing, I arrived early and watched as the occupants of cars and trucks ease into parking spaces. All were casually dressed; the ladies in jeans and sweaters, the men in jeans and button-down shirts—with a few men in overalls and plaid shirts. They all carried an oblong shaped beige and green book—*The New Harp of Columbia*, I later discovered—as they made their way into the church that had been

established in the mid-1800s.²² Green and I joined them in the musty, wood-scented sanctuary, built in 1902. The history of the building and congregation can be found on an historic landmark sign placed at the base of the church's drive as shown in Figure 1.

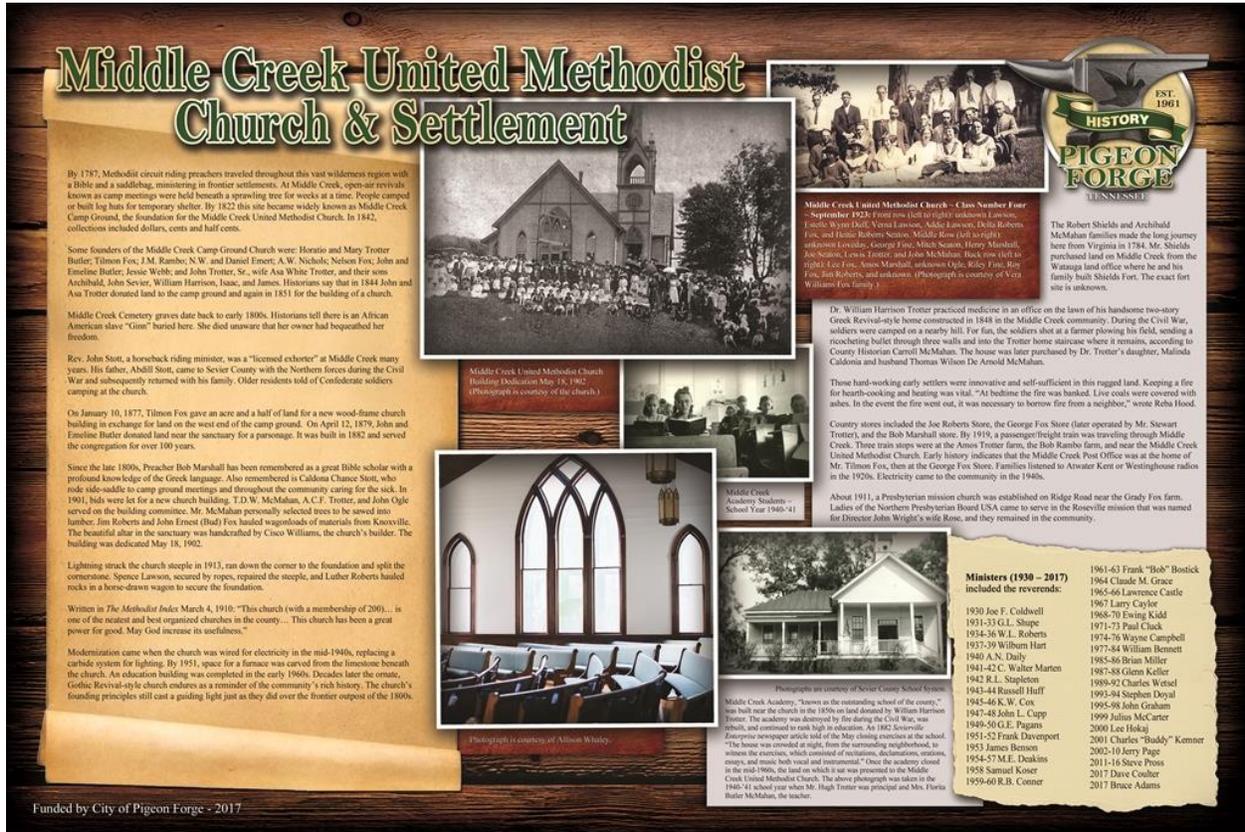


Figure 1-Middle Creek United Methodist Church Historic Landmark Sign
This historic landmark sign was placed by the city of Pigeon Forge as a brief history of this community and church.

Over the course of the next hour and half, Appalachia began to open her doors to me ever so slightly as I realized, here, five minutes away from all the parkway hubbub and hillbilly flash, a small community of mountain singers still gathered and sang old American tunes.

At that first meeting, the president of the group, David Sarten and the vice-president, Andrew Whaley, made an announcement Green's hopeful thoughts about my thesis which generated a lot of excited talk in the room. The group had just received a grant from the East

²² Historic landmark sign placed by the City of Pigeon Forge, 2017.

Tennessee Arts Commission for the hiring of two apprentices who were of the younger generation to help preserve harp singing in the mountain community. This announcement was met with group joy and much agreement that these apprenticeships were needed, and that preservation of harp singing was a priority.²³ The preservation of their art form was clearly a goal of the community that was further confirmed to me when I approached David Sarten at the conclusion of the singing.

After I introduced myself and expressed my enjoyment of the evening, I signed up to be a member of the group. I stated my interest in the group as a community member and as an ethnomusicology student. Sarten said that over the years many students had come through the group doing research for papers and documentaries. He commented to his shoes, “No one has ever let me read their work though. And none of them ever came back.” When I said that he could read my work when I was done, he smiled the biggest I had seen him smile that night.

I wanted to honor my word, and in so doing, represent Sarten, and the rest of the old harp singers, by producing a document that reflected their voice—as musicians and as modern-day mountaineers. These voices and songs were alive and active before I arrived on the scene searching for an authentic mountain expression, and they show no signs of being silenced—even in the midst of a pandemic which doomed singing and gatherings around the nation—because these songs have built a community. I only hoped to capture a portion of that living heritage as I give others a peek into the modern mountain identity through her voices and her songs. The modern mountain identity was not, I had discovered on this fall evening, on the tourist parkway hawking hillbilly wares but perhaps in the community these venerable songs had built.

²³ Several months later, Sarten and Whaley gained permission from the grant committee for me to be the apprentice to learn the rudiments and ways of harp singing from this community.

One of the key manifestations of this modern mountain musical identity is the concept that I began to call “songs of ownership.” Song ownership seems to contribute to a member’s identity as an old harp singer. “This is Sharee’s song,” or “This one is one of mine,” or “This was one of Larry’s songs,” or “Joe, this one is one of yours, do you want to lead it?” are all statements that dotted the landscape of the two singings I attended in the Fall of 2020.

When I finally found the courage to “call” a song at my first singing, the group floundered for a moment on who should lead it. The song had been “one of Larry’s,” but Larry had passed away some years since and the song had fallen out of use. It took quite a bit of group discussion to decide on a key, tempo, and leader. Green leaned over to me in the meantime and suggested a song that, in her opinion, should become one of mine should I want it, “because the lady that used to lead it can’t come anymore because she has been diagnosed with cancer. And she had a high voice like you.” After I recovered from my embarrassment for stumping the band, as it were, I agreed to learning the song Green had suggested.

Song ownership seems to be some of what contributes to the feeling of shared faith in their God and love of the poetry and a shared love of the tunes—lines that are kept distinct in the discussion of harp singing proper,²⁴ but lines that appear to be blurred in practice with this particular group. This kind of song ownership speaks of the personal relationship each person has with “their” songs that contributed to the feeling that I was treading on sacred community ground. It led me to wonder if the relationship members have to “their” songs is also directly related to other relationships they have in their lives.

The primary research question that this thesis tries to answer is: What makes someone an old harp singer? Additionally, sub-questions that branch off from this main question are: Why

²⁴ Kiri Miller, *Traveling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 115-23.

and how has harp singing survived time/generations? Will it continue to do so? Is it changing, and if so, how? How do songs of ownership play a part in this conversation? The answers to these and the primary question have shed some light on why harp singing has not been commercialized and turned into a tourist art form like other mountain arts and music.

This study is limited to the mountain counties of East Tennessee—Sevier, Blount, Knox, Cocke, and Greene. The study is also limited to *The New Harp of Columbia* tunebook, with occasional historic reference to several other tunebooks influential in the building of the tradition. For this project I also limited my interactions and participation to the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia* with occasional interactions and participation at larger area singings with the larger community of the Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee. In addition, I limited my interviews to traditional harp singers, even though the community includes many non-traditional harp singers.

Other limitations to this study proved to be the fact that I was a novice old harp singer and an outsider. Although I have music training in solfège and sight-singing, it was never a strong suit. Learning the shapes that represent the syllable and the aural distances between those pitches at the outset of my experience with this community, made me a true novice to their tradition. My initial lack of skill possibly limited their belief that I could aid in preserving their tradition. The fact that I am not blood-kin to any member, nor a county or neighboring county native might have proved a hindrance as well. Also, the fact that I was seen as a “trained” musician further contributed to making me an outsider and created the potential to severely limit this study.

The chief limitation this study encountered was the COVID-19 virus. In addition to the “practice singings,” “annual singings,” a more formal and produced events which draw hundreds

of people from many states, are also held. Due to the COVID-19 virus, the “practice singings” in Sevier County were limited at the start of this study, and all “annual singings” were cancelled. The community hoped this would change in the new year. Whaley, vice-president of the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*, expressed that the cancellations were extremely hurtful to the community, and he seemed fearful the virus was suppressing any momentum the art form had begun to build among the younger generation.

This topic of old harp singer identity assumes that no other true/authentic mountain music and art forms are left untouched by parkway commercialism other than harp singing. I also assume that there is a distinct modern mountain identity not yet merged with the greater American popular culture or the performed “hillbilly” identity created to foment tourism. I assume that the true mountain musical identity is still alive and vital. I also assume that I would not carry any biases with me as a trained, Western classical musician into this research about harp singing. I further assume that I would work hard to not portray mountaineers from a romantic perspective that would somehow place them in a skewed light, one that might contribute to constructing the current hillbilly/mountaineer identity²⁵ and perpetuate the “end of the line” narrative popular among historians, filmmakers, and other ethnomusicologists.

Despite these limitations and assumptions, the question this study asks—what makes someone an old harp singer?—has three-fold value. The first, and perhaps most insistent is that of sustainability and preservation. This question is an urgent one, especially as the world and the local community reopens in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Questions about the arts commission and if a singing school is on the horizon as a rallying event for the community are arising once more as the community reemerges from a long isolation. Lamentations abound at

²⁵ Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” 212-20.

each singing over who has not returned, followed by exhortations to invite more people to participate—especially younger people. Though acutely felt, the crisis of sustainability and preservation are not quickly being addressed beyond the “each one reach one” method. My hope is that this study will lay the foundations not only as to why this tradition needs to be preserved and sustained but also to offer suggestions as to possible means of sustainability and preservation.

The second reason this study is valuable is the contribution of more literature to build a foundation for the sustainability and preservation of old harp singing in East Tennessee. This is the second reason a study like this one is needed. Literature on harp singing and shaped note singing in general is easily accessible. However, literature on seven-note singing, specifically the seven-note singing being done in East Tennessee out of the *New Harp of Columbia*, is relegated to one book, Marion Hatchett’s *A Companion to the New Harp of Columbia*, along with a few sentences in other books that cover the tradition as a whole. If this tradition and community are to have longevity moving forward more literature on this specific community and shaped note singing style is vital to that endeavor.

The third reason this study is valuable is that the narrative of this specific mountain musical tradition is at stake. However insistent the issue of sustainability and preservation may be and however vital it is to gain more literature on this tunebook and the people that sing from it, in order to ensure any kind of success for either, research must dig underneath the surface to identify the ongoing story of the harping singing community in East Tennessee. Identity and nostalgia often go hand in hand in Appalachia. But the danger here is that nostalgia often becomes a “politicized emotion”²⁶ and commoditized. I submit that this factor, combined with

²⁶ Miller, *Traveling Home*, 206.

the “end of the line” narrative and constructed identity it has created in this region, is hindering the sustainability of the tradition of the Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia* and the Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee. This study hopes to disrupt this current narrative in two ways: by highlighting the way East Tennessee harp singers use the past as a vehicle to meaningfully understand the present and to elevate the songs that have built a community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Ask people what they know about shaped note singing and if they have any working knowledge and the words “Sacred Harp” will probably be swift to follow. Over the years the two seem to have become conflated and synonymous with each other in popular and music culture. In fact, my very first understanding of shaped note singing was that it was all considered “Sacred Harp” singing. It was not until I began to investigate the tradition in my area of the mountains of East Tennessee that I realized not all shaped note singing was created equal. The very first person with whom I inquired was quick to set the facts straight. The shaped note singers in this community were called old harp singers or just harp singers. The moniker “Sacred Harp singer” was strictly reserved for those who sang specifically from *The Sacred Harp*—a shaped-note tunebook compiled by B. F. White and E. J. King in 1844. “And besides,” the fact adjuster added, “they sing four-note, and we sing seven.” I had never been so confused or fascinated in all my musical and academic years.

Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha James King, compilers of *The Sacred Harp* (1844), were among the more than thirty-five Southern musicians who compiled and printed their own shaped-note tunebooks between 1816 and 1861.²⁷ As I soon discovered, in addition to some original compositions, they pulled from many other tune repositories popular at the time, like William “Singing Billy” Walker’s *Southern Harmony* (1835) and early American tunes popular in New England during the 1770s.²⁸ It became apparent from simple, initial scholarly inquiry that the terminology “Sacred Harp singing” in popular musical consciousness had erroneously absorbed the entire history of a multi-generational, a multi-regional, and a multi-tunebook

²⁷ David Warren Steel and Richard H. Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), xi.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

publishing and singing tradition. The term “Sacred Harp singing” clearly stood as false synecdoche of a much larger and varied practice.

I began to attend Fpractice singings in October of 2020, and I discovered that the tunebook of choice to the East Tennessee shaped note singing community was M. L. and W. H. Swan’s *New Harp of Columbia*,²⁹ published in 1867 in nearby Knoxville, Tennessee. The tagline to the title of the tunebook, *A System of Musical Notation, with a Note for Each Sound and a Shape for Each Note* gave a little more insight into its original use and format. Further inquiry revealed a little more about the four-note and seven-note singing to which my informant had referred. The *New Harp of Columbia* employed a shape for every solfège syllable from Do to Ti (or Si as I was to discover)—thus, seven notes.³⁰ Other shaped note singing tunebooks and traditions, like *The Sacred Harp*, employed a repeating tetrachord system (based on an overlapping hexachord view of the scale) of using Fa, Sol, La, Fa, Sol, La, Mi to ascend the seven-note scale.³¹ The differences between four-note and seven-note shapes are compared in Figure 2 and can be seen in the Jeremiah Ingalls tune NORTHFIELD³² in Figure 3.

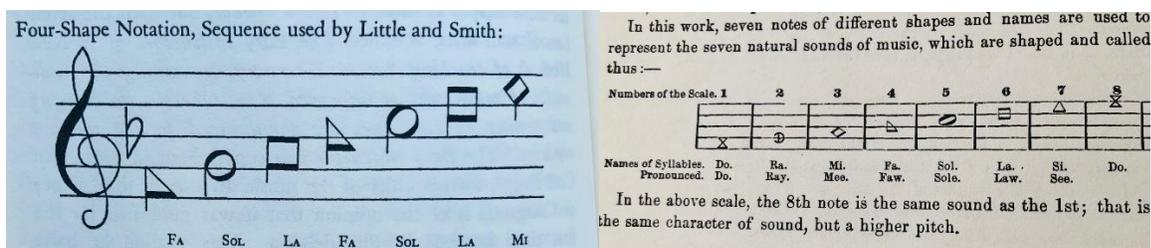


Figure 2-Little and Smith Four-Note System and Swan Seven-Note
 Little and Smith Four-Note Shapes³³ Swan Seven-Note Shapes³⁴

²⁹ Jackson surmises it was due to the title of the tunebook that area singers became known as “old harp singers” or “harp singers.” George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Songs, Singing and Buckwheat Notes* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1932), 324.

³⁰ Swan and Swan, *New Harp of Columbia*, 4.

³¹ Dorothy Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven: A Study of Folk and Early American Materials in Three Old Harp Books* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1970), 5.

³² Jeremiah Ingalls, NORTHFIELD, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 115.

³³ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 14.

³⁴ Swan and Swan, *New Harp of Columbia*, 4.

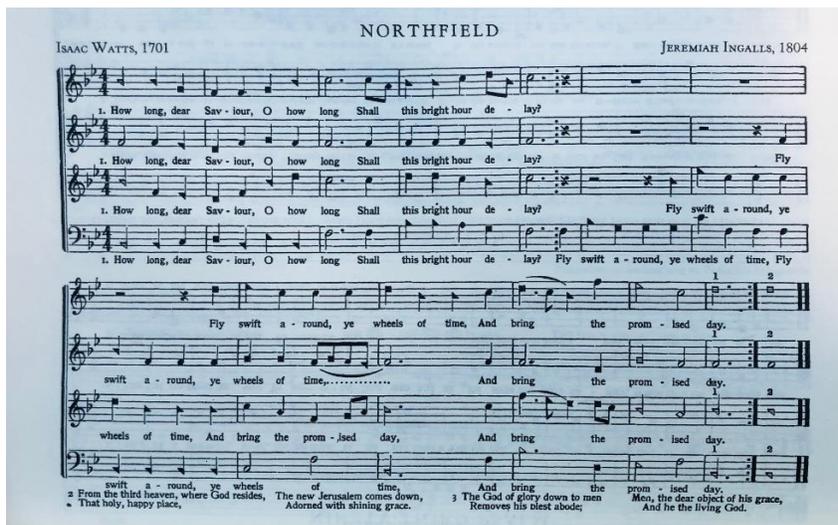
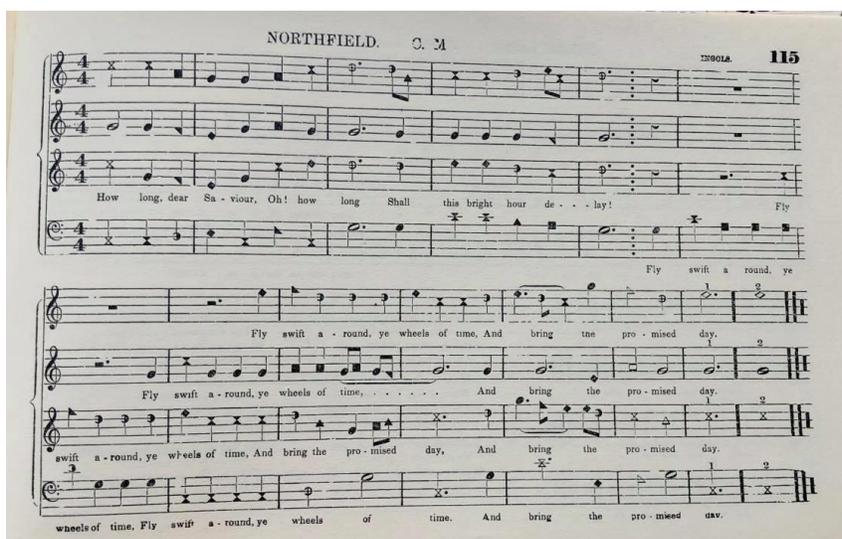


Figure 3-Comparison of Four-Note and Seven-Note Systems
 NORTHFIELD by Jeremiah Ingalls in four-note shapes as found in the *Sacred Harp*.³⁵



NORTHFIELD by Jeremiah Ingalls in seven-note shapes as found in the *New Harp of Columbia*.³⁶

My early searches of shaped note singing groups and societies in the Southeast showed that harp singing was still a much enjoyed and active tradition. However, a very interesting

³⁵ Buell E. Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 215.

³⁶ Ingalls, *New Harp of Columbia*, 115.

phenomenon began to emerge: Anyone could journey over the mountains east to North Carolina, southeast to Georgia, southwest to Alabama, and west to the Tennessee plateau and encounter contemporary gatherings of four-note singing traditions and tunebooks. The mountain counties of East Tennessee seemed to be the only active preservation of the *New Harp of Columbia* tunebook and the seven-note shaped note system devised by M. L. and W. H. Swan.³⁷

The seminal question for this study of what makes someone an old harp singer in the East Tennessee harp singing community may possibly be grounded in the answer to a different question: why and how did the Swan seven-note system and their tunebook, *New Harp of Columbia*, take root in this small, mountain pocket of the South, when just over the mountains in any direction a different tradition and tunebook reigned? Initial inquiry with participants pulled back a curtain that revealed an entire community and generations of singing families and faith that needed to be explored to understand and answer this question. While the road from my home to the singings at Middle Creek United Methodist Church was a mere mile, the path to uncovering how this specific tunebook and tradition had survived was as convoluted and oft-times as faded as the old wagon roadbeds that still run through these mountains.

This literature review reflects the history of shaped note singing and the tunebooks used in that tradition. Special attention is also given to tracing the advent of seven-note shaped singing in America, elements of early American folk tunes and hymns, the shaped note singing tradition, and the compilation and use of the *New Harp of Columbia*. Databases used were ProQuest, Google Scholar, JStor, and SAGE. Key terms used to gather data were harp singing, old harp

³⁷ I have since discovered that there are small communities in North Carolina and Virginia that sing seven note shapes, but they employ the *Christian Harmony* (1866) tunebook and the seven-note system devised by Jesse B. Aiken. The Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association has added an additional Camp DoReMi to complement its Camp FaSolLa. Camp DoReMi focuses on teaching the history and rudiments of the seven note systems in *Christian Harmony* and *New Harp of Columbia*.

singing, sacred harp singing, shaped note singing, seven-note shaped note singing, M. L. Swan, W. H. Swan, and *New Harp of Columbia*. All database inquiries and sources used for this literature review revealed a considerable lack of information on the *New Harp of Columbia* tunebook and tradition. The majority of the literature available on shaped note singing focuses on four-note singing and *The Sacred Harp* tradition. Seven-note singing and the *New Harp of Columbia* are in general relegated to a few lines in the history books as cousins to the greater harp singing tradition.

The question of the survival of the *New Harp of Columbia* and the mountain community of old harp singers in East Tennessee that it built over generations is important for various ethnomusicological and historical reasons. The investigation of this question exposes a need for preservation of an early American tunebook and the on-going living preservation of some of the first truly American compositions and early American folk tunes and hymns through their regular performance at current singings. The pursuit of this question also opens the door to understanding and participating in the East Tennessee modern mountaineer experience, community, and ultimately their identity. Also, of key importance is the preservation of a dying musical dialect. However, all the above listed functions are in my opinion supporting pillars in one of the purposes of this study: the inclusion of more information on the *New Harp of Columbia*, its tradition, and the old harp singers who carry on that tradition in the existing literature on shaped note singing in America.

David Warren Steel in his leading work *The Makers of the Sacred Harp* first defines harp singing not from a musical standpoint but from a communal one. He is quick to point out that harp singing is community-based music making,³⁸ a musical *and* social event.³⁹ Other scholars

³⁸ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 3

³⁹ *Ibid.*, xi.

support this definition of harp singing. Even before Dorothy Horn pursues an in depth examination of the music theory and harmonic practices of harp singing, including an analysis of the *New Harp of Columbia*, she is quick to spend time focusing on the communal elements of the performance tradition surrounding harp singing.⁴⁰ Kiri Miller informs her exploration of space in the singing square with an eye toward community elements—local, regional, and continental.⁴¹ Even George Pullen Jackson, a famous, if not controversial musicologist, insists on putting harp tunes in the folksong category instead of categorizing them as “mountain songs.”⁴² His insistence at this seemingly small distinction with huge implications came from a recognition that these were songs that sprang from the folk—the community.

The scholars I encountered all agree. This style of singing was more than shaped notes and musical rudiments—this is a community, a family, each appearing to exist for the other, begetting new generations and alternate family branches as it grows through time. This is the true one for the many, not my initial synecdoche, catch-all idea of “Sacred Harp singing.” The community exists for the music while the music stands as a name for the community. However, it did not start that way. Harp singing music and its branching family tree started because in the beginning there was no unity in the community.

The History of Shaped Note Singing

To understand the origins of shaped note singing, the state of post-Reformation sacred music must be understood. Trained choirs and organ music arranged in polyphonic settings filled England’s cathedrals and universities. However, parish churches were tragically neglected

⁴⁰ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 1-4.

⁴¹ Miller, *Travelling Home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism*, 45-48.

⁴² Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, 1-3.

musically,⁴³ and rural congregations were left to muddle through their worship. Men like John Calvin and those trained by him stepped into that muddy musical middle and promoted the unaccompanied, unison singing of metrical Psalms—tunes composed for four, six, or eight lines of poetry that could be repeated.⁴⁴

This style of worship in the rural churches of England, Scotland, and eventually North America reigned even when the Puritan Party remodeled the Church of England and abolished choirs and church organs.⁴⁵ Yet it eventually disintegrated into a distinctive, redundant form called “lining out” where the clerk or leader spoke or chanted a phrase in call and response form with the congregation. This “old way of singing,” as it came to be known and is still practiced today in Scotland and parts of the United States, is described by Steel:

...the singing was led by parish clerks or other leaders chosen ‘more for their poverty than skill and ability’; the repertory was increasingly limited to a small number of tunes that the congregation knew by heart; interrupted by the leader’s promptings, the melody lost its rhythmic momentum and tended to slow down; the tune came to be freely embellished by members of the congregations and developed into an oral tradition bearing little resemblance to the printed tunes.⁴⁶

The Reverend Thomas Walker of Bradford, Massachusetts, commented that the state of singing in his congregation was “miserably tortured”⁴⁷ and Benjamin Franklin’s brother James Franklin is said to have observed: “the Congregation falls from a cheerful pitch to downright grumbling...a confused Noise, made up of Reading, Squeaking, and Grumbling than a decent and orderly part of God’s Worship.”⁴⁸ It was exactly this disintegration of melody, rhythm, and participation that the tunebooks and singing schools that followed were intended to counteract.

⁴³ Steel, *Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 39.

⁴⁴ Steel, *Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 40.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Marion J. Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 2-3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Shaped note singing and tunebooks began with John Playford, a prominent music publisher in the mid-1600s, selling to customers such as renowned composer Henry Purcell. Playford became the clerk at London's Temple Church in 1653 where this sort of dismal congregational singing was being practiced. By 1654, Playford had published his *Brief Introduction to the Skill of Musick*⁴⁹ that included rudiments of music and principles of composition along with a selection of vocal compositions. Most importantly for our discussion, the 1672 edition of Playford's *Brief Introduction to the Skill of Musick* included the letters F, S, L, and M under the corresponding notes of the melody that represented fa, sol, la, and mi to remind singers of the scale degrees and intervals.⁵⁰ Playford followed up this volume in 1677 with *Whole Book of Psalms* which included psalm tunes set for three voices: *cantus, bassus, and medius*—all three voices could be doubled in the male or female voices.⁵¹ These works led to the founding, growth, and great availability of singing schools and societies that in turn led to a high demand of new compositions in this style. Playford and his son continued to publish new tunebooks of composition in this style to meet the high demand.⁵²

Playford's pioneering practices in these volumes survive today as foundational elements of harp singing in England and America. Singing psalm tunes in parts, using musical notation and corresponding fasola identifiers, doubling at the octave for men and women, practice singings as gatherings to learn the music for the purpose of introducing songs to a larger body of people⁵³—all remain key elements of harp singing today.

⁴⁹ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 40-41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 41

Playford's method did cross the Atlantic to the colonies but fell largely into disuse until the mid-eighteenth century. In the meantime, the only surviving vestige of Playford's work in the colonies appeared in the ninth edition of the *Bay Psalm Book*.⁵⁴ This ninth edition included an explanation of fasola usage taken from Playford's work and thirteen tunes written in two-part harmony with F, S, L, and M below the notes in each voice.⁵⁵ These thirteen tunes were: CAMBRIDGE SHORT (or LONDON), HACKNEY (or ST MARY'S), LOW DUTCH (or CANTERBURY), LITCHFIELD, MARTYRS, OXFORD, PSALM 100 (or OLD HUNDRED), PSALM 113, PSALM 119, PSALM 148, ST. DAVID'S, WINDSOR (or DUBLIN), and YORK (or THE STILT).⁵⁶

Not until the 1720s did the singing movement begin in earnest in America—specifically in Boston.⁵⁷ Singing masters began to hold singing schools which were attended by young people who learned about the rudiments of music and how to sight read. They returned to their own congregations and choirs armed with new melodic and harmonic knowledge.⁵⁸ And again, as in Playford's England, demand called for new compositions and a wave of tunebook publications crashed upon the colonies. John Tuft's 1721 *Introduction to the Art of Singing Psalm Tunes* drew heavily from Playford, but in an historic and innovative move Tuft replaced the noteheads with the letters F, S, L, M—thus simplifying reading the intervals and revolutionizing the practice.⁵⁹

Among the wave of tunebooks that invaded the market at this time were the first truly original American compositions. William Billings published his *New England Psalm Singer* in 1770 that introduced one-hundred-twenty-six new, original compositions—mostly fugues and

⁵⁴ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 42.

⁵⁵ Steel, *Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 42.

⁵⁶ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 1.

⁵⁷ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 42.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

anthems—effectively ushering in the beginning of the “first New England school” of composers.⁶⁰ Billings claimed that compositional rules did not apply to him and admitted to starting with the tenor line— “a flight of fancy”—when composing.⁶¹ He further outlined his compositional process:

...the other parts are forced to comply and conform to that, by partaking of the same air, or, at least, as much of it as they can get: But by reason of this restraint, the last parts are seldom so good as the first; for the second part (bass) is subservient to the first, the third part (treble) must conform to the first and second, and the fourth part (counter) must conform to the other three; therefore the grand difficulty in composition, is to preserve the air through each part separately, and yet cause them to harmonize with each other at the same time.⁶²

Whether it was Billings’ flights of tenor line “fancy” or his freedom in throwing rules to the wind, fuguing tunes became a new American musical frontier to explore and conquer. This genre led to new “rhythmic flexibility and varied textures...closer attention to the text...and a [rediscovered] intimate connection between the music and the words”⁶³ which led to beautiful word painting in tunes. Under the charging leadership of Billings, music in America became art again, but in a distinctively American way. Between 1770 and 1810 a staggering “nearly three hundred American composers had appeared in print.”⁶⁴

It is helpful to address the fuguing tune at this point. Due to Billings and others of his large compositional school, the fugue became the favored genre to push these new compositional skills forward. The fugue is characterized by beginning in four-part harmony that comes to a cadence after two (sometimes four) phrases. At this point, each voice enters alone in a manner resembling a round and concludes with all the voices coming together powerfully in a strong

⁶⁰ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 42

⁶¹ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 43.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

cadence.⁶⁵ Billings' DAVID'S LAMENTATION⁶⁶, is still a favored fuguing tune in the *New Harp of Columbia* community (Figure 4).

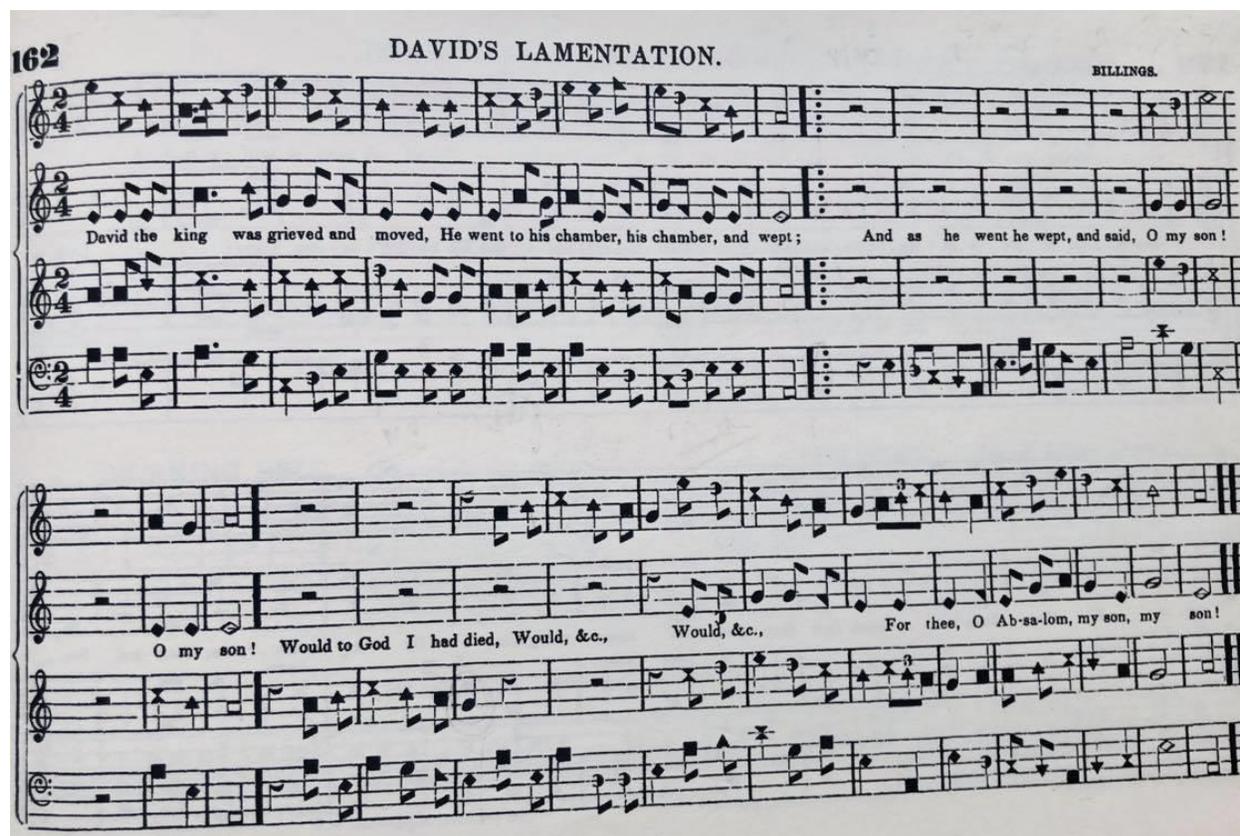


Figure 4-DAVID'S LAMENTATION by William Billings

DAVID'S LAMENTATION by William Billings as found in the *New Harp of Columbia*.⁶⁷

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Billings and his school were coming under sharp criticism from those who still favored a European sound. To the critic's ears, the lack of dissonances, sevenths, suspensions, and appoggiaturas made the American style of composing seem "sweet, languid, and lifeless" according to composers and publishers such as Samuel Holyoke and Andrew Law—a key figure in the shaped note history.⁶⁸ As this new style of European influenced composition took root in New England, singing schools fell out of fashion

⁶⁵ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 4; Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 4.

⁶⁶ William Billings, DAVID'S LAMENTATION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A162.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 44-45.

in the northeastern urban centers. However, singing schools and their manuals were not abandoned completely, as they had begun to push deeper into the American frontier.

As these compositions encased in their respective tunebooks journeyed deeper into the frontier, the fresh compilations and compositions—and the new tunebooks that they begat—began to show new hallmarks of the true American singing and compositional experience (not the Euro-modeled urban composition of the time). One of the tunebooks that migrated West was William Little and William Smith’s 1801 follow up to Tuft and Playford’s works. Little and Smith’s *The Easy Instructor* was the first to use a type of shaped note predecessor, or “patent notes,” for note heads⁶⁹ and employed a four-shape system.

Sacred songs during this time period began to be pulled from old, oral traditional ballads and dance or drinking tunes and often even though they were original tunes reflected these old ballads and tunes in some form.⁷⁰ This time period became known as the golden age of the folk hymn or as George Pullen Jackson categorized them “white spirituals.”⁷¹ To provide perspective on the popularity of shaped note singing during this era, William “Singin’ Billy” Walker’s *Southern Harmony* sold six hundred thousand copies between 1835 and 1866.⁷²

These folk hymns possessed four distinct characteristics as defined by Steel, Horn, Hatchett, and Jackson: AABA form, gapped melodies (modes), melody ending on a note other than tonic, and tune migration⁷³—identical sections or recomposed sections of the original appearing in multiple tunes.⁷⁴ Jackson goes so far as to organize these gapped melodies into tune

⁶⁹ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷¹ George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Songs, Singing and Buckwheat Notes* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1932), 4-6.

⁷² Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 5.

⁷³ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 46; Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 11.

⁷⁴ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 18 and 49-50.

families.⁷⁵ Dorothy Horn spends considerable time diving into a melodic and harmonic analysis of these folk hymns in her *Sing to Me of Heaven*.

Horn expands on the examination of these gapped melodies by narrowing them down to pentatonic or hexatonic scales. In the pentatonic scale, Do, Re, Mi, Sol, and La are used to form the melody. Horn notes that *if* Fa and Ti are used they are only in a passing tone capacity.⁷⁶ Horn admits that the hexatonic scale makes it harder to determine if Fa and Ti are being used at all.⁷⁷ Part of this difficult determination is due to the fact that shaped note books rarely use accidentals, so all raised and lowered notes, such as the sixth, are a matter of ear and by heart singing to the community. Horn describes this phenomenon present in the of harp singing of East Tennessee,

...it is quite true as Dr. [George Pullen] Jackson noted, that Dorian tunes are sung as Dorian whether the raised sixth is printed or not. Unfortunately, certain groups also raise the sixth in tunes that are unmistakably Aeolian. The author has heard East Tennessee groups turn NEW TOPIA from Aeolian into Dorian many, many times.⁷⁸

Meter, rhythm, and form are other considerations in folk hymn analysis that Horn explores. Typically, tunes will begin on the upbeat of a quadruple or duple meter which she attributes to the English and Scottish psalmody influence.⁷⁹ Regardless, a strong secondary beat is always present in spite of the sub-division.⁸⁰ However, in an important note, Jackson points out that “Metrical precision and mechanical adherence to any formula is the least of the folk’s concerns.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ Jackson’s tune families include: the “Lord Lovel” family in Ionian mode; “I Will Arise” family in Aeolian and Ionian mode; “Hallelujah” family in Mixolydian mode; “Kedron” family in Aeolian mode; “Babe of Bethlehem” family in Dorian mode; and “Roll Jordan” family in Ionian. Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*. 14.

⁷⁶ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 19

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁸¹ Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, 15.

As to the phrase form, Horn likens the shape of these folk hymns to Gregorian chant—a series of alternating arches (small, large, small) no matter the phrase structure.⁸²

| Four Phrase: | Six Phrase: |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Phrase 1: Small | Phrase 1: Small |
| Phrase 2: Large | Phrase 2: Small |
| Phrase 3: Large | Phrase 3: Large |
| Phrase 4: Small | Phrase 4: Large |
| | Phrase 5: Small |
| | Phrase 6: Small |

Steel and Horn agree on the basic AABA form, but Horn catalogs all the variables: AABB, ABAB, ABBA, AAAB, ABAA. Ways that composers also varied these phrases included the use of ornamentation, repetition, and the addition of sub notes as lines had more or fewer syllables.⁸³

Horn also characterizes the form of folk hymns by noting the trend that final melodic cadences are almost always approached stepwise from above unless the tune is using the Ionian or Aeolian modes, in which case the final melodic cadence will be approached from below.⁸⁴ However, after extensive tallying she observes that the “final approach from above far outnumber those in which final approach was from below.”⁸⁵

What led to these practices? Horn surmises that perhaps these folk hymn composers had studied Tans’ur’s early *Compleat Harmony* (1736), but no real evidence is found to support her educated guess.⁸⁶ Perhaps it was an influence of early tunebooks that migrated along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains. The fact that consecutive fifths and octaves along with V-I cadences abound in the early tunebooks like Billings’ *The Singing Master’s Assistant* (1780),

⁸² Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 26.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

The Psalmodist's Companion (1793), *Union Harmony* (1793), *The Beauties of Harmony* (1814), and *The Music Instructor* (1818) are the true probable cause⁸⁷ of the harmonic practices during the golden age of folk hymns.

Other compositional hallmarks of the period include dyadic harmonies from the pentatonic two note chord resulting in triad spellings that occasionally produced sevenths as dissonances on the weak part of the beat with chromaticism being very rare.⁸⁸ Also no “clear understanding of the principles of chord progression except perhaps in the case of sub-dominant, dominant, and tonic”⁸⁹ is present. For interest, the harmonic minor frequently modulates briefly to the dominant.⁹⁰ Chords appear in either root or first inversion with the third persistently being left out of the final tonic.⁹¹ And finally, this period was marked by an excessive use and “love of floridity,” with composers making sure each part was singable and interesting.⁹² Because of these hallmarks, old harp singing is often described as having an Asian quality or sounding medieval and Gregorian chant-like.⁹³ This has led to the overall impression that even in the twenty-first century this is “primitive” music. Horn summarizes:

...the harmony is purely intervallic and the writing definitely contrapuntal. As far as melodic writing is concerned, the procedures follow Early America's: each part makes a good melody, conjunct motion is more common than disjunct, and melodic skips tend to be small...If the perfect fourth and fifth are indeed the natural intervals of harmonization in pentatonic melodies, then these hymns are exactly what one might expect from untrained but essentially musical people.⁹⁴

Horn develops the idea of tune migration only hinted at in Steel by introducing the ideas of contrafactum and centonization. Horn defines contrafactum as the same tune being used

⁸⁷ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 82.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 86 and 91.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 85-86.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 96 and 116.

multiple times but with different words.⁹⁵ And she points a finger at Primitive Methodists and Baptists for the trend of collecting airs and tunes from public houses and writing new verses to them.⁹⁶ A finger point that was confirmed by Jackson's work who quotes from a Primitive Methodist tune compiler: "Why should the devil have all the pretty tunes?"⁹⁷ Jackson directs the contrafactum blame squarely to John Wesley whose precedent setting actions of setting secular tunes with sacred texts "brought into existence hundreds of folk hymns."⁹⁸ John Powell notes in the introduction to Jackson's *Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America*:

Singing religious songs to folk tunes did not cheapen the sentiment...on the contrary, it rather emphasized the respect and love of the folk for their traditional music as their most loved and treasured possession...they brought this noble musical heritage and laid it on the altar of their worship.⁹⁹

Horn defines centonization as the process by which a tune is "patched together either wholly or in parts from a pre-existent melodic fragment."¹⁰⁰ These "wandering phrases"¹⁰¹ are studied exhaustively in Jackson's works, and he and Horn both contribute a large part of this to the usage of gapped scale melodies belonging to the same modes—Dorian, Mixolydian A (use all four notes), Mixolydian B (omit the first note), Ionian, and Aeolian.¹⁰² They also agree that this borrowing and wandering is a result not only of stock cadence formulas but also composer favorites of the day.¹⁰³

Important to the study of folk hymns is the acknowledgement that not all tunes composed and compiled during this time were patched and or taken from other sources. Some free

⁹⁵ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁷ Jackson, *Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America*, ix.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹⁰⁰ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 36.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 77.

composed folk hymns can also be attributed to singing school masters such as Lucius Chapin, his brother Aaron Chapin, and Robert Boyd.¹⁰⁴ Examples of free composed folk hymns that included no centonization are NINETY-THIRD¹⁰⁵, GOLDEN HILL¹⁰⁶, ALBION¹⁰⁷, and SALVATION.¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁹

The Second American Great Awakening produced two cultural phenomena that contributed to the explosion of folk hymn popularity—camp meetings and shaped note singing.¹¹⁰ Camp meetings began in Kentucky in 1800.¹¹¹ They were characterized by thousands of people coming to sites with their tents to hear preachers, sing together, and fellowship with families and people whom they had not seen in years. Camp meetings became holiday gatherings and also served as courting times for young people. And perhaps most interesting, they were free from any denominational authority.¹¹² Their popularity soon spread West, South, and Northeast.

Because “many of those who came together at the camp meetings were illiterate or did not have books,”¹¹³ these camp meetings produced a new genre of spiritual song that was characterized by repeatable, spontaneously generated, refrains and choruses everyone could learn easily and sing by heart. This made it possible for all to participate in the music.¹¹⁴ This genre

¹⁰⁴ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven* 41-48.

¹⁰⁵ Chapin, NINETY-THIRD, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 25.

¹⁰⁶ Unknown, GOLDEN HILL, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 81.

¹⁰⁷ Attr. to Robert Boyd, ALBION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 12.

¹⁰⁸ Attr. to Robert Boyd, SALVATION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 24.

¹⁰⁹ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 41-48.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹¹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 11.

¹¹² Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, 7.

¹¹³ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 11.

¹¹⁴ Hatchett, *A Companion to the New Harp of Columbia*, 11.

carried on the Wesleyan tradition of providing “tunes everybody could sing with words that spoke from the heart of the devout in the language of the common man.”¹¹⁵ The refrains were simply repeated phrases or sections of song, and the choruses were repeatable additions that were added to already known and standard hymns.¹¹⁶

These refrains and choruses, true to the folk style, tended to migrate and wander their way into a variety of pre-existing tunes. Often, they appeared as extensions of phrases or as interruptions to phrases in some form of “O Glory!” or “Glory hallelujah!”¹¹⁷ The tune they attached themselves to became known to musicologists as “the mother hymn” and one “mother hymn” may have many different “floating verses” or “traveling refrains” attached to it.¹¹⁸ Examples of such “mother hymns” include: THE PROMISED LAND¹¹⁹, WARRENTON¹²⁰, MORNING TRUMPET¹²¹, JOYFUL¹²², and NEVER PART AGAIN¹²³ (this one actually is a chorus with several known “mother hymns.”)^{124 125} THE PROMISED LAND¹²⁶ is an excellent example of a “mother hymn” as the chorus is found attached to multiple other tunes in the *New Harp of Columbia* and is shown in Figure 5.

¹¹⁵ Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, 6.

¹¹⁶ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 11.

¹¹⁷ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Miss M. Durham, THE PROMISED LAND, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 47.

¹²⁰ Unknown, WARRENTON, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 56.

¹²¹ B.F. White, MORNING TRUMPET, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 99.

¹²² B.F. White and E. J. King, JOYFUL, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 141.

¹²³ Unknown, NEVER PART AGAIN, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 74.

¹²⁴ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 12.

¹²⁵ This one is also my personal nemesis in shaped note singing. I always get utterly and embarrassingly lost.

¹²⁶ Durham, *New Harp of Columbia*, 47.

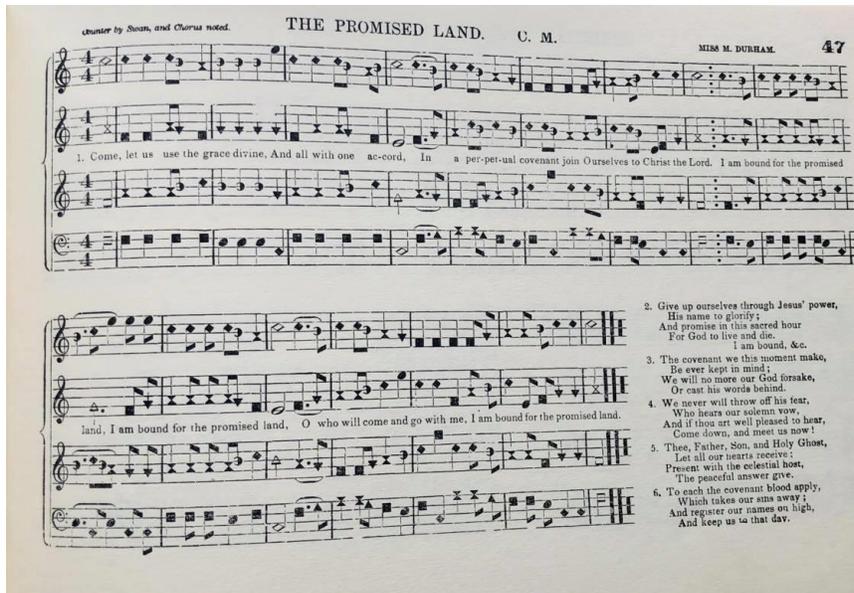


Figure 5- THE PROMISED LAND, an Example of a “Mother Hymn”
 THE PROMISED LAND as found in the *New Harp of Columbia*.¹²⁷

Songsters, small pocket-sized song books, popularized by Jeremiah Ingalls became a feature of these camp meetings which enabled those who could read a chance to take these camp meeting songs back home. As new refrains and choruses were born, they were notated by meeting goers, often in shaped note style, and carried back home to teach those unable to attend the meeting.¹²⁸

“Singing masters were quick to recognize the value of the rousing revival song and saw to it their own institution benefitted from their vogue.”¹²⁹ And by the 1820s shaped notes “dominated sacred tunebook publications in the West and South regardless of whether the singing master/compiler favored folk hymns, New England standards, or tunes by Europeans and reformers.”¹³⁰ Little and Smith’s shaped note *Easy Instructor* had journeyed into the South and West with the settlers, but now a whole new pantheon of shaped note tunebooks burst the seams

¹²⁷ Durham, *New Harp of Columbia*, 47.

¹²⁸ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 11.

¹²⁹ Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, 10.

¹³⁰ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 46.

of publishing houses. Amos Pilsbury (1799's *United States Sacred Harmony*) and Jeremiah Ingalls were among the first to include folk hymns that were "passed orally among the common folk"¹³¹ in their tunebook compilations. In 1812 Andrew Law was the first of this particular era to publish in shape notes specifically for a southern singing school. Law's publication was for a singing master from Virginia, John Logan. This publication was an eight-page leaflet in which Amzi Chapin's BETHEL became one of the "first southern [composed] shaped note publication."¹³²

The first shaped note tunebook to use the Little and Smith four-note system, and print tunes that would be found in the *Harp of Columbia*, was compiled by Robert Patterson in 1813, Patterson's Church Music, and included NINETY-FIFTH¹³³, NINETY-THIRD¹³⁴, and GOLDEN HILL¹³⁵ in shaped notes for the first time.¹³⁶ John Wyeth's *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music: Part Second* followed that same year and included CONSOLATION,¹³⁷ KEDRON,¹³⁸ TENNESSEE,¹³⁹ NEW SALEM,¹⁴⁰ MORALITY,¹⁴¹ and REFLECTION¹⁴² printed for the first time in shaped note format.¹⁴³ Next in publication line was Ananias Davisson's 1816 *Kentucky Harmony*. Prior to the

¹³¹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 10.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³³ Attr. to Chapin, NINETY-FIFTH, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 35.

¹³⁴ Chapin, *New Harp of Columbia*, 25.

¹³⁵ Unknown, *New Harp of Columbia*, 81.

¹³⁶ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 17.

¹³⁷ Lucius Chapin, CONSOLATION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A21.

¹³⁸ Reverend Elkanah Kelsay Dare, KEDRON, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 45.

¹³⁹ Unknown, TENNESSEE, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A114.

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, NEW SALEM, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A34.

¹⁴¹ B.F. White and Ananias Davisson, MORALITY, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 89.

¹⁴² Ananias Davisson, REFLECTION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 13.

¹⁴³ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 17.

Kentucky Harmony, all southern shaped note compositions and tunebooks had been published in the North. This was the first shaped note tunebook to be published south of the Mason-Dixon line.¹⁴⁴ Its first and second editions, plus an additional published supplement, included for the first time in shaped note print: IDUMEA,¹⁴⁵ ALBION,¹⁴⁶ SALVATION,¹⁴⁷ NEW TOPIA,¹⁴⁸ CRUCIFIXION,¹⁴⁹ DAVISSON'S RETIREMENT,¹⁵⁰ EMERALD GATES,¹⁵¹ DETROIT,¹⁵² EXULTATION,¹⁵³ KINGWOOD,¹⁵⁴ PLEASANT HILL,¹⁵⁵ SALEM,¹⁵⁶ SOLITUDE IN THE GROVE,¹⁵⁷ MESSIAH,¹⁵⁸ CONFIDENCE,¹⁵⁹ and DAVID'S VICTORY.¹⁶⁰¹⁶¹ Over forty more shaped note tunebooks would continue to be published through the remainder of the nineteenth century. The remaining Tennessee lineage of the *New Harp of Columbia's* predecessors is covered later in this review.

¹⁴⁴ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 17.

¹⁴⁵ Ananias Davission, IDUMEA, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 44.

¹⁴⁶ Attr. to Boyd, *New Harp of Columbia*, 12.

¹⁴⁷ Attr. to Boyd, *New Harp of Columbia*, 24.

¹⁴⁸ Munday, NEW TOPIA, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 163.

¹⁴⁹ Ananias Davission, CRUCIFIXION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A73.

¹⁵⁰ Ananias Davission, DAVISSON'S RETIREMENT, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A74.

¹⁵¹ Ananias Davission, EMERALD GATES, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A58.

¹⁵² Bradshaw, DETROIT, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A22.

¹⁵³ Humphreys, EXULTATION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A82.

¹⁵⁴ Humphreys, KINGWOOD, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 83.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholson, PLEASANT HILL, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 43.

¹⁵⁶ Bovellet, SALEM, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A23.

¹⁵⁷ Attr. to Ananias Davission, SOLITUDE IN THE GROVE, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A154.

¹⁵⁸ Carrell, MESSIAH, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A72.

¹⁵⁹ Jackson, CONFIDENCE, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A87.

¹⁶⁰ Attr. to Robert Boyd, DAVID'S VICTORY, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A96.

¹⁶¹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 18.

These publications focused on three-part writing and trended toward no extra notations save the shapes—meaning, no sharps, flats, or naturals were notated. Ananias Davisson, a famous singing school master and prolific tunebook compiler and composer, offered this reason behind the simplified notation: “Swell the rudiments and perplex the learner.”¹⁶² And so, extra notations fell out of fashion in shaped note publications as many singing masters and tunebook compilers followed Davisson’s lead to simplify the rudiments so as to not overwhelm the learner. The music in these tunebooks became marked by being diatonic and modal without raised leading tones and accidentals.¹⁶³

With this exclusion of “perplexing” rudiments, other compositional elements began to relax during this time as well. Chief among these relaxations that would drive compositional purists to distraction was the disregard for parallel fifths and octaves. Also, in a major shift in the genre, the tenor which had historically carried the tune became less pronounced as tunefulness began to emerge from other voice lines.¹⁶⁴ This resulted in a new interest in the alto part by the late 1870s.¹⁶⁵

Ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger weighs in on this shift in the genre, in a castigating, yet eventually, admiring way:

...the style of the three-voice shape-note settings of which I speak are outrageously heterodox, violating such basic and centuries-old prohibitions as those against:

1. Parallel fifths, octaves, and unisons
2. Parallel fourths between outer voices or between upper voices without a third in the bass
3. Unprepared and unresolved dissonances
4. Cadences on 8/4
5. Crossing of voices

Were these violations only occasional, one might easily pass them by. But they are so frequent that they clearly constitute essential elements in the style...Here is true style!

¹⁶² Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 47.

¹⁶³ Steel, *Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 47.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

There is a rigorous, spare, disciplined beauty in the choral writing that is all the more to be prized for having been conceived in the ‘backwoods’ for which many professional musicians have such scorn, and in the face of the determined opposition of sophisticated zealots in no small number, from Lowell Mason down to those of this very day.”¹⁶⁶

Horn, looking at these same elements of style, analyzed them and suggested that these folk hymns use a quartal harmony system based on a dyad instead of the triad system to which Western harmony is accustomed.¹⁶⁷

One important historical element is that during the time of the Civil War (1861-1865) shaped note singers and composers fought for both sides. These tunebooks and tunes gave much comfort around campfires and unified soldiers from various regions as a new family if only for a moment in time. Newly composed songs were also notated in shaped notes and sent to brothers and uncles as comforts from home.¹⁶⁸

The late 1800s became a battle ground of pointed arguments over the relaxed compositional practices. Such sentiments play out in prefaces of tunebooks through thinly veiled snark and snide comments. As Seeger points out, Lowell Mason, self-appointed “apostle of better music”¹⁶⁹ and his Boston friends Thomas Hastings and William B. Bradbury formed the Boston school of “better music.”¹⁷⁰ This new school of composition looked scornfully upon most of the music in the Southern and Western published tunebooks of this era. They “attempted to squeeze out the early American tunes” and replace them with tunes from Europe or tunes “written and harmonized according to the current European fashion, which they considered more

¹⁶⁶ Charles Seeger, “Contrapuntal Style in the Three-Voice Shape-Note Hymns,” *Musical Quarterly* 26 (October 1940): 484-86.

¹⁶⁷ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 90-91.

¹⁶⁸ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 16-19.

¹⁶⁹ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 48.

¹⁷⁰ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 26.

worthy for use as church music.”¹⁷¹ What ensued was a vehement exchange between schools and regions that “spoke to the charm and strength”¹⁷² of both schools of compositional thought.

As Mason and his cohorts composed “properly” and published their tunes, their works were “Southernized” and compiled into southern tunebooks to sit alongside jaunty fugues, camp songs, and old reform tunes like OLD HUNDRED¹⁷³ and MEAR¹⁷⁴. Meanwhile, the Southern tunes being disseminated were reworked, both harmonically¹⁷⁵ and visually to remove the shapes, and generally made to be “proper” by Mason and his colleagues so the Southern tunes could sit alongside European inspired tunes in their hymnals.

Mason’s chief complaint of the Southern style was that it was “common folk music. . . exotic and archaic.”¹⁷⁶ The school termed these shaped notes “dunce notes” or “buckwheat notes.”¹⁷⁷ Mason and his colleagues sought to provide singers with a more “devout and chaste” sound.¹⁷⁸ Thomas Hastings wrote very heatedly about the matter in his July 1835 *Musical*

Magazine:

Little and Smith, we regret to say, are names which must stand in musical history closely connected with wholesale quantities of ‘dunce notes.’ Probably no other book in the country had ever such an amount of purchasers as theirs; or did so much in the day of it to hinder the progress of taste. . . Even at the present time there are some excellent men who are filling the Valley of the Mississippi with patent notes which are destined, we fear, to hold back the progress of musical improvement in that region for half a century to come.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷¹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 26.

¹⁷² Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 50.

¹⁷³ Martin Luther, OLD HUNDRED, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 11 and A11.

¹⁷⁴ Simon Browne, MEAR, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 14.

¹⁷⁵ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 26-27.

¹⁷⁶ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 39.

¹⁷⁷ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 26. “Buckwheat notes” refers to the shape of the wheat head and grains in comparison to the note shapes and sizes. It would be akin to using the term “hayseed” today to refer to a country person.

¹⁷⁸ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 8.

¹⁷⁹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 27.

Mason also fired shots across the Mason-Dixon line in a statement he made in a July 1836 article for the *Cincinnati Journal and Western Luminary*:

...the 'patent note' system being a miserable device, a mere shift to clothe ignorance and laziness with the look of science.¹⁸⁰

Steel reminds his reader, ironically, that while Mason's "better music school" disdained shaped note singing, the tradition itself was born of a desire to make better music for congregations and set a musical standard for communities.¹⁸¹ And if another ironic "note" could be permitted: Jesse B. Aiken, the popularizer of the seven-note shaped system, was a member of Mason's "better music school."¹⁸²

The next great wave of American church music was to be the gospel song movement born out of the great revival meetings of Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and their song leaders like Ira Sankey during the turn of the twentieth century. These songs were more predictable and decidedly major in tonality with texts that avoided such topics as God's weighty judgements and punishment and focused instead of being assured of His love.¹⁸³ As the demand for these new gospel songs that took over the music publishing industry in America, shaped note tunebooks began to decline in popularity and were relegated to family usage and smaller, church communities.

Yet, buried in this isolation, shaped note singing still took root and continued to grow into strong communities in small pockets of the South and was then revived mid-1900s, only to lose popularity again in the late 1980s, but gain a slow and steady resurgence in the 1990s and turn of the twenty-first century. A handful of these old Psalm and hymn tunes and folk hymns

¹⁸⁰ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 27.

¹⁸¹ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 8.

¹⁸² Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 27.

¹⁸³ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 52.

also filtered their way into mainline denominational hymnals.¹⁸⁴ The survival and inclusion of these tunes by and large depended on “educated people who knew these songs and loved them which suggests that quite a few Protestant Americans who lived in the nineteenth century were quite familiar with what today is known as ‘old harp music’.”¹⁸⁵ This idea of educated, modern people preserving tunes contributes to destabilizing the “end of the line” narrative so popular with folklorists and Americana seekers—a thought to be revisited later in this study.

Steel refers to these modern pockets of shaped note singers as a “lost tonal tribe...isolated from the commoditization of the musical arts [that] seems quaintly at odds with those of the commercial mainstream of American culture and music.”¹⁸⁶ Again, important in debunking the contemporary notion of an “end of the line” narrative regarding these communities, Steel contends that the original composers and compilers did not intend to form a lost tribe at all given the prolific work of these men and women.¹⁸⁷ These communities still stand as “living reflections of the music of early American psalmody”¹⁸⁸ and are “tradition bearers.”¹⁸⁹ —a label that carries a truer and more respectfully accurate picture than the over-used “primitive music and place” labels. These are a modern amalgam of generations of composers, compilers, revisors, editors, singing masters, and singers who all share in some capacity with the devotion to the deep emotion and historical roots of the tradition.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 159-70.

¹⁸⁵ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 177.

¹⁸⁶ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 10-11.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁸⁹ Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, ix-x.

¹⁹⁰ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, xi.

Characteristics of Shaped Note Singing: Practice and Tradition

Shaped note, or harp singing, is a communal tradition meant for music education and community harmony—literally and figuratively. Within that tradition certain characteristic and protocols, spoken and unspoken, exist that make harp singing unique and not just a mere gathering of singers. An understood decorum and expectation of mannerliness is present at the singings.¹⁹¹ These correct practices descend and pass through the generations from the “rudiments” found in the front matter of all tunebooks and from the oral teachings of the singing school masters.¹⁹²

Of course, the first requirement is a tunebook—one that employs four or seven shapes. The importance of semantics here is significant. Tunebooks are so called because their initial purpose was a singing instructional manual for singing—*not* a hymnal. They were not initially intended for church services. Understanding that the roots of these tunebooks reflected a singing tradition not a worshiping tradition is vital.¹⁹³ The tunebooks are rectangular in shape and bound on the short side. Each tunebook begins with a series of lessons in shape note singing called “rudiments.” This is a “pedagogical introduction intended to serve as a reference for those attending singing school or as a guide for those attempting to learn without a teacher.”¹⁹⁴ After the rudiments section, tunebooks typically contain one tune per page (sometimes the tune may span two or more pages if it is a longer anthem). Each page contains three or four staves with the shapes functioning as the notehead on the staff.¹⁹⁵ The noteheads are barred and dotted as needed in traditional Western rhythmic notation. Each staff represents a vocal part, from top to bottom:

¹⁹¹ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 2.

¹⁹² Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 36.

¹⁹³ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 10.

¹⁹⁴ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 4.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Treble (male or female high voices), Alto (female voices), Lead or Tenor (melody for male or female voices), and Bass (male voices). Often, three staves are used, in which case the tune will be lacking an alto part, this is reflective of an era of American composition in which alto was not emphasized. Tunebooks came to reflect regional and local musical tastes and preferences as well as localized musical styles.¹⁹⁶

There are five basic categories of songs found in these tunebooks (Figure 6):

1. Strophic psalm and hymn tunes
2. Fugues¹⁹⁷
3. Revival songs with refrains that came to be known as choruses
4. Non-strophic odes
5. Anthems or settings of unrhymed prose from the Bible¹⁹⁸

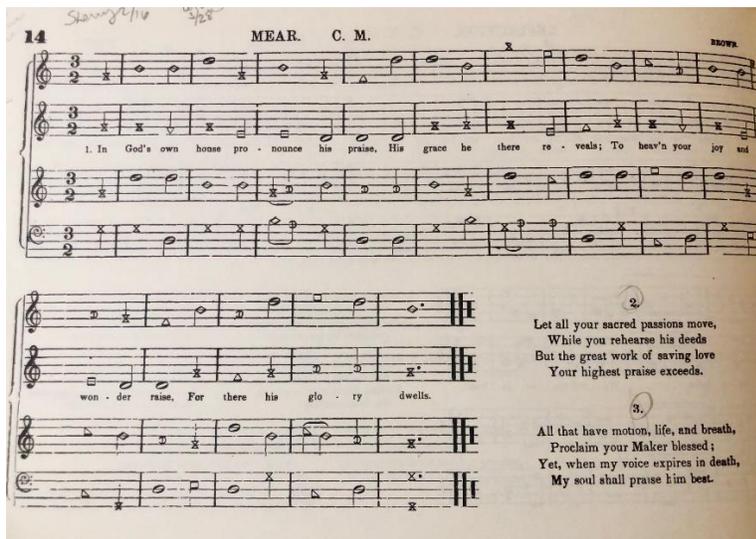


Figure 6-Examples of the Five Categories of Tunes found in Shaped Note Tunebooks MEAR as found in the *New Harp of Columbia*,¹⁹⁹ and an example of a strophic hymn tune.

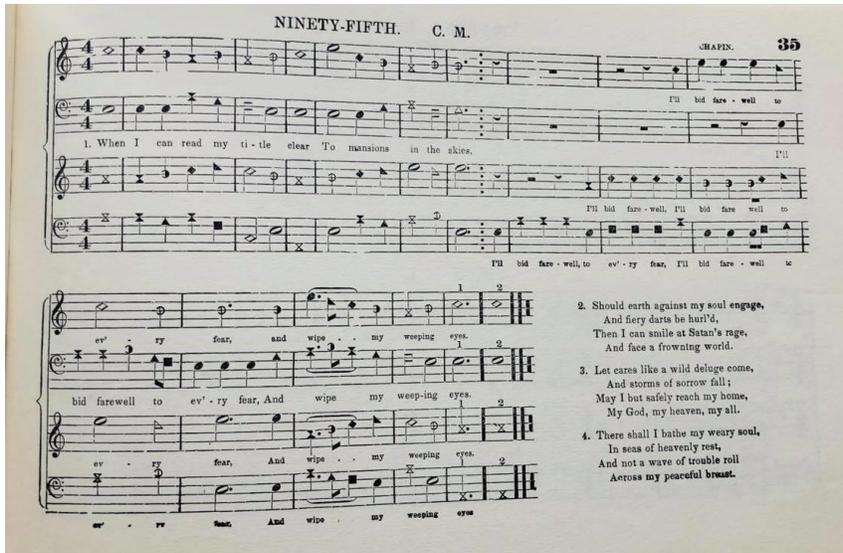
¹⁹⁶ Steel, *Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 4.

¹⁹⁷ Horn includes fugues as a separate category. Steel place fugues in the psalm and hymn tune category.

¹⁹⁸ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 7-8.

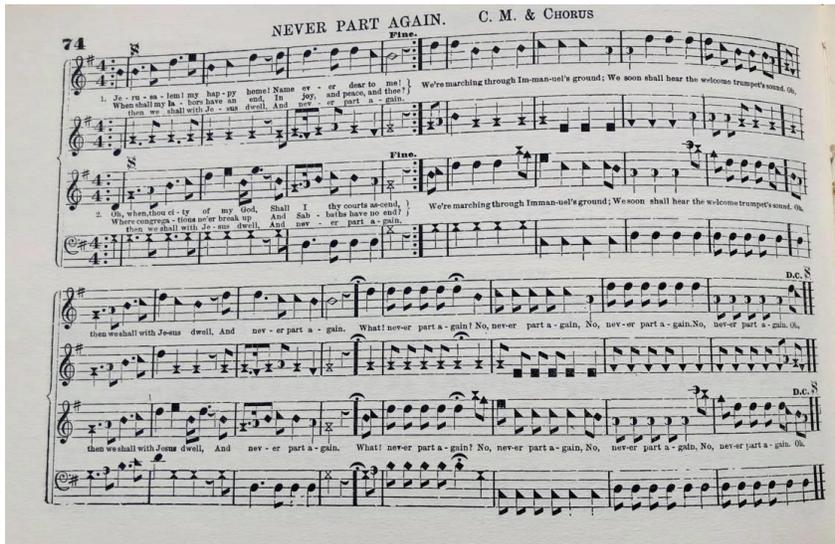
¹⁹⁹ Browne, *New Harp of Columbia*, 14.

NINETY-FIFTH. C. M. CHAFIN. 35



NINETY-FIFTH as found in the *New Harp of Columbia*,²⁰⁰ and an example of a fugue.

NEVER PART AGAIN. C. M. & CHORUS



NEVER PART AGAIN as found in the *New Harp of Columbia*,²⁰¹ and an example of a camp meeting “mother hymn” with an attached chorus.

²⁰⁰ Chapin, *New Harp of Columbia*, 35.

²⁰¹ Unknown, *New Harp of Columbia*, 74.

hymn tunes, to tunes from the New England “new school” that Billings belonged to spanning 1770-1810, to folk hymns based on oral traditions, to reform tunes in the Mason’s “better” urban style.²⁰⁵ These tunebooks functioned as an example of American pluralism and unity.

Singers sit in what is known as a hollow square shape while the leader stands in the center of the square to lead their song.²⁰⁶ (This is shown in Figure 7.)



Figure 7-Singing Square at Headrick’s Chapel, Wears Valley, Tennessee
A singing square at the Headrick Chapel annual singing located in Wears Valley, Tennessee.²⁰⁷

The host or chairman of the singing is in charge of welcoming everyone, picking someone to open in prayer, and then calling on singers one by one with an invitation to call a tune, step to the

²⁰⁵ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 8.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

²⁰⁷ “Books and Recordings,” accessed August 1, 2021. Oldharp.org

center, and lead.²⁰⁸ After calling a number in the book, the leader pitches the tune,²⁰⁹ either by ear or the use of the chairman's pitch pipe, and using solmization. The square responds, each holding their appropriate pitch. The goal is to pitch a tune in order to avoid "squeaking above or grumbling below"—a remaining word of advice taken from the rudiments in the *Bay Psalm Book*.²¹⁰ The tune is then sung through on solfège pitches following the shapes, then sung through again on the poetry while the leader beats time. This beating of time is not conducting in the traditional sense. The basic 4/4 pattern resembles a backwards "L" shape. The ictus of beat one is at the bottom corner of the "L", beat two is the outermost point, beat three comes straight back to the corner, and beat four goes up the spine of the "L" to the top. The basic pattern for 3/4 is a triangle. The ictus of beat one, again, occurs at the bottom corner, beat two is the outermost point, and beat three swings back up to the top. Often these patterns are ignored as too complicated and a simple down and up motion is employed. This motion has been likened in some instructions to the image of a dog jumping a fence every time a leader encounters a bar line.²¹¹

The purpose of this order in singing the shapes first and then the poetry is for the square to learn their vocal part first before adding verse to the pitches. Often, if a leader or a square member was not satisfied with the shape singing, they will request a "do over" to assure correct part singing before proceeding to the poetry. These are the basic spoken rules of harp singing.

One of the unspoken rules of the square is that it is not a space for denominational affiliations, theological squabbles, or political agendas. As mentioned above regarding the tunebooks' pluralistic trends, the square "reflects American democracy and religious pluralism

²⁰⁸ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 2.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 36.

²¹¹ Ibid.

and cultural self-improvement;” the square “eschews contentious discussion of politics and denominational religion.”²¹²

Singing Schools and Singing Masters

The singing school is perhaps the most historical and educational event in the harp singing community. The tradition began in the 1720s in New England, but during the latter part of the eighteenth century quickly became a welcome and popular social outing and community gathering particularly in the South and West.²¹³ Singing schools could run between two and three weeks for two to three hours a day or night. They were conducted by singing masters who employed one or two textbooks in the form of tunebooks that, as previously discussed, included a rudiments section in the introductory remarks.

The singing master was among the most pursued professions in America during the New England “new school” heyday (1770-1810). Most singing masters were products of singing schools themselves²¹⁴ and were also bi-vocational.²¹⁵ Their bi-vocationalism highlights one of the fundamental differences between American and European music. American musicians rarely had the option of a patron. Instead, lacking traditional sources of patronage found in Europe, they in essence became their own patrons and created a market for their own skills and gradually began to form a “foundation for musical institutions” in America.²¹⁶ During this time in American history, singing masters were also successful in trades such as: tanners, merchants, comb-makers, hatters, innkeepers, carpenters, schoolmasters, ministers, preachers, deacons, magistrates, sheriffs, mayors, printers, book-binders, book store owners, newspaper publishers,

²¹² Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 3.

²¹³ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 3.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 4-5.

²¹⁶ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 32.

editors, and barbers. Also, in this pre-industrial era, most were also farmers.²¹⁷ This self-patronage may have contributed to Billings' and his contemporaries' feelings of being justified in their abandonment of the rules of musical composition that resulted in the first truly American sounds, a practice that has continued throughout American music making and is a hallmark of American creativity.

Often, these singing masters compiled tunebooks themselves to be used (and sold) in their own schools.²¹⁸ These singing-master-compiled tunebooks started with the easier more metrical psalm tunes that were probably more commonly known such as OLD HUNDRED,²¹⁹ WELLS²²⁰, and MEAR.²²¹²²² The further the class went in the book, the more difficult the tunes became as the school encountered fugues and anthems.²²³

Not all the tunes used in the books and schools were necessarily sacred. A good example of this is a tune often used in school and included in the *New Harp of Columbia*, FEW HAPPY MATCHES.²²⁴ Written by then bachelor Isaac Watts, FEW HAPPY MATCHES²²⁵ is a cynical take on the fleeting happiness of marriage.²²⁶

Singing masters soon moved from compiling to new compositions as well. William Billings, a famed singing master in his own right, is an excellent example of this trend. His *New England Psalm Singer, or American Chorister* (1770) contained one-hundred-and-twenty-seven

²¹⁷ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 33-35.

²¹⁸ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 4.

²¹⁹ Luther, *New Harp of Columbia*, 11 and A11.

²²⁰ Holdroyd, WELLS, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 19.

²²¹ Browne, *New Harp of Columbia*, 14.

²²² Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 4.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Crane, FEW HAPPY MATCHES, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A81.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 5.

original compositions to be used in singing instruction.²²⁷ His fugues in this volume were the first fugues to be published in America.²²⁸ These tunes are represented in the 2001 reprint of the *New Harp of Columbia*.

The *Musical Million*, a monthly periodical (1870-1910) devoted to rural singing schools and masters ran an article in Volume 29 by P. M. Claunts that laid out the tools and techniques necessary to run a successful singing school.²²⁹ Jackson summarizes the article:

Mr. Claunts' list of the teacher's impedimenta includes a four-by-five foot blackboard, a music chart (showing graphically the diatonic and chromatic steps and how they appear with changes of key), a quire²³⁰ of heavy white paper, say twenty-four by thirty-six inches; a blue drafting pencil, box of crayon, box of tacks, one tack hammer, one baton, two three-foot pointers, a good supply of music books, tablets and pencils sufficient for a large school and 'a soul burning with love for the work... Show them that music teaching is a business, that you are worthy and competent to earn a good salary and that... you are not in a charity line... pay your board. Have an appointment for a public singing well announced' (by the heavy-paper, blue-pencil, and tack-hammer method, we presume). In introducing yourself, 'don't be too gay. Be unassuming.'²³¹

Jackson continues with the article's description of the teaching process:

The teacher explains the musical staff, symbols, measures, note shapes and names (solmization), scales, etc.; and impresses them by the question-and-answer method and by much choral singing. And before the ten-day term is over, the group... will be do-raming their different parts to the songs in one of the little manila-bound books... When the school closes, another squad of singers has been prepared either to go on and deepen their elementary musical attainments at other singing schools later on, or to take part directly in church and revival choruses and to swell the singing throngs at the many big 'singings' or conventions.²³²

Singing schools in New England fell out of fashion at the same time shaped note singing popularity began to rise from the camp meeting fervor of frontier states like Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia. But in the South, the singing school became the "cradle of musical

²²⁷ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 5.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 391-92.

²³⁰ A quire is twenty-four, sometimes twenty-five, sheets of paper. By today's standards approximately 1/20 of a ream of paper.

²³¹ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 391-92.

²³² Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 392.

democracy.”²³³ The first documented singing school, probably of the sort described above in Jackson, held in Knoxville, Tennessee, was conducted by R. Monday in 1818.²³⁴ The archival documentation of these singing schools demonstrate a clear westward and southern trek, as singing masters followed the settlers.²³⁵ While there are no settlers to follow today, singing schools do still happen and “offer a clear vehicle for continuity of musical tradition between the generations.”²³⁶

The New Harp of Columbia and The Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee

Today the *New Harp of Columbia* (1867) is one of only five old harp, shaped note tunebooks still in use.²³⁷ Jackson notes that out of all the tunebooks its longevity is second only to White and King’s *The Sacred Harp*.²³⁸ The *New Harp of Columbia* is also the first Southern seven note tunebook and the first tunebook to include an extensive number of “better music school” tunes—more than any other Southern tunebook.²³⁹ Given the flood of tunebooks available on the market at the time of its publication, its survival could be considered a small miracle. To appreciate the *New Harp of Columbia*’s endurance, its seven-note tunebook predecessors and Tennessee tunebook lineage must be considered.

In a twist of musical and historical irony is that the seven-note system employed by the harp singers of East Tennessee who use the *New Harp of Columbia* can be traced to Lowell Mason. Mason, who, despite his early opposition to this system and its compositions, which he decried as deplorable and crude, eventually recognized its popularity and educational benefit

²³³ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 391.

²³⁴ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 48.

²³⁵ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 15 and 24.

²³⁶ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 37.

²³⁷ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, ix.

²³⁸ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 324.

²³⁹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, ix.

releasing his own foray into shaped note writing in the *Ohio Sacred Harp*. As such, Mason is partially responsible for the popularity of the seven-note system. His introduction to that publication has this to say:

The most correct method of solmization is to apply a distinct syllable to each note of the scale, viz: the syllable DO to one, RE (ray) to two, MI to three, FA to four, SOL to five, LA to six, and SI (see) to seven. Indeed, by pursuing the common method of only four syllables, singers are almost always superficial. It is therefore recommended to all who wish to be thorough, to pursue the system of seven syllables, disregarding the different forms of the notes.²⁴⁰

Horn points out that the *New Harp of Columbia* uses this seven-note system, and that there are virtually no key signatures in the tunebook and no notational account of accidentals or chromatics, a fact verified in the front matter by the compiler, M. L. Swan, stating, “the last note in the bass is always the keynote.”²⁴¹ Jackson explains Swan’s comment: “If that note was shaped like an hour-glass the tune was in major; if it was square the tune was in minor. And from the position of those notes the singer could orient himself and ‘key’ the song.”²⁴² Horn says of modern-day usage: “the singers don’t mind, and the music doesn’t seem to suffer much.”²⁴³

Mason’s and his school’s journey to accepting shaped notes was not quick. While four-note, shaped note tunebooks were taking over the publishing industry in the South and West, northern musicians were turning to seven-note solmization developed in the eleventh century by Guido d’Arezzo (c. 995-1050) as a way to quickly teach musically what had taken him weeks and months to learn.²⁴⁴ In 1807, Andrew Law published *Harmonic Companion* in which he experimented with seven shapes to represent all seven solfège pitches.²⁴⁵ From 1807 to 1856,

²⁴⁰ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 17-18.

²⁴¹ Swan and Swan, *New Harp of Columbia*, 6.

²⁴² Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 325.

²⁴³ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 8.

²⁴⁴ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 23.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

only six other seven note, shaped note tunebooks were published, each trying different shapes for the pitches. They were Nathan Chapin and Joseph L. Dickerson's *Musical Instructor* (1808), a "professor of music's"²⁴⁶ *Norristown New and Improved Musical Teacher* (1832), Jesse B. Aiken's *The Christian Minstrel* (1846), Truman Van Tassel's *Phonographic Harmonist* (1846), Alexander Auld's *Ohio Harmonist* (1847), and J.S. Warren's *Warren's Minstrel* (1856).²⁴⁷

In 1846, Jesse B. Aiken, a member of Lowell Mason's "better school of music,"²⁴⁸ published a tunebook in the seven-note tradition, and he also created the additional shapes for Do, Re, and Si. His book *The Christian Minstrel* included three-hundred-and-seventy-eight tunes and anthems.²⁴⁹ In the preface, Aiken voiced his thoughts on round notes versus shaped notes and made a potentially heretical statement about the revered Mason:

...Mason's publications alone have furnished the churches with a great variety of rich devotional music. But the difficulty of acquiring music by the old system [that is, round notes] renders even these works comparatively useless.²⁵⁰

While others would still experiment with different shapes for the added solfège pitches, Aiken's shapes would eventually be established as one of the standards. After Aiken's massive success with *The Christian Minstrel* and his publication of three more seven-note shaped note tunebooks, four-note tunebook publications began to dwindle, with only seven more being published. Since the publication of John G. McCurry's 1855 *Social Harp*, only revisions and new editions of White and King's *The Sacred Harp* were the only publications to use the four-shape system.²⁵¹ New compilers adopted the seven shaped note system, most using Aiken's

²⁴⁶ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 24. This professor is rumored to have been David Sower, Jr.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 27.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

²⁵¹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 25.

scheme²⁵²—including “better music school” founders Lowell Mason and Thomas Hastings.²⁵³

Also, in the wake of seven-note popularity and the trend toward “better music,” compilers who had achieved enormous success with four-note shaped note tunebooks and other song books and hymnals began to revise and release updated editions that reflected this seven-note “better” style.²⁵⁴

The *Harp of Columbia*, compiled by W. H. and M. L. Swan of Knoxville, Tennessee, was published in 1848 at the height of “better music” inclusion into tunebooks and has the distinction of being the first seven-note, shaped note tunebook compiled in the South.²⁵⁵ The Swans did borrow from Aiken’s system by retaining the original, traditional shapes for Fa, Sol, La, and Mi, but they chose different shapes for Do, Re, and Si.²⁵⁶ Another important distinction given to the Swans’ compilation is that the *Harp of Columbia* relied heavily on Lowell Mason tunes, which explains why the *Harp of Columbia* and later the *New Harp of Columbia* both possess a higher percentage of “better music” tunes than any other southern, shaped note tunebook.²⁵⁷ Eighteen Mason tunes or Mason reharmonizations are represented in the *Harp of Columbia*, and the *New Harp of Columbia* added a startling thirty-eight more.²⁵⁸

The *New Harp of Columbia* also stands in a long line of tunebooks originating in Tennessee from which the Swans selected tunes when they compiled both the *Harp of Columbia* and the *New Harp of Columbia*. The *Harp of Columbia* would reproduce the “greatest number of tunes” from this lineage, specifically *Union Harmony* (sixty-one tunes) and *Knoxville Harmony*

²⁵² Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 26.

²⁵³ I recently found and purchased an excellent shape first edition of Thomas Hasting’s 1855 *Presbyterian Psalmist* that used Aiken’s system. I found it in a little used and rare book shop in the sleepy little mountain town of Sylva, NC, near the border of Tennessee.

²⁵⁴ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 29.

²⁵⁵ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 23.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

²⁵⁸ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 28.

(fifty-five tunes).²⁵⁹ The Swans also reproduced nineteen tunes from William “Singing Billy” Walker’s *Southern Harmony* (1840, ed), changing the tunes from four-note to seven-note shapes.²⁶⁰ And they also gleaned eighteen tunes from their seven-note forerunner, Aiken’s *Christian Minstrel*.²⁶¹ Of the seven remaining tunes not linked to prior tunebook or composed by the Swans, three were composed by Sevier County, Tennessee’s, own singing school master Pleasant Marion Atchley, who is buried at Alder Branch cemetery just outside of Sevierville, Tennessee.²⁶² Figure 8 details the Tennessee tunebook lineage of the *Harp of Columbia*, forerunner of the *New Harp of Columbia*. The *Harp of Columbia* followed this string of Tennessee tunebooks listed below with its appearance in 1848. Parts of it are still in use today in the Appendix section of the University of Tennessee Press 2001 reprint of the *New Harp of Columbia*.

Figure 8²⁶³-Tennessee Tunebooks That Influenced the *Harp of Columbia* and *New Harp of Columbia*

| Tunebook Title | Year Published | Compiler | Tennessee Region | Important Notes |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|---|---|
| <i>Kentucky Harmony</i> | 1816 | Ananias Davisson | Singing school master with documented Knoxville singing school from 1818-1824 | First to publish south of the Mason-Dixon line; May have known composer Robert Boyd of Blount County, TN. |
| <i>Johnson’s Tennessee Harmony</i> | 1818 | Alexander Johnson | Maury County | Third edition published in Nashville. |

²⁵⁹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 52.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 56.

²⁶¹ Ibid. 58.

²⁶² Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 59; details on where he is buried came from the March 16, 2021, field recording.

²⁶³ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 34-43.

| | | | | |
|---|------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>The Missouri Harmony</i> | 1820 | Allen D. Carden | Nashville | One of the most popular four-note shaped note tunebooks. |
| <i>The Western Harmony</i> | 1824 | Allen D. Carden | Nashville | |
| <i>Columbian Harmony</i> | 1825 | William Moore | Wilson County | |
| <i>United States Harmony</i> | 1829 | Allen D. Carden | Nashville | |
| <i>St. Louis Harmony</i> | 1831 | John B. Seats | Western Tennessee | Seats registered for and received his copyright in West Tennessee. |
| <i>The Cumberland Harmony, 2nd ed.</i> | 1834 | JD McCollum & Rev. JP Campbell | Nashville | The first edition of this tunebook is lost which probably contained the first printing of Woods' CHRISTMAS (#A69) |
| <i>Union Harmony</i> | 1837 | William Caldwell | Maryville, Blount County, Tennessee | Contains IMPORTUNITY (#60), a tune by Jean Jacques Rosseau, philosopher and composer. |
| <i>Knoxville Harmony</i> | 1838 | John B. Jackson | McMinn County | Twelve tunes first printed in this volume classified by George Pullen Jackson as being folk hymns. |
| <i>The American Harmony, 2nd ed.</i> | 1839 | Andrew Johnson | Rutherford County | |

M. L. Swan most likely stands for Marcus Lafayette Swan (1827-1869), found in the 1850 census and listed as “author, music.”²⁶⁴ He was twenty-one when the *Harp of Columbia* was published. W. H., or William H., was probably M. L.’s father and was a very successful Knoxville lawyer.²⁶⁵ M. L. married Mary Morrison of a prominent Bellefonte, Alabama, family, and although he entered the Confederate army, he did not see active duty due to poor health. The Civil War ruined Ms. Morrison’s family wealth and after the war, M. L. became a traveling singing school master in Alabama and Tennessee to provide for the family. He died in 1869 of typhoid fever at the age of forty-two.²⁶⁶ A surviving story about M. L. Swan is found in many sources:

It seems the Uncle Lafayette had been imbibing a bit one day when he spied on the street a big fellow clad in a new and very loud checked suit. The textile resemblance to the lines and geometrical note shapes of the musician’s trade was unavoidable. M. L. approached the fellow, picked out with his finger the ‘notes’ on his coat and commenced singing them, ‘do, mi, sol, sol,’ etc. The man of the new suit, however, his pride grossly insulted, jerked off the coat and threw it to the ground in preparation to cleaning Swan up. The latter, however, far more interested in the practice of his art than in the imminence of a drubbing, followed the musical coat. And by the time its owner had pushed back his shirt-sleeves M. L. was on his knees and busy singing another verse of the musical garment. The big fellow looked on for a few seconds. Then he snatched up his coat and pulled it on with: ‘Well, if he’s such a dam’fool, I jus’ cayn’t whup’im.’²⁶⁷

W. H. Swan wrote the introduction to the *Harp of Columbia* that, compared to other tunebooks of its day, was considerably short on rudiments.²⁶⁸ The *Harp of Columbia* was divided into three parts. Part one had no real designation, but contained patriotic songs, songs such as Watt’s cynical FEW HAPPY MATCHES²⁶⁹, and Moore’s BEQUEST²⁷⁰ which mentions mistresses

²⁶⁴ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 36.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁶⁶ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 328-29.

²⁶⁷ This account taken from Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 329.

²⁶⁸ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 47.

²⁶⁹ Crane, *New Harp of Columbia*, A81.

²⁷⁰ Attr. to Dmitri Bortniansky, arranged by M.L. Swan, BEQUEST, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 71.

and wine—so this first part was not necessarily intended for public worship.²⁷¹ Part two was mainly tunes used in singing schools and societies and consisted of mostly fugues and some rounds.²⁷² And Part three consisted of odes and anthems.²⁷³ Out of one-hundred-and-forty-six tunes, forty-eight, or roughly a third, were composed by the Swans; fifty-four or fifty-six were by Southern composers; and the last fifty, or third, were made up of a combination of English hymn and psalm tunes, northern composers, the “better music school,” and some tunes that are uncategorized.²⁷⁴

It was the eighth edition printed in 1857 of the *Harp of Columbia* that finally gave the tunebook wider popularity. In 1867, M. L. Swan published a revision under a new title, *New Harp of Columbia*. M. L. stated in the preface to this revised and retitled edition that “...between fifty and hundred tunes, selected and original, will be found in this that are not in the old Harp.”²⁷⁵ He goes on to argue that this seven-note system allows for “one to sing more readily and as correctly as the round-note system.”²⁷⁶

The rudiments in the *New Harp of Columbia* were still abbreviated, but some issues were resolved such as who should sing the lead line, additional instructions on beating time, and the inclusion of some interval exercises. The *New Harp of Columbia* reflected the contents of its other contemporary tunebooks: old psalm and hymn tunes, fugues, anthems, folk hymns, and a considerably heavier representation of Mason and the “better music school” than perhaps any other Southern compiled tunebook. Five rounds and thirty-eight hymn tunes were dropped from the *Harp of Columbia*, and sixty-five other tunes took their place. This brought the *New Harp of*

²⁷¹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 49.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁷³ Hatchett, *A Companion to the New Harp of Columbia*, 51.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Swan and Swan, *New Harp of Columbia*, 2.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Columbia's total tunes to two-hundred-and-twenty.²⁷⁷ This revision was divided into three parts like its predecessor with the only categorical change being that Part One was now considered suitable for church services.²⁷⁸

Categorically, the *New Harp of Columbia* appeared to be basically the same; the contents proved a different story. One flip through this newly revised and titled edition read like M. L. Swan's personal love letter to Lowell Mason. Of the thirty-eight tunes dropped, five were by W. H. Swan and the rest were from the long legacy of Southern and Tennessee tunebooks mentioned above. Of the sixty-five new tunes added the majority were composed or arranged by Mason. The tunes added that were not Mason's belonged either to M. L. Swan himself or to another member of the "better music school" like William Bradbury or Jesse B. Aiken. And the Southern tunes that were retained were reharmonized by Mason or another "better music school" colleague.²⁷⁹ The majority of the revisions occurred in Parts One and Two with Part Three remaining untouched and identical to the *Harp of Columbia*.²⁸⁰

Figure 9 and Figure 10 illustrate this attempt at musical gentrification or "northernization" that the *New Harp of Columbia* underwent in M. L.'s hands. (Mason's name is in bold below to showcase his immense influence on M. L. and the *New Harp of Columbia*.)

Figure 9 ²⁸¹-Lowell Mason's Influence on the *New Harp of Columbia*

| Tune in <i>HoC</i>: | Composer | Source | Replacement/s in <i>NHoC</i> | Composer | Interesting Notes |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| AFRICA | W. H. Swan | <i>HoC</i> | ARIEL; TABOR | Mason ; M.L. Swan | |
| AMERICA | Wetmore | <i>Union Harmony</i> ; <i>Knoxville Harmony</i> ; | MAYSVILLE | Mason and Bradbury | |

²⁷⁷ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 68-69.

²⁷⁸ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 70.

²⁷⁹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 70-73.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 70-73.

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|---|
| | | <i>Southern Harmony; Sacred Harp</i> | | | |
| ATHENS | W. H. Swan | <i>HoC</i> | FOUNTAIN | Mason | |
| BOWER | W. H. Swan | <i>HoC</i> | HERITAGE | M. L. Swan | |
| CHRISTMAS | Attr. to Woods | <i>Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony</i> | RETURN; MIDDLETON | M. L. Swan; M. L. Swan's arrangement | |
| CONFIDENCE | James P. Carrell | <i>Supplement to Kentucky Harmony; Songs of Zion</i> | CHIMES; HIGHTOWER | Mason; M. L. Swan | |
| CONSOLATION | Lucius Chapin | Andrew Law's 8 page leaflet | ROCKINGHAM; MENDON | Mason; Mason's arrangement | |
| CRUCIFIXION | Ananias Davission | <i>Supplement to Kentucky Harmony; Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony</i> | LANESBORO; WOODSTOCK | Mason's arrangement; Dutton | |
| CUMBERLAND | Unknown, possibly William Caldwell | <i>Union Harmony</i> | THOU ART PASSING AWAY | Mason's arrangement | |
| DAVID'S LAMENTATION | William Billings | <i>Southern Harmony; Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony; Sacred Harp</i> | MERDIN | Mason | |
| DAVID'S VICTORY | Robert Boyd | <i>Knoxville Harmony; Kentucky Harmony</i> | HADDON; WILMOT | Mason; Mason's arrangement | WILMOT was originally a tune by Carol Maria von Weber |
| DAVISSON'S RETIREMENT | Ananias Davission | <i>Supplement to Kentucky Harmony; Knoxville Harmony</i> | BELLEVILLE; NEVER PART AGAIN | Hastings; Aiken | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|--|
| DETROIT | William Bradshaw | <i>Supplement to Kentucky Harmony; Sacred Harp; Southern Harmony; Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony</i> | OXFORD; MISSIONARY CHANT | Mason; Heinrich Christoph Zeuner | Zeuner was a famous German-born organist who served churches in Boston and Philadelphia |
| EMERALD GATES | Attr. to Ananias Davisson | <i>Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony; Supplement to Kentucky Harmony</i> | OH SING TO ME OF HEAVEN | M. L. Swan's arrangement | |
| EVENING SHADE | Stephen Jenks | <i>Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony</i> | BALLERMA; HENRY | Mason; Pond | HENRY first appeared in Mason's <i>The Boston Academy's Collection of Church Music</i> (1835) |
| EXULTATION | Attr. to Humphries | <i>Supplement to Kentucky Harmony; Knoxville Harmony; Southern Harmony; Sacred Harp</i> | BEALOTH | Timothy Mason | Timothy Mason was Lowell Mason's brother |
| FAIRFEILD | Wiley H. Hitchcock | <i>Knoxville Harmony</i> | UXBRIDGE; HEBRON | Mason; Mason | |
| FEW HAPPY MATCHES | Crane (words by Watts) | <i>Knoxville Harmony</i> | SHIRLAND; GOLDEN HILL | Mason; Mason's rearrangement | |
| FLORIDA | Wetmore | <i>Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony; Southern Harmony; Sacred Harp</i> | PETERSBORO; AND ONO | Mason's arrangement; Mason's arrangement | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| I HAVE MY TRIALS | W. H. Swan | <i>HoC</i> | TEMPLE | M. L. Swan | |
| INDIAN PHILOSOPHER | Unknown | <i>Knoxville Harmony</i> | LABAN; SHAWMUT | Mason and Hastings; Mason | This tune was originally printed in 1798 and has text associated with Watts |
| LENA | Daniel Belknap | <i>Southern Harmony; Sacred Harp</i> | WHEN SHALL WE MEET AGAIN | M. L. Swan's arrangement of Aiken's tune originally published by Mason | Daniel Belknap (1771-1815) was a Massachusetts singing teacher and compiler of tunebooks |
| MALINDA | William Caldwell | <i>Union Harmony</i> | MOUNT VERNON | Mason | |
| MESSIAH | Attr. to Carrell | <i>Knoxville Harmony; Supplement to the Kentucky Harmony</i> | MY MOTHER'S BIBLE; A HOME IN HEAVEN | M. L. Swan; M. L. Swan | |
| MIDDLEBROOK | John B. Jackson | <i>Knoxville Harmony</i> | UPTON; WATTS | Mason ; M. L. Swan | |
| NEW DURHAM | Austin | <i>Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony</i> | MARLOW; ARLINGTON | Mason's arrangement ; Mason's arrangement | |
| NEW MARKET | William Caldwell | <i>Union Harmony</i> | AZMON | Mason's arrangement | |
| NEW SALEM | Attr. to Lewis, but disputed | <i>Union Harmony, Knoxville Harmony; Kentucky Harmonist</i> | ANVERN; MIGDOL | Mason ; Mason | |
| PERSIA | W. H. Swan | <i>HoC</i> | ZERAH | Mason | |
| REDEEMING LOVE | William Caldwell | <i>Union Harmony</i> | NAOMI; THE ROCK | Mason's arrangement ; M.L. Swan's arrangement | |
| SALEM | Attr. to Bovellev | <i>Southern Harmony; Union Harmony; Knoxville</i> | DANVERS; DUKE STREET | Mason ; Mason's arrangement | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| | | <i>Harmony; Sacred Harp</i> | | | |
| SALUTATION | Attr. to Johnson | <i>Southern Harmony; Sacred Harp; The Western Harmony; Supplement to Kentucky Harmony</i> | ROWLEY | Mason | |
| SOLITUDE IN THE GROVE | Ananias Davisson | <i>Southern Harmony; Union Harmony; Knoxville Harmony; Sacred Harp</i> | YARMOUTH | Mason | |
| STAR IN THE EAST | John B. Jackson | <i>Knoxville Harmony</i> | HARWELL; WAYNESVILLE | Mason; Hastings | |
| SWEET RIVERS | Attr. to More | <i>Columbian Harmony</i> | NASHVILLE; SUDBURY | Mason; Mason | More is probably William Moore of Wilson County, TN |
| TENNESSEE | Attr. to Samuel Medley | <i>Southern Harmony; Sacred Harp; Virginia Sacred Music Repository; Christian Harmony</i> | RICHMOND; ZION | Mason; Hastings | |
| THE PILGRIM'S LOT | William Caldwell | <i>Union Harmony</i> | TAMWORTH; LUCAS | Mason's arrangement; Mason's arrangement | |
| TRANQUILITY | William Caldwell | <i>Union Harmony</i> | WARWICK; DUNDEE | Mason's arrangement; Mason's arrangement | |
| W.H. Swan's 5 Rounds | W. H. Swan | <i>HoC</i> | WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT | Mason | |

Figure 10²⁸²-Comparison of Swan’s Inclusions and Exclusions in the *New Harp of Columbia*

| <i>Harp of Columbia</i> | | <i>New Harp of Columbia</i> | |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| European Tunes | 18 | 30 | European Tunes |
| Northern Tunes | 47 | 43 | Northern Tunes |
| Southern Tunes | 117 | 99 | Southern Tunes |
| Mason, et al Tunes | 11 | 48 | Mason, et al Tunes |

Hatchett lists M. L. Swan’s claims to fame in the *New Harp of Columbia* as being:²⁸³

1. Added parts to WHEN SHALL WE MEET AGAIN
2. Added new treble parts to BALLERMA, MARLOW, and ONO
3. Composed six new tunes: HERITAGE, HIGHTOWER, RETURN, TABOR, TEMPLE, and WATTS
4. Produced new arrangements of five tunes already in print: A HOME IN HEAVEN, MY MOTHER’S BIBLE, OH SING TO ME OF HEAVEN, and THE ROCK
5. Reharmonized MIDDLETON (also known as NEW BRITAIN, or more commonly known today as “Amazing Grace”)

However, despite his success with both tunebooks, M. L. Swan was never picked up and used by other tunebook compilers.²⁸⁴

Many tunes composed before 1770 made their way through time and tunebook, and survived M. L. Swan’s purge to be compiled into the *New Harp of Columbia*. A few Old World composed tunes were: OLD HUNDRED²⁸⁵, WELLS,²⁸⁶ and DUNDEE.²⁸⁷ OLD HUNDRED²⁸⁸ originated in the 1500s in the *Geneva Psalter*.²⁸⁹ DUNDEE²⁹⁰ is said to have been a part of the 1615 *Scottish Psalter*.²⁹¹ And WELLS²⁹² first appeared in *The Spiritual Man’s Companion, or the Pious*

²⁸² Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 73.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁸⁴ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 82.

²⁸⁵ Luther, *New Harp of Columbia*, 11 and A11.

²⁸⁶ Holdroyd, *New Harp of Columbia*, 19.

²⁸⁷ Unknown, DUNDEE, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 53.

²⁸⁸ Luther, *New Harp of Columbia*, 11 and A11.

²⁸⁹ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 187.

²⁹⁰ Unknown, *New Harp of Columbia*, 53.

²⁹¹ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 11.

²⁹² Holdroyd, *New Harp of Columbia*, 19.

Christina's Recreation published in London in 1724.²⁹³ These tunes reflect the early musical trend of the time in being plain settings where all parts move together in consonant intervals on strong beats.²⁹⁴

Those tunes in the *New Harp of Columbia* which reflect an “older harmonic tradition”²⁹⁵ than the folk hymns that sprang from Post-Civil War camp meetings are listed in Figure 11. The tunes listed in Figure 11 are rich with early American music history. CORONATION²⁹⁶ by Oliver Holden is one of the most printed and sung early American hymn tunes today and has made its way into innumerable hymnals and worship traditions.²⁹⁷ LENOX²⁹⁸, while published in 1785 by Tans’ur, was actually composed in 1773 and has the distinction of being used in almost every singing school manual ever printed.²⁹⁹ MEAR³⁰⁰ is one of the very first American compositions,³⁰¹ and NINETY-THIRD³⁰² is attributed to Lucius Chapin, a Revolutionary War veteran who taught singing schools and eventually settled in the Shenandoah Valley in 1787.³⁰³

Figure 11³⁰⁴-Early American Tunes Included in the *New Harp of Columbia*

| <u>Tune Name</u> | <u>NHoC Number</u> | <u>Composer</u> | <u>Original Publication</u> | <u>Year First Published</u> | <u>Genre</u> |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| BALLSTOWN | 161 | Nehemiah Shumway | <i>The Musical Instructor</i> | 1818 | Fugue |
| CHINA | 39 | Timothy Swan | <i>New England Harmony</i> | 1801 | Hymn |
| CLAREMONT | 211 | Jacob Kimball (Kimbol) | <i>Worcester Harmony</i> | 1803 | Anthem |

²⁹³ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 226.

²⁹⁴ Steel, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, 42.

²⁹⁵ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 16.

²⁹⁶ Oliver Holden, CORONATION, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 117.

²⁹⁷ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 110.

²⁹⁸ Lewis Edson, LENOX, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 42.

²⁹⁹ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 14.

³⁰⁰ Browne, *New Harp of Columbia*, 14.

³⁰¹ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 14.

³⁰² Chapin, *New Harp of Columbia*, 25.

³⁰³ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 15

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-261.

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------|
| CORONATION | 117 | Oliver Holden | <i>Union Harmony</i> | 1793 | Hymn |
| CREATION | 157 | Nehemiah Shumway | <i>American Harmony</i> | 1793 | Fugue |
| EASTER ANTHEM | 195 | Attr. to Billings | <i>Suffolk Harmony</i> | 1786 | Anthem |
| EGYPT | 150 | Timothy Swan | <i>New England Harmony</i> | 1801 | Hymn |
| EXHORTATION | 155 | Attr. to Amos Doolittle | <i>New England Harmonist</i> | 1799 | Fugue |
| FAREWELL ANTHEM | 219 | No composer listed | <i>The Psalmist's Companion</i> | 1793 | Anthem |
| HUNTINGDON | 175B | Attr. to Justin Morgan | <i>New York Collection</i> | 1794 | Fugue |
| INVITATION | 178B | Jacob Kimbol, Jr. | <i>Rural Harmony</i> | 1793 | Fugue |
| LENOX | 42 | Attr. to Lewis Edson | <i>Tans'ur's American Harmony</i> | 1785; 1733 listed in inscription | Fugue |
| LIBERTY | 68 | Attr. to Stephen Jenks | <i>Musical Harmonist</i> | 1800 | Fugue |
| MEAR | 14 | Aaron Williams; NHoC says Brown | <i>New Version of the Psalms of David</i> | 1755 | Hymn |
| MIDDLETOWN | 173 | Attr. elsewhere to Ball or Bull | <i>American Harmony</i> | 1793 | Semi-Anthem |
| MILFORD | 152 | James Stephenson | <i>American Harmony</i> | 1793 | Fugue |
| MONTGOMERY | 158 | Attr. to More; really Justin Morgan | <i>The Psalmist's Companion</i> | 1793 | Fugue |
| NINTY-FIFTH | 35 | Colton or Chapin (disputed) | <i>The Beauties of Harmony</i> | 1814 | Fugue |
| NINTY-THIRD | 25 | Attr. to Lucius Chapin | <i>The Beauties of Harmony</i> | 1814 | Hymn |
| NORTHFIELD | 115 | Jeremiah Ingalls | <i>Christian Harmony</i> | 1805 | Fugue |
| OCEAN | 159B | Timothy Swan | Andrew Law's <i>Rudiments of Music</i> | 1792 | Modified Fugue |
| ODE ON SCIENCE | 208 | Deacon Janaziah Summers | Composed for the semicentennial | 1798 | Anthem |

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|--------|
| | | | of Stephen Daggett's Academy | | |
| ROSE OF SHARON | 199 | Billings | <i>Singing Master's Assistant</i> | 1778 | Anthem |
| SPRING | 170 | No composer listed | <i>Delaware Harmony</i> | 1809 | Hymn |
| SUTTON | 113 | Goff | <i>The Psalmist's Companion</i> | 1793 | Fugue |
| WINDHAM | 18 | Leed or Daniel Read | <i>American Singing Book</i> | 1785 | Hymn |
| WINTER | 101 | Attr. to Daniel Read | <i>American Singing Book</i> | 1785 | Hymn |
| YARMOUTH | 154 | Attr. to Jacob Kimball | <i>Worcester Collection</i> | 1786 | Fugue |

M. L. Swan's purge of these older tunes and fugues from the *Harp of Columbia* resulted in only nine of the original thirty-three fugues from the pre-nineteenth century era being retained in the *New Harp of Columbia*.³⁰⁵ Later editions, specifically the 2001 edition, of the *New Harp of Columbia* included an appendix in which these purged fugues and older, southern composed tunes were included and are actively sung today.

Because of the "better school of music" influence on M. L. Swan, the *New Harp of Columbia* also has "fewer folk hymns than the *Sacred Harp*. The first dyadic cadence does not occur until page 43, PLEASANT HILL.³⁰⁶³⁰⁷ Jackson's comparison of folk tune inclusion between the *Harp of Columbia* and the *New Harp of Columbia* is illustrated below:

HoC: 40 folk tunes out of 193 tunes total = 21% of tunebook
NHoC: 33 folk tunes out of 220 tunes total = 15% of tunebook³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 6-9.

³⁰⁶ Nicholson, *New Harp of Columbia*, 43.

³⁰⁷ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 92.

³⁰⁸ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 133-150.

However, “fewer” proves to be an arbitrary term when used in comparison to the other tunebooks of the time, and the *New Harp of Columbia* still offers a large representation of contrafactum and centonized tunes and phrases. Figure 12 shows a sample of Horn’s centonized findings in the *New Harp of Columbia* and Figure 13 shows a sample of Horn’s contrafactum findings.

Figure 12-Centonized Tunes ³⁰⁹

| Tune Name | Number in <i>NHoC</i> | Centonized Tune/s | Type of Centonization as Appears in <i>NHoC</i> |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| BRADLEY | 38 | LOVINGKINDNESS | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrase 1 |
| DEEP SPRING | 93 | PILGRIM’S LOT; ERIE | Phrase 4 and 8 |
| DEEP SPRING | 93 | LOVELY STORY | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrases 4 and 8 |
| GOLDEN HILL | 81 | SING ON | Phrase 2 |
| HOLY ARMY | 119 | SERVICE OF THE LORD | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrases 2 and 4 |
| HOLY MANNA | 107 | STILL BETTER | Phrases 2, 4, and 8 |
| IDUMEA | 44 | MEDITATION | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrase 1 |
| LENOX | 42 | BLOOMING YOUTH | Common Phrases |
| MARIETTA | 90 | CHRISTIAN DELIGHT | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrase 1 |
| MORNING TRUMPET | 99 | RELIGION IS A FORTUNE | Phrases 2 |
| NINTY-THIRD | 25 | PROSPECT | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrase 4 |
| NINTY-THIRD | 25 | ODEM | Phrase 4 |
| SING TO ME OF HEAVEN | 73 | TEACHER’S FAREWELL | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrase 3 |
| SING TO ME OF HEAVEN | 73 | CHRISTIAN SOLDIER | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrase 4 |
| WELLS | 19 | PENICK | Differ by a Few Notes in Phrase 1 |

³⁰⁹ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 60-78.

Figure 13-Contrafactum Tunes³¹⁰

| Tune Name | Number in <i>NHoC</i> | Well-Known Song from Which Taken |
|------------------|------------------------------|--|
| BEQUEST | 71 | VESPER HYMN |
| BRUCE'S ADDRESS | 109 | SCOTS WHAT HAE WI' WALLACE BLED |
| CELEBRATION | 118 | O WHERE, O WHERE HAS THY HIGHLAND LADDIE GONE |
| HOME | 54 | HOME SWEET HOME |
| JOYFUL | 141 | JOYS SEVEN |
| LONG AGO | 183 | LONG, LONG AGO |
| HAMBURG | 111 | AULD LANG SYNE |

Jackson noted in 1932 that “shape-noters have from the start had to defend their practices.”³¹¹ And in 1937 he continues to defend that practice by saying that interest in this tradition should be revived to free us “from the banalities of much present-day church music.”³¹² Jackson saw the on-going struggle against “the round-noters” as ultimately a struggle against invisible foes, namely willful ignorance of musical traditions, stating, “If the surest way to kill a minority human undertaking is for the powerful majority to ignore it, the southern country singers’ institution is doomed”³¹³ The second foe he named was urbanization.³¹⁴ Jackson’s concern was not so much the slow urban overtaking of the rural areas. Instead, his chief complaint of urban areas was the city dwellers themselves. He named them as being a non-singing folk who instead listened and consumed—two nails in the coffin of a highly participatory singing tradition.³¹⁵ One of the most alarming statistics he sites is “of the fifty-four early tune books of the fasola and dorayme folk, more than half are absent from the list of American tune

³¹⁰ Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven*, 31-36.

³¹¹ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 419.

³¹² Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, x.

³¹³ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 421.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 426-29.

books in Grove's *Dictionary, American Supplement*, pages 385 ff." This is startling both in 1927 and remains so in 2021.³¹⁶

As Hatchett points out and I agree: "These original American folk hymn tunes are America's most original contribution to the arts...in this early American folk hymnody there is something which is distinctively American which should be saved, appreciated, preserved, treasured, and propagated."³¹⁷ We owe a huge ethnomusicological debt to folklorists who have combed the mountains of this region searching for and recording disappearing sung and spoken culture. For almost a generation, these men and women focused their collection and preservation efforts on words—that is, histories, stories, ballads and poetry. It was not until the work of George Pullen Jackson and then that of Dorothy Horn that emphasis began to be placed on the actual tunes themselves—both historically and musically—the *sound*, or sonic practice, of the people, their sung story. They started a shift—a shift that has subtly and slowly continued to influence this field of study and the men and women who continue to be the tradition bearers and active participants in a living preservation. Those studying this tradition heed Jackson's concluding words in *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*:

The songs are living vigorously without being fought for.... If this was and still is the firm belief of those uncounted thousands who know and sing the country songs, those who are still carrying on the tradition for the sheer love of it and joy they get out of it; then is there not an inspiration for us? Is that picture not an incentive to look into, to learn to know this tonal tradition, the chief one in our ethnic background? ...The lore of a folk comprehends, as I understand it, the whole of its basic cultural accomplishments. Understood in the broadest and deepest sense, *a folk-lore is truer, more vital and more significant than an art-lore. It is a clearer mirror of a people's past, a more reliable interpreter of its present trends, and a safer prophet of its culture to come. It is all this because it is the body and soul of that culture, where art is merely a vestment.*³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Ibid., 425

³¹⁷ Hatchett, *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, 33.

³¹⁸ Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, 21-22. Emphasis mine.

Chapter 3: Philosophy of Fieldwork and Methodology

Michael B. Bakan offers a new definition of ethnomusicology which grounds a large portion of this study: “the study of how music lives in the lives of people who make and experience it, and of how people live in the music they make.”³¹⁹ Bakan’s definition allows for all who participate in a specific musical world, both insider and outsider, to be included in this definition. His view also allows for more fluidity of tradition; meaning, that the musical tradition is not necessarily divorced from the culture, but instead becomes a kind of “free agent,” creating a distinctive culture wherever it is employed. This understanding is important to this study because, first, I sought as Jeff Todd Titon encourages,³²⁰ “to musically be in the world [as an old harp singer] as a way of knowing.” And second, my fieldwork reveals a fluidity in harp singing tradition. While it is rooted in local culture, within the singing square is a sub-culture unto itself, and this sub-culture is the one that is fluid—the singing square possesses the ability to travel and take its own culture with it. The singing square links and adapts itself to its own and other local cultures. The result is a building of community through song.

Ethnomusicologist Brian Schrag states in his article *Ethnoartistic Cocreation in the Kingdom of God* that he advocates involvement in traditions that are rural, old, geographically concentrated, tied to an ethnolinguistic community, ripe for church use, and fragile.³²¹ The old harp communities in the mountain counties of East Tennessee meet every criteria on Schrag’s list. I join with Schrag in saying, “We want to encourage communities to look favorably on the

³¹⁹ Michael B. Bakan, *Music of Death and New Creation: Experiences in the World of Baliese Gamelan Beleganjur* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 17-18.

³²⁰ Jeff Todd Titon, “Knowing Fieldwork,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Second Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.

³²¹ Brian Schrag, “Ethnoartistic Cocreation in the Kingdom of God,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 54.

artistic behaviors of their parents and grandparents, amidst a raucous, terribly attractive, and often financially persuasive group of artistic choices.”³²² This presented itself as the task at hand to the current and the younger generation of musiking East Tennesseans.

The writings of Titon, Timothy Rice, and Philip V. Bohlman also shaped my philosophy and methodology of fieldwork as pertains to old harp singing in East Tennessee. Titon’s article *Knowing Fieldwork*³²³ played a formative role in how I thought about fieldwork. His work challenges the ethnomusicologist to move beyond a “collecting and observing” mentality of fieldwork to more of an “experiencing and understanding” position.³²⁴ He submits that the fieldworker should ground their musical knowledge in musical being, and further encourages fieldworkers to pay attention to their own shifts in consciousness.³²⁵ According to Titon, fieldworkers should pay attention to the journey from the knowing self to the music making self and back again. My fieldwork became the documentation of my journey from myself as Amanda Rogers the researcher to my new self as Amanda Rogers the old harp singer, and back again. This connectivity to self and musical being self was grounded, as Titon suggests, in relationships and friendships.

Experiencing and understanding musical being in the world is a paradigm Rice addresses in his article *Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology*.³²⁶ Rice supports an interchangeability between the state of being the researcher and the researched. He goes on to say that perhaps those selves change through time because of the dialoging

³²² Schrag, “Ethnoartistic Cocreation in the Kingdom of God,” 55.

³²³ Titon, “Knowing Fieldwork,” 25-41.

³²⁴ Titon, “Knowing Fieldwork,” 25.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

³²⁶ Timothy Rice, “Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Second Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42-61.

multiple realities of the field in which the ethnomusicologist participates.³²⁷ I am inclined to agree with Titon and Rice. To be an active participant researcher required me, as the fieldworker, to be cognizant and reflexive about the process.

For me, the challenge was a matter of focus and voice. That meant that this project was not the story of how Amanda Rogers, an ethnomusicologist, became an old harp singer. But rather, it was the story of old harp singers like David Sarten, Andrew Whaley, and others and their experience. I must, however, represent that their experience as old harp singers now involved touching lives and experiences with how I, Amanda Rogers, became an old harp singer. It was a delicate line to navigate. Katherine Morehouse has stated that fieldworkers would be naïve to think that they do not meddle in their chosen fields—the question becomes *how* they will meddle.³²⁸

Titon provides some insight into this dynamic when he refers to the concept of visiting, or the Irish tradition of sitting and staying awhile among friends.³²⁹ And while he has been criticized within the field for his “friendship evangelism” approach to fieldwork,³³⁰ his approach resonated with my work. The Tennessee mountains were settled by the Scots-Irish, and the concept of visiting is still a valued tradition among her people even today. Titon states,

Singing and music and storytelling and *craic*, or good talk, conversation raised to art, are sought and found in these visits that connect and reconnect friends. That good talk, intersubjective, is always a part of good fieldwork, where again mutual discovery is a sought and found experience. Visiting, then, is the social basis for fieldwork. ... That is the model I support, and of course it has implications for human relationships well beyond ethnomusicology.³³¹

³²⁷ Rice, “Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology,” 47.

³²⁸ Katherine Morehouse, “Recognizing and Resolving Culture Clashes,” (video lecture in ETHM 613 at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, 2016).

³²⁹ Titon, “Knowing Fieldwork,” 39.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

This idea of relationships beyond ethnomusicology is especially applicable to my situation, since my chosen field is not one I can leave—it is where I live, and it is among people, like Sharee and others, with whom I share portions of my weekly life. Acknowledging relationships *as* ethnomusicology is equally important in regards to this kind of visiting Titon (and I) advocates in fieldwork. I again choose Bakan’s definition of ethnomusicology here because it keeps people at the center of the work.

Another voice that has contributed to my philosophy of fieldwork has been that of Philip V. Bohlman in his article *Returning to the Ethnomusicological Past*.³³² His work explores the malleability of the boundaries between past and present as they exist in people’s individual and collective memories. His work was particularly informative to mine because so much of what happened, and still happens, in the singing square has happened in the past. The past is heavily present at every singing and in every conversation I have had with community members. The past it seems, in its various forms, is a regular member of the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*. Therefore, I had to be aware of it in order to wrestle with its presence in a way that contributed to answering the question of what it means to be an old harp singer.

I entered into deep relationship with the past of these singers as I read the newsletter archives³³³ of the Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee. I cheered with each passing year as Russell Whitehead celebrated first his one-hundredth birthday, then his one-hundred-first, then one-hundred-second, and teared up at the account of his funeral service and the singers that came to honor him. This is one of many examples from the newsletters and the accounts of singings and songs they treasured and kept alive. I discovered as I read these archives that each singing

³³² Philip V. Bohlman, “Returning to the Ethnomusicological Past,” in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Second Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 246-70.

³³³ These are all available at oldharp.org.

that I attended afterward became more rich and layered as the music “wrested from the past”³³⁴ sounded “a present that is meaningful.”³³⁵

I conducted most of my fieldwork at the monthly practice singings (once gatherings were allowed to resume in January of 2021). While I was actively participating in the singings, I recorded the event on my iPhone. Later, at home I transferred it to a password protected computer where I listened to the recording and took notes. I then compiled those notes with the quick jottings I had made in the margins of my tunebook during the singing.

David Sarten also asked me to help coordinate a spring singing school, an event that has not been held in the area since the spring of 2009, almost fifteen years ago. A singing school is a weekend event in which harp singers gather from neighboring regions, often from several states away, to participate in one large singing square. It also serves the purpose of education, providing workshops and training in the traditions for any newcomers or returning members wishing a refresher course. But Sarten appeared to be hopeful that this singing school might attract new members of the younger generation. By involving the local community college music department where I am adjunct, I hope to take old harp singing into the local area young people in an effort to work together with Sarten to raise awareness and stir local, younger interest in the tradition prior to the singing school.³³⁶

Many possibilities of focus exist within my old harp singing. While I could not fully pursue each one in its entire depth, I hoped to pursue the musical, textual, historical, and communal topics far enough to inform the biggest questions that had emerged from the field thus far: What makes someone an old harp singer? Is it tied to the *New Harp of Columbia* tunebook

³³⁴ Bohlman, “Returning to the Ethnomusicological Past,” 247.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ As of the writing of this paper, the singing school has not happened but is still in the planning stages.

specifically? Is it tied to the tunes and poetry in the songs people call “their” songs? Is it simply a matter of being a proficient shaped note singer? Or perhaps it is something more ineffable than these? Or is it a combination of all the above factors?

Particular and careful attention needed to be given to the texts in the songs of ownership in order to understand what made someone an old harp singer. Those songs that each singer claimed as “theirs” become what Roberta King has called “self-theologizing”—a way that they “give voice to their understanding of God.”³³⁷ This emic understanding could provide an insight into their worldview. A compiled list of each member’s personal songs to compare and contrast not only within those lists themselves but also within the rest of the songs in the tunebook that remained “unclaimed,” as it were, could give excellent emic insight into this community

Most of my fieldwork was participatory action research that was grounded in live singing events with the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*. At these singings, I participated by singing one of the parts (the lead or tenor line), eventually becoming proficient enough to “lead” my own songs. I received real time, group training and feedback on my progress at the time of the singings. The act of picking my own song, singing the shapes, then singing the poetry, and experiencing the center of the square allowed me to musically be in the world of an old harp singer.

The re-opening of Sevier County post-Covid-19, allowed for more visitation time. These visting times that Titon valued proved to be priceless in my understanding of this community. As I sat, with my plate of finger sandwiches, chips, casseroles, and a slice (or two) of pie, I unplugged from chronological time and allowed myself to sink into relational time. I soon discovered conversations about daughters-in-law and grandkids and doctor’s appointments

³³⁷ Roberta King, *Global Arts and Christian Witness: Exegeting Culture, Translating the Message, and Communicating Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 112.

flowed around talk of tunes and past singings and singers like mountain creeks flow around the rocks in their path. This allowed the community opportunity to also get to know me as someone other than the lady who showed up mid-pandemic to learn shaped note singing. I learned that it was not my growing proficiency that garnered acceptance. It was my sitting and listening to stories and telling my own until the last person left, and then helping the host wash dishes and re-package food.

Participants in the study to be interviewed included: David Sarten, president of The Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*; Andrew Whaley, vice-president of The Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*; and other members of the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia* and the Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee. Questions for these interviews were taken from a roughly forty-question questionnaire and ranged from general questions about the participant's history with old harp singing to specific questions about songs they claim as their own and why. The questionnaire used can be seen in the Appendix. My intent was not for these interviews to be clinical, but instead my purpose was to use the questions as prompts to promote a conversation about old harp singing. In addition to the above-mentioned participatory observations, other data came from recordings, documentaries, and archival documents.

Schrag mentions fragility in his criteria for community. It is a component that can get buried among weightier topics. However, the fragility of the moment when I saw Sarten start to smile at the thought of finally reading a thesis from a member of the group and of the multiple realities I began to glimpse became a moment of realization for me. This older gentleman's fragile confidence in an outsider, the threats to old harp singing tradition and identity in contrast with the booming tourist appetite for a constructed image less than a mile away from where we stood, the generational gap they were attempting to close to ensure continuity, the reality of a

mostly elderly community that depend on these gatherings in the midst of a global pandemic³³⁸--the old harp singing community seemed suddenly both delicate and brittle. Standing at the intersection of all these realities, I realized I had entered another. This was the mountaineer existence—intimacy with fragility. Carving out a life out and protecting it against the uncontrollable forces of nature, other men, and industries—it made needing one another, their faith, and their songs more urgent and poignant.

The mountaineers braved hard winters and seasons of difficult work, often riddled with isolation, provision depletion, and death as they settled this region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These realities have not gone away with time, instead they are continually reborn in each new generation. The year 2020 and the global pandemic have taught all of us the fresh lesson about the fragility of life, of provision, and the difficulties of isolation. The stories behind the old harp singing community are still relevant to today's world. Perhaps this new chapter in their collective story might aid in a renewal of local engagement and preservation of a centuries-old tradition that took root among the original settlers and survivors in the mountains of East Tennessee.

³³⁸ The Old Harp Singers of East Tennessee normally have more singings scheduled per month at varying host churches, but COVID-19 has affected many of the church locations they use. The "Middle Creek Singing," as it is called, is one of a handful of the churches still open and functioning as of October 2020.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

An Ethnographic Glimpse into Old Harp Singing

I officially embarked on the journey to answer the question of what makes someone a harp singer in January 2021. I and my own copy of the *The New Harp of Columbia*, newly delivered from Amazon, enter the doors of the Middle Creek United Methodist Church fellowship hall on the third Tuesday night of the month. This is their designated monthly date for the practice sing. The heat has not been turned on in the hall, and the air is as crisp as my new tunebook pages. The twelve people present—mostly men, several children, and a handful of women—settle into the church folding chairs arranged in a square still in our coats and flannels as the heat clicked on.

Members smile at me and are polite but talk quietly to one another about who should sit where and if so-and-so is coming. Ultimately, the chit-chat comes around to a collective conversation topic that is very popular these days: Masks on or off? The president, David Sarten, admits he has had the Covid-19 virus and several heads nod around the square. I am one of them. A quick litany of sick dates and sympathetic groans ensue, and I chime in with mine: “I had it over New Year’s.” David nods toward me sympathetically and then leaves the mask issue to personal preference. Everyone sheds their mask. There is a brief pause as we all sit there with exposed, but smiling, faces—it felt odd, in today’s world.

Joe, a kindly-voiced man, in jeans, a flannel shirt, and heavy jacket leans over to the young girl sitting beside him in a dress, tights, and bright, royal blue glasses. She cradles a tune book be-decked with small, colorful post-it notes sticking out from the pages. Joe asks, “Are you going to lead like last time, ‘Lizabeth?’” From the treble section Andrew, a younger man still in his work boots, notes, “Did a good job.” Joe continues, “I see you got more stickers! That’s

good—more favorites now?” Elizabeth nods and clutches her tunebook to her chest. Andrew draws attention away from her with a comment about the empty alto section. Elizabeth relaxes her grip on the tunebook.

David calls the group to order by welcoming all who have come—old and new faces—and smiles warmly at those present in the square. His white beard cannot hide his dimple, nor his age the twinkle in his eye. “Let’s start with 107 (HOLY MANNA) as we’re accustomed to. Verses one and three.” He produces a pitch pipe from his overall pocket, blows his pitch and then belts out a solid broken chord in resounding bass that reverberates off the concrete walls: Do, Sol, Mi, Do, holding the lower Do in a mellow bass. Those in the square catch their note and hold the chord with him. “On the shapes,” he says, and the room awakens with a thumping, three-part harmony (still no altos present). I am a measure behind, then a few beats, then I catch them at the cadence: Mi, Re, Do. I quickly lose them again as the chorus repeated unexpectedly (to me). I catch them again at the same cadence. David calls, “On the poetry!” And the words “Brethren, we have met to worship...” roll on in open harmonies (apparently, no altos are coming). And after we sing the verse about the sisters joining to help us, David calls on Andrew to open in prayer.

During the prayer, my mind wanders. Are we just singing? Are we worshipping? What is the story here? Can I really learn this? My prayer becomes to at least sing more than a cadence or two tonight. After the “Amen,” David turns to the treble section and invites Andrew to “start us off.” Andrew steps into the center of the square and calls 85 (GREENLAND).

Andrew is the vice-president of the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia*. He has been singing harp since he was young and comes from generations of harp singers in Wears Valley. He takes a moment to explain what is about to happen in his quiet, calm manner: “This is 2/4

time, and I'm gonna beat it up and down. Very simple. To stay on track, look at the bars—when you come to a bar you need to be going up (his arm with hand in a loose fist goes up), cross the bar, go down (his arm follows his own instruction). Just up and down, no matter if it's two, four, or three." Andrew studies the book quietly, and then gives us the starting pitches without aid of the pitch pipe, in a clear, focused tenor holding his own note: Do, Sol. The square finds and holds their note. "On the shapes!" And the process from before is repeated, as are my cadence catch-ups. When we get to the poetry, I resonate with the words of the text, "...the fiercer be the tempest the sooner it is o'er," but realize I am beginning to get good at recognizing the shapes for Mi, Re, Do—a common ending cadence in major tunes.

The song ends and the turn moves to Jeremy, a young dad present with his son, James. Jeremy stands in the center and calls number 84 (THE MIDNIGHT CRY). He comments, "This was the first song I ever sang at any real singing. It was at Oldham's Creek." He, too, self-pitches, but realized it is too high when the square chords on his notes. He re-pitches and the square re-chords, heads nod that this is better, and the singing process starts. It is shaky this time. I am completely lost, but I do not appear to be the only one. Jeremy stops the singing before the poetry can begin and re-chords a third time. This time, I am determined to master the stepwise movement. I last for a verse. Everyone else lasts a full verse and chorus, but it begins to disintegrate again on verse two. Jeremy decides, "Let's finish the story and sing verse five (the final verse)." They all struggle along. I give up and listen. I have to wonder if the struggle is due to the tunebook format of only having one or two verses matched under the notes and the rest of the verses are in poetic form under the staff. Just as they all struggle together to the end, they all laugh together when it is over. Jeremy comments while he makes his way back to his

seat: “In the new heavens and new earth those words will fit the tune.” Everyone chuckles and David affirms in a grandfatherly bass voice, “It is a struggle.”

David turns to me. It is my turn; do I want to lead? I get a little stomach churn and decline saying, “I’ll call one, but I won’t lead...I’m going to work up my courage one of these times.” I have fallen in love with number 99 (MORNING TRUMPET). I call it and Jeremy asks his son James if he wants to lead it. There is a quiet and polite deferring back and forth between James and me. Somewhere across the square I am jokingly accused of being afraid and I readily admit it. I am. James takes the center and politely asks for a pitch from David, the pitch pipe owner. This is a well-known and loved song in the community and they sing it heartily. I solidly grab my ending cadences, this time the minor Do, La, La, and enjoy singing along with the poetry. As the final minor chord dies away, there are many exclamations of “That was good!” or “Good!” James, no longer quiet and deferring, seizes the opportunity to chatter excitedly about how it is his sister’s favorite song, and he and all his siblings play instruments. His eyes are as bright as his voice and his smile makes his freckled face even more animated. Everyone gives him respect until he is done speaking and seated. His father, Jeremy comments, “But the best instrument is the sacred harp.” And with that David moves us around the square to his brother, Joe.

This process repeats. Joe calls number 16 (GREENFIELDS). Next is little Elizabeth who quietly calls number 47 (THE PROMISED LAND) and stoically leads as we sing, “I am bound for the promised land...” She sits back down silently, pushing the blue glasses up her nose, as voices from around the square call to her, “Good!” “You’ve been practicing.” “That was near perfect, ‘Lizabeth.” She smiles with tight lips.

The turn keeps moving around. Others take the center, call their number, lead the shapes and the poetry, and take their seat amid encouraging comments or little jokes that generate chuckles around the square. The turn comes to a visitor, a young woman who Jeremy appears to know. She calls number 57 (PROTECTION) but declines to lead. David asks Jeremy to lead in her place and Jeremy agrees but invites her to come up with him “to hear how it sounds with everybody singing at you. It’s nice.” She declines. The song is sung, and the turn moves on.

The next two songs must be restarted and re-pitched. This does not seem to bother anyone, and the leader takes it in stride each time amid some jokes and friendly laughter. The overall feeling is that we are all in this together and mistakes happen, try again. The turn has moved all around the square and we are back at the start.

David pauses for announcements for other singings happening and group discussion again gravitates to Covid-19 and restrictions. Andrew mentions that hopefully the annual singing at Oldham’s Creek will be able to happen on the fourth Sunday in March. He states that our practice singing here at Middle Creek is the only singing in the area that is carrying on. There is a moment of silence. I can feel how deeply that statement landed in the room. James’ bright young voice breaks the silence, “How long will that singing be if it happens?” Andrew replies with a chuckle in his voice, “Well, it depends on how excited we are, James. If we really enjoy it, we might sing for about two and half hours. Sometimes they’ve even sung for about three hours...But if it’s not too good it won’t be as long (everyone laughs in a knowing way). You’ll just have to come find out, James.”

David brings the gathering back to order and says, “Let’s start around again,” and I realize this time will be make or break for me. My breath gets short, and I want to blame post-Covid lung issues, but I know it is nerves. Also, I take off my coat. I just got warm.

Andrew starts round two with number 24 (SALVATION). I have to wonder if he read my panic when the poetry stated, "...come with your guilt and fear oppress'd..." Jeremy takes center square next with number 14 (MEAR), a tune he describes as "one of our prettiest songs." It is a slower, hymn-like tune, and I mangle through well enough to gain a little extra courage. I am next.

I call number 183 (LONG LONG AGO). Before I can answer the question of will I lead, Joe interjects expectantly, "You're gonna get up and lead this time, aren't you?" I hesitate. Jeremy chimes in, "Kinda all you do is stand there." Andrew adds his encouragement, "We don't pay any attention to the leader anyway." Everyone laughs.

I stand and walk to the center. "Anyone gonna help me?" I half question, half implore. David advises: "Just follow Joe." Andrew also counsels: "Starts on a down." Joe looks up at me and smiles and pumps his arm slowly, "Just up and down." I nod and attempt a smile as I ask for a pitch. David blows the note. I pitch: Do, Sol, and hold my note—a very shaky Sol. I look down and the shapes swim in the staff, but I summon all courage: "Sing the shapes." And we are off.

I start on an up-swing despite their counsel but find the beat two measures later and by the chorus realize I am actually doing it—singing the correct shapes and beating the time! It is exhilarating—even if I do confuse La for Fa in the first phrase. The sound coming from all sides made up for my lack. We make it to the poetry, and I know I am home free, and we all sing together, "Where are the friends that to me were so dear, Long, long ago, long, long ago...." By the end of the song, I knew I had made friends. After the final chord fades, David exclaims to Andrew, "I believe we found us a new leader!" Andrew concurs and Jeremy notes, "We probably paid attention because of the pencil." I did not realize I still clutched it in my time

keeping hand. Joe adds with a smile, “It makes you look so official—like a baton.” Everyone laughs and I settle back in my seat, thrilled with my small victory. And the turn moves on.

Joe stands and calls number 180 (WHITESTOWN). Since it is a fugue, Andrew moves over to the alto section to cover the part. We sing the shapes and before we head for the poetry Joe looks at me and asks, “Getting the hang of it?” I reply that it took me a minute, but yes now I was, and off the group went on the poetry. David remarked that fugues take a lot of wind, especially after having Covid-19. We all agree—I had really felt it, too.

Blue bespeckled Elizabeth is up for a turn again and calls number 31 (NATIVE COUNTRY), the poetry is “My country, tis of thee....” Joe cautions her, “We can try it, but we always mess it up because it’s just enough different.” There is a quiet exchange between Joe and Elizabeth that ends in Joe standing and saying, “But we’ll try it. It will still be in the book when we get done.”

Joe and Andrew discuss the time change in the middle of the tune from 2/4 to 2/2 and debate if 2/2 is slower or faster. I am invited to weigh in on the matter. Perhaps they remember I am a music teacher. Rhythm was never my strong suit, but I feel pressure to contribute a smart answer; however, I am unsure. I feel the red creeping into my face as I am unable to render a tempo verdict to them. They decide to try it faster at the 2/2 and I lamely agree. The square chords and sings, promptly derailing at the 2/2. We chord and try again and derail even worse at the 2/2. Andrew seems to think faster makes sense and looks at me and I nod agreement. But Joe refers to the instruction manual at the front of the book and says a little more authoritatively, “2/2 is about three seconds a measure, and 2/4 is about one and half seconds per measure. It needs to be slower.” We defer to Joe and try again, muddling all the way through this time. “Well, Joe, you were right!” Andrew concedes. I can feel I am still a little red-faced. Joe turns to Elizabeth, “You got another?” We all laugh.

Elizabeth calls number 52 in the back (EVENING SHADE) followed by a chorus of encouraging “Good choice!” It is another fugue and we do well. I even manage to keep up—it is a slow fugue.

The turn keeps moving around the square and we get derailed again with another lesser known tune, number 64 on the bottom (FOUNTAIN), called by the young woman who Jeremy knows. Jeremy asks David, “Do we ever sing this?” David replies that it is different from the hymnal version and asks Andrew to lead it. Andrew pitches it himself, decides against it, and lowers the pitch. We try the shapes, and it sounds like every man for himself. Yet, slowly a lead line and strong cadences emerge. Hearing it form from out of what seemed like vocal chaos seconds earlier is fascinating.

The turn moves to the bass section, and a young man, first time visitor, who also knows Jeremy steps forward fearlessly and calls number 36 in the back, the tune is MIDDLEBROOK but the text is “Come, Thou Fount.” Andrew says that he does not know this one. Jeremy observes that number 56 on the bottom, WARRENTON, has the same text and is a tune that will be more familiar. Andrew observes with a smile that it still is not the tune for which the young man is looking. Everyone chuckles and agrees. It is a rookie mistake, and myself, having just graduated seven songs ago from rookie status spoke up, “I’ve fallen into that trap before, too!” Everyone around me nodded in agreement. WARRENTON goes foot-stompingly well for the group, even for me and the rookie in the center.

Not wishing to cheat anyone out of a proper experience, David asks the young man if he wishes to call another song. He calls Number 80 on the bottom (SHAWMUT) and everyone is happy over the choice. The singing is strong and unified, and everyone is quiet as the final chord fades against the white concrete blocks of the fellowship hall walls.

After a pause David calls number 143 (WONDROUS LOVE), and it has the same lingering effect as SHAWMUT. David quietly utters, “Thank ye,” and sits back down. Once seated, he asks the crowd if there are any special requests of songs to call or lead before we close. A few take him up on it and 81 on the bottom (GOLDEN HILL) and 117 (CORONATION) are sung heartily.

David invites us all to turn to number 95 (PARTING HAND) to close “as we are accustomed to doing.” It is a cheerful tune about temporarily parting from friends on earth and looks forward to the eternal day when friends will no longer have to part. After the final chord dies away, David declares, “Good singing!” with a big grin, “Didn’t expect to see so many come out! Be safe going home.” And people begin to disperse, putting away their folding chair and disappearing out into the frosty mountain night.

My car’s headlights sliced through the winter night on the winding roads home. I considered each person, what I knew of them, the songs they had chosen, the words, the tunes, and the shapes. The survival and preservation of harp singing in East Tennessee was suddenly a very complex question hanging shapeless before me. I smiled at the irony. But as my mind wound around the hours I had just spent singing, a new question emerged and took shape: what makes someone an old harp singer? If this tradition is to be preserved and survive, the core issue becomes that of *who*—for singing is not an artifact to put in a museum. The tunebook is, yes. But what I had experienced in the fellowship hall—the singing itself—was a living, active thing. This was a matter of *living* preservation and a question of *who* was doing the living.

My plan moving forward becomes to continue attending the practice singings and annual singings if they are able to be held, and I will also dive into the newsletters and archives available to me from the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia* to ascertain the answers to my questions: what makes someone a harp singer and what goes into a living preservation?

Fieldwork Findings

Since January, I have attended and actively participated in practice singings at Middle Creek United Methodist Church every third Tuesday of the month on February 16, 2021; March 16, 2021; and April 20, 2021. With the accessibility of vaccinations and decrease in Covid-19 active cases Sevier County and surrounding counties lifted restrictions and annual singings resumed. I have attended three annual singings to date: Oldham's Creek Missionary Baptist Church Annual Fourth Sing on March 28, 2021; Tuckaleechee United Methodist Church Annual Third Sunday Sing on April 18, 2021; and Middle Creek United Methodist Church Annual First Sunday Sing on May 1, 2021. I have also read the newsletter archive dating from 1982 to the present, and interviewed members representing each age range of singer.

My field notes, recordings, and newsletter notes yielded many characteristics of a harp singer. The first step, and perhaps most obvious, yet at the same time not the simplest was learning the shapes. All participants interviewed from youngest (nine years old) to oldest (mid-60s) agreed that the key element to harp singing and being a harp singer is first knowing the shapes and the pitches they represent. This task became the gateway and gatekeeper to becoming a harp singer. It separates the observers of the tradition from the participants, and thus preservers, of the tradition.

Many practice sings are attended by visitors who primarily come to listen and observe. Their reasons vary from uninformed curiosity to wanting to experience a present sound of what passed loved ones experienced. Or perhaps they come seeking community. While their reasons may vary, the core motivation is the same: they come seeking a connection, often to the past, but a connection none-the-less.

These observers may request songs, but they do not sing, and they do not lead. Yet they are welcomed, given a loaner tunebook to follow along, and invited at each round to participate at their own level of comfort. Some choose to hesitantly stand beside a leader and experience the sound and spirit at the center of the square. While few choose active participation as singers, some do.

Andrew Whaley, age 30 and a traditional singer, credits this aspect of connection as being the defining element that makes harp singing a singing tradition first, versus a worshipping tradition. He notes that while he would feel out of place at one of the harp singings “up north, in a big city,” and would share no commonality with others in the square, the experience would still be a good one because of the connection harp singers share, at their core, for the love of the music.³³⁹

David Sarten mentioned, as an example, a young woman who had joined us for the second half of the annual singing at Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church on June 27, 2021. The young woman had sung intermittently with the group over the years and was welcomed and given a book. When asked to lead, she stepped forward, called a song, and led it followed by smiles and camaraderie all around. What I did not realize that day, as David Sarten pointed out, was that the young woman visits from Portland, Oregon. David went on to say, “I know if we really talked about life and political views, she and I would have nothing in common...but the music connects us...there is a bond there. It unifies us.”³⁴⁰

At the annual singings, which draw a bigger crowd—both of square participants and observers—the newcomers are given the choice of sitting in the square and singing or sitting in the congregation and observing. Yet, at the end of each turn about the square the invitation is

³³⁹Andrew Whaley, interview by author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

³⁴⁰David Sarten, interview by author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

extended to the congregation for requests, and the singers happily oblige. Everyone gets an opportunity, and no one is ever denied a song.

But what of those of us who move from observer to participator, as I had done? The history books and newsletter archives reveal that in times gone by, and as recent as a generation ago, singing schools were still an active part of the tradition and important aid to the correct learning of the shapes and their correlating pitches, counting, and beating time. For those of us joining the community in the 2020s, it is trial by fire and essentially “barefooting”³⁴¹ this new musical language.

Veterans point to aids such as the lessons at the beginning of the tunebook, called the rudiments, remembering that *The New Harp of Columbia*, and other tunebooks like it, did not come into existence for the purpose of being a hymnal or a songbook but instead for the explicit purpose of being a singing manual. The purpose of the tunebook is in the tagline of the title: *A System of Musical Notation, With a Note for Each Sound and a Shape for Each Note*.³⁴² A combing of the newsletters yielded snippets of interviews conducted with the region’s original “old-timers” like Burl Adams, Bates Elliot, Russell Whitehead, Charlie Clabo, Wiley Lamons, Gideon Fryer, and Martha Graham, to name only a few that sang in the East Tennessee squares dating back to the 1920s and before. Burl Adams (b. 1897), one of the fathers of modern old harp singing in Wears Valley, Sevier County, gave the following advice to beginners, “Get a book! Learn the notes! Take some effort!”³⁴³ Bates Elliot—who is famously known for his condemning

³⁴¹ A style of immersive language learning popularized by Donald N. Larson in his *Guidelines for Barefoot Language Learning: An Approach Through Involvement and Independence* (Minneapolis, MN: CMS Publishing, 1984).

³⁴² M. L. Swan and W. H. Swan. *The New Harp of Columbia: a System of Musical Notation, With a Note for Each Sound and a Shape for Each Note: Containing a Variety of Most Excellent Psalm and Hymn Tunes, Odes and Anthems, Happily Adapted to Church Service, Singing-Schools and Societies* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

³⁴³ Bruce Wheeler, “Burl Adams,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 20 (Fall 1998): 3-4.

to eternal damnation those who sing too low and too slow—took great effort with the notes and in his later years, studied the tunes with a jeweler’s glass when his eyesight began to fail him. He would memorize them this way, and then call and lead them from memory at the sings.³⁴⁴ Wiley Lamons replied in similar fashion to the same question: “My advice to all is just learn the shapes and enjoy Old Harp.”³⁴⁵

David Sarten, his brother Joe Sarten, Andrew Whaley, and Sharee Green all have referenced these old-timers in our conversations about learning old harp and singing “correctly.” They pointed out in an after-singing visiting session that the old-timers did not sing the way the tradition is sung now. I was shocked. They revealed that it was the resurgence of the rudiments and emphasis on teaching them brought about in the mid-1990s by Larry Olszewski, a non-traditional singer, that began to shift local tradition. Before Olszewski, the old-timers sang the songs the way they remembered them—aural memory—not necessarily as they were notated in the tunebook.

This shift that has taken place in Whaley and Green’s lifetime, and they recalled the transition time with chuckles. Whaley recounted laughing, “Oh yeah, if you sang it differently, the old timers would just shut their books and look at you!”³⁴⁶ However, Whaley and Green both shared in their conviction that this shift was the best thing to happen to the tradition in recent generations. Green, a middle school teacher, put heavy emphasis on the music education aspect of the tradition now as one of the key reasons harp singing is important and unique among local musical traditions.³⁴⁷ Both singers placed high value on the singing school tradition that

³⁴⁴ Larry Olszewski, “Bates Elliot,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 21 (Spring 1998): 6.

³⁴⁵ Sharee Rich, “Wiley Lamons Interview,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 20 (Fall 1997): 4.

³⁴⁶ Andrew Whaley, interview by author, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, June 27, 2021.

³⁴⁷ Sharee Green, interview by author, Sevierville, Tennessee, July 2, 2021.

Olszewski spearheaded during his lifetime, and all parties interviewed agreed that a revival of this rudimentary teaching tradition was long overdue in the community.

When this shift to “correct” singing began to occur one by-product was that community members who learned it the old, “incorrect” way still sometimes will slip and sing it that way even while looking at the page. This has resulted in many a disclaimer spoken in my direction, usually by Joe Sarten or Whaley, as a leader steps to the center of the square that this is “another one we don’t sing right,” usually followed by a chuckle or two. But following the spirit of Burl Adam’s words, they still “take their effort,” to sing it correctly or at least to acknowledge that it is technically (rudimentally) incorrect.

“Taking my effort” to learn the shapes and applying it to enjoying the Old Harp as Burl, Bates, and Wiley encouraged some thirty to forty years ago has led me to believe that this first step of becoming a harp singer is an exercise closely related to bi-musicality. Mantle Hood developed the term *bi-musicality* in the late 1950s as a way of looking at crossing musical system boundaries by using the student’s “ear, eyes, hands and voice” as their primary guide to performance fluency.³⁴⁸ Borrowing from the world of linguistics and grammars, Hood drew parallels to learning entirely new-to-the-student musical systems in an effort to become fluent.

I view my acquisition of shaped note singing as acquiring a kind of new musical language in which the goal is to become fluent. However, the fact that harp music is essentially based on antiquated Western harmony principles precludes me from being truly bi-musical and led me to consider alternate ways of considering and learning this “dialect” of American music in which the community seems to “code-switch” adeptly between it and other musical “dialect”

³⁴⁸ Bruno Nettl, “A Nonuniversal Language,” in *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-Three Discussions* (Urbana, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 63; and Mantle Hood, “The Challenge of Bi-Musicality,” *Ethnomusicology* 4, no. 2 (May 1960): 55-59.

traditions.³⁴⁹ This bi-musicality or bi-dialectality has been present in my experience in some fashion at each sing I have attended as I attempted to leave behind what I know and what my ear “knows” and function for a few hours in a new, but vaguely familiar, system.

This phenomenon is clearly and consistently seen within the community in the singing and discussion of number 16, GREENFIELDS.³⁵⁰ Number 16 is a popular tune choice, being called at over fifty percent of the singings I have attended. It is usually led by Joe Sarten and often prefaced by or epilogued with a comment on how they “don’t sing it like it is in the book.” Hal Wilson, a regular at all the sings, gave some background as to why this happens.

I called and led number 16 one evening³⁵¹ in an attempt to branch out from my same two comfortable tunes. After the song, Joe Sarten reflected: “That’s another we don’t sing like it’s written...but that’s the way we’ve always done it, I reckon somebody taught us wrong.” Whaley commented, “We make a bird’s eye and ignore the rests.” I had heard these observations before, but Wilson contributed something new: “That’s because we didn’t learn it out of the harp book. We learned it out of the old church hymnals.” Agreement was voiced from the older crowd represented in the square. An older overall clad gentleman with a long beard, had the last say in the matter: “Well, if you learnt it wrong, and you sing it wrong, and then everyone sings it wrong—it’s right!” Everyone laughed.

However, it is Hood who shall have the last laugh. Whether or not these men and women were first introduced to GREENFIELDS³⁵² in church from the hymnal or at an old harp singing

³⁴⁹ Bi-dialecticality refers to fluently and fluidly crossing system borders of dialects. An understanding of dialectical and cultural “code-switching” would be helpful for anyone seeking to become fluent in another musical system that is self-contained within an umbrella musical culture. See *Code-Switching* by Penelope Gardner-Chloros (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³⁵⁰ Lewis Edson, GREENFIELDS, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 16.

³⁵¹ This account occurred at the April 20, 2021, practice singing at Middle Creek United Methodist, Sevierville, Tennessee.

³⁵² Edson, *New Harp of Columbia*, 16.

from *The New Harp of Columbia*, these individuals cross musical system boundaries when they sing this tune, which results in “wrong-right” singing, to put it in Tony’s terms. It is not that they were taught wrong, as Joe indicated, it is a matter of the fact that they were taught right—twice. GREENFIELDS³⁵³ then becomes this community’s version of a mixture of two languages from two different contexts when it is sung—a mixing of two rights, as it were. For a detailed breakdown of the differences, I would have to hear the church hymnal version. I regret that I never had the opportunity to hear the church hymnal version by itself.

This sub-phenomenon of bi-musicality also occurs in other forms in the community. Number 11 in the *New Harp of Columbia* and number 11 in its appendix are both versions of OLD HUNDRED³⁵⁴, each has harmonies that differ both from each other and from any version I have heard before, including mainline denominational churches where it is known as “The Doxology.” As I listened to my recordings of the part lines of both number 11s, it became obvious that singers added notes and rhythms to which their ears were accustomed from other musical systems, as opposed to being faithful to what their eyes were reading on the page.

My efforts in bi-musicality, or bi-dialecticality, are beginning to yield fruit. By my fifth and sixth singings, I found I can follow the line confidently on the shapes and have ceased to confuse the shapes for Fa, Sol, and La. The only time I flounder is when the leader decides to take the tempo faster than I am used to, and then it feels like I am back to my days of being lost until a cadence.

I was shocked when I listened back to later field recordings. My voice had changed. I was stunned. I was used to hearing my bell-like, classically trained, vertical soprano voice pierce the recordings. It always made me cringe a little as it stood out from the rest. But not this time.

³⁵³ Edson, *New Harp of Columbia*, 16.

³⁵⁴ Luther, *New Harp of Columbia*, 11 and A11.

My vowels were spread wide, my tone was more from my chest and head, and I breathed in all the “wrong” spots. I had begun my transition to being bi-musical/bi-dialectical in my voice without even realizing it.

I found my next task was to focus on difficult intervals. An example of this is in number 38 (BRADLEY).³⁵⁵ At the bar line between measures four and five, the interval of Sol to Si can be found. At the March 16, 2021, practice sing, after this interval derailed the tune attempt twice, Whaley pointed out that this was a difficult interval that required practice and memorizing. Even though it is a major third, or as another member pointed out the same distance as Do to Mi, it feels unfamiliar because we are so far from Do at this point in the phrase.

Si intervals have also been my undoing as a similar issue occurs for me in number 20 in the appendix of the tunebook (FAIRFIELD).³⁵⁶ The antepenultimate measure contains the intervals Re, Si, Sol, La. Again, the Si down to Sol is a difficult interval to anticipate and hear, and it requires practice and memorizing, as Whaley advised.

One of the other intervals I have consistently had a hard time with is found in number 74 (NEVER PART AGAIN).³⁵⁷ This is a rollicking camp meeting song that incorporates dotted rhythms and octave leaps. The problem for me was that the octave leap is not on Do, it is on Re immediately followed by a descending scale that works its way back to low Do. Again, I believe my issue was losing the pitches the further the tune took me away from Do. The fact that it is a rare occurrence in old harp music to move far away from Do for a long period also contributes to the difficulty of it. However, I have continued to “take my effort” and have practiced these non-

³⁵⁵ M.L. Swan, BRADLEY, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 38.

³⁵⁶ Hitchcock, FAIRFIELD, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), A20.

³⁵⁷ Unknown, *New Harp of Columbia*, 74.

Do based and non-stepwise, unfamiliar intervals as I continued my quest of becoming fluent in old harp singing.

Harp singing proper has two pillars. The music pillar consists of tunes and shaped notes; and the text pillar consists of the poetry set to those tunes. The defining statements of the leader hinge on these two pillars: “Sing the shapes!” “Sing the poetry!” Becoming a harp singer starts with learning to sing the shapes and taking steps toward a bi-musical or bi-dialectical fluency. The second step to becoming an old harp singer has to do with the second pillar—the poetry, which in ways is just as beloved to this community.

The poetry is used in two ways in the old harp community. The first way the poetry is elevated in the old harp singing community is through the creation of a type of short-hand speech to convey deeper meaning. I found this to be present more so in the written communications within the newsletters, but I have also heard it used in conversation around the square. The short hand occurs when a snippet of verse is inserted into verbal conversation or written communication to convey a deeper meaning all parties will understand. For example, in a newsletter article about singing school masters, a former student relates an anecdote from his time with singing master Moses Cheney (1776-1856). He prefaces his story of attempting to sing for the master the first time with “I lift my heart and voice, oh, let me not be put to shame!”³⁵⁸ Any old harp singer will know that this is taken from a community favorite, number 81 on the bottom, GOLDEN HILL.³⁵⁹ True old harp singers will know that this snippet sits in the poetry bookended by God’s kindness and mercy.

Another example of the phenomenon in the written communication occurs in an apology from the newsletter compiler for failing to properly coordinate start times for a sing with Gideon

³⁵⁸ Olszewski, “In the Beginning,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 8.

³⁵⁹ Unknown, *New Harp of Columbia*, 81.

Fryer, one of the community's venerated singing forefathers. The apology ends with, "But I believe 'All is well, all is well'."³⁶⁰ This line is taken from number 124, THE SAINT'S ADIEU.³⁶¹ The five verses of poetry speak to the glories of heaven that will be ours when we are "from every pain and sorrow free." Clearly, the miscommunication between Olszewski and Fryer had caused Olszewski some pain and sorrow of mind and heart, and perhaps he found the forgiving release from verse two: "Weep not my friends, my friends, weep not for me, All is well, all is well; My sins are pardon'd, pardon'd, I am free, All is well, all is well."

The second way the words of the poetry are elevated in the community occurs at the sings themselves. The calling of a tune at a sing is called "a lesson," (this harkens back to the original singing school tradition) and the singers in the square are "the class." This lesson can be musical—perhaps the leader feels we need to work on that unfamiliar interval or tricky rhythms.³⁶² But the lesson can also be theological or emotionally personal.³⁶³ Examples of the latter abound from my field notes and recordings. The following are three different types of examples lifted from the many found in my notes:

At the February 18, 2021, practice sing, Wilson happily called number 44 (IDUMEA),³⁶⁴ quickly informing us all that this song had been in his head all day. When asked how many of the eight verses he wanted to sing, amid goads of "sing 'em all," he replied, "Let's do one, two, seven, and eight. Those are my favorites. I really do like the seventh—it's a lesson the world needs to hear today." Wilson paused and grinned, "Don't know if they'll listen, but they can still hear it!" After the chuckles settled, he self-pitched it, and we sang it loud and strong. As the last

³⁶⁰ Olszewski, "Epworth Sing," *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 3.

³⁶¹ M.L. Swan, THE SAINT'S ADIEU, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 124.

³⁶² Olszewski, "Comments on Old Harp," *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 21 (Spring 1998): 10-12; Olszewski, "On Tradition," *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 23 (Spring 1999): 9.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Davisson, *New Harp of Columbia*, 44.

chord drifted toward the rest of the world, David Sarten quietly affirmed, “That was good Hal, thank ye.”

Verse 7:
The men of grace have found
Glory begun below:
Celestial fruit on earthly ground,
From faith and hope may grow,³⁶⁵

At the April 20, 2021, practice sing, Joe Sarten called and led number 69 on the bottom (MIDDLETON)³⁶⁶, a forerunner of the tune that we would come to know as *Amazing Grace*. The final verse ends with a God who “every want supplies.” Before the chord even died away, Joe and his brother David Sarten jumped in with the following story: “Our uncles would sing ‘need’ not ‘want’ because, they’d say, ‘even God couldn’t satisfy everybody at once!’” This prompted brief discussion and Scripture quotes about learning to be content.

At the March 16, 2021, practice sing, Wilson called number 20 (HEBRON)³⁶⁷. Before he pitched it, he told the following story, “‘Thus far the Lord hath led me on.’ I love the words to this song. The older you get—the more you appreciate it. Few years back, Sandy had a brain aneurism and after she got well, we raised up a big flint rock in the yard—an Ebenezer—thus far the Lord has helped us....” Wilson got very choked up for a moment then spoke again, “It means something to know the Lord walks with you every day.” Whaley pitched it, and we sang it strong and unified.

Larry Olszewski, a beloved former old harp singer, had this summary about lessons for the class: “We are here to share this little piece of us. You are welcome to use these lessons

³⁶⁵ Swan and Swan, *The New Harp of Columbia*, 44.

³⁶⁶ M.L. Swan, MIDDLETON, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 69.

³⁶⁷ Lowell Mason, HEBRON, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 20.

anytime; they are not ours alone.”³⁶⁸ His thought demonstrates the idea that while lessons can grow out of personal places, they are ultimately intended for the community.

The shapes, the tunes, and the poetry will all give a singer access to the inner workings of the singing square. But a key element, perhaps the key element, of officially entering the inner circle of the square, so to speak, is all about the communal, shared element that springs from a deeply personal place. This is manifested in what I have come to call songs of ownership.

I first noticed this phenomenon at my very first singing in October of 2020. The shapes flabbergasted me, I enjoyed the poetry part of singing, and since I did not know anyone except my friend Sharee Green who had brought me, I just listened to the conversation and banter between songs. A common phrase quickly became evident to me. I jotted it down and did not think about it again until I attended the next month’s singing. Again, this phrase permeated the air between songs and has continued to do so at every singing I have attended. Here is a list of the mentions I have happened to catch over the last six months:

“This was Larry’s song.”

“This was Bruce’s song”

“That one was Martha’s song.”

“Can we sing Christine’s song?”

“She leads that one so well, I’m going to have to find myself a new song.”

“This one used to be another lady’s song, but she passed away, you should take it—you have a high voice like she did.”

“I thought this was her song, but I’ll lead it.”

“I’m not surprised he called that one—it’s always been his.”

“This one was my Grandma’s.”

³⁶⁸ Olszewski, “Comments on Old Harp,” 9.

“I’ve never led this one before, but it was one of Larry’s so I’m gonna try it tonight.”

“Well, it used to be one of mine, but I gave it up. Haven’t led it in a while.”

“Let’s sing this for Gideon, it was his song.”

“Let’s all remember Larry when we sing this one. It was his.”

“Jeremy, this one is yours as you’re the only one I’ve ever known to lead it.”

“I gave it up for Bill to take over, but Bill don’t hardly ever lead it, so I’ll go back to it again.”

Response: “Bill’s been out for a while—you gave him a chance.”

“Tony this one’s your song, I’ve never heard anyone call it but you.”

“This one’s becoming yours Elizabeth, you lead it every single time.”

“He oughta know this one—it’s his momma’s song.”

“That was mine at one time, I loved the polyphony.”

“This one was one of Myrtle’s songs.”

Context of these statements would indicate that multiple owners of a song do not exist at the same time. However, context also seems to indicate that song ownership is fluid and can be transferred between contemporaries and/or passed along after the original owner has died—an inheritance of sorts. This was a question I attempted to explore while interviewing community members. At first, they were unaware of any meaning to their language indicated ownership, particularly as it pertained to preserving their tradition. Surprise turned to acknowledgement which turned to the glad sharing of examples of their song ownership.

At first glance, the definition of song ownership came down to simply a matter of it being the song that you are known to lead. I gained deeper understanding when I pressed into why they led “their” songs. David Sarten replied that he chose his songs 143 (WONDROUS LOVE),³⁶⁹ 22 in

³⁶⁹ James Christopher, WONDROUS LOVE, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 143.

the back (DETROIT),³⁷⁰ and 63 on the bottom (AZMON)³⁷¹ because he loved the harmonies and found the poetry to be powerful which resulted in the “music taking you over”—a statement he related to the spiritual aspect of harp music.³⁷²

Green chose her songs based on different criteria. She shared that number 99 (MORNING TRUMPET)³⁷³ was hers because she had been leading it since she was four years old. It had been passed to her from its previous owner, Olszewski, who had taken her under his singing wing at an early age. In later years, Olszewski jokingly accused her of stealing it from him. Green considers number 56 on the bottom of the page (WARRENTON)³⁷⁴ to be hers as well. She said that she had always loved it when it was led by another singer who left the area, and when they left Green stepped in and took over the song. Finally, Green named number 21 on the top (ROCKINGHAM)³⁷⁵ as her song as well because she was always asked to lead it by an elderly beloved member, Dr. Bruce Wheeler. Green shared with a smile that she, “really wanted 117 (CORONATION)³⁷⁶—but that’s Kathleen’s and I don’t want to steal it from her.” But Green said that when Kathleen was not present she always liked to lead it or hear it led.³⁷⁷

Nine-year-old Elizabeth Wood was quick to list off songs she considers to be hers with number 162 in the back, Billings’ DAVID’S LAMINATION,³⁷⁸ being her first choice. When I asked her why she chose this solemn, almost morose, fugue she said it was because she loved to hear the basses enter by themselves in the chorus. She also said that she had studied the Bible story

³⁷⁰ Bradshaw, *New Harp of Columbia*, A22.

³⁷¹ Attr. to Lowell Mason, AZMON, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 63.

³⁷² David Sarten, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

³⁷³ White, *New Harp of Columbia*, 99.

³⁷⁴ Unknown, *New Harp of Columbia*, 56.

³⁷⁵ Lowell Mason, ROCKINGHAM, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 21.

³⁷⁶ Holden, *New Harp of Columbia*, 117.

³⁷⁷ Sharee Green, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, July 2, 2021.

³⁷⁸ Billings, *New Harp of Columbia*, A162.

right before she heard it for the first time and loved the link between to the two. She went on to list number 183 (LONG AGO)³⁷⁹ and number 47 (PROMISED LAND)³⁸⁰ as her songs as well because she liked the tunes and knew the Bible stories that accompanied them. When I asked if there were anymore, she grinned and said in nine-year-old fashion, “Weeeell...I like GREENFIELDS³⁸¹ a lot but it’s already Joe’s so...” but then she confided in me that she could sing GREENFIELDS³⁸², shapes and all, without even looking at the book. I congratulated her and asked her how that came to be. She returned to her stoicism that is so present at singings and solemnly informed me that she practiced—“like a lot!”³⁸³

The most interesting response I received regarding song ownership came from Andrew Whaley who became hesitant and deferred to David Sarten to name his songs. This is a common occurrence in this harp community. It is respectful to defer to the older generation, and Sarten obliged, “Well, Andrew, the number I most typically associate with you is probably 110.” Whaley concurred and said that it was a past member Henrietta Sharp’s song. Apparently, Henrietta was a regular institution at harp singings in Whaley’s adolescence, but she never took the center to lead and instead always asked him to lead in her stead. It had always been 110 (NORTH SALEM).³⁸⁴ He seemed touched to share a song with Sharp as bond to a community member, which was now an additional connection to the past.³⁸⁵

It is this bond to the past on which so many singers dwell. Green pointed out that sometimes a specific number becomes someone’s song because the song makes you “remember

³⁷⁹ Claimed by M.L. Swan, LONG AGO, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 183.

³⁸⁰ Durham, *New Harp of Columbia*, 47.

³⁸¹ Edson, *New Harp of Columbia*, 16.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Elizabeth Wood, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

³⁸⁴ Stephen Jenks, NORTH SALEM, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 110.

³⁸⁵ Andrew Whaley, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

someone who you cared for...that's why I used to lead 47 (PROMISED LAND)³⁸⁶ it was Larry's and I wanted to remember him."³⁸⁷ This was a general sentiment I encountered with other singers as well. Singing tunes that recalled a former member was a way of preserving that member's memory and presence in the square. What I was unprepared for was the revelation that followed which unlocked the answers to many questions in this study.

A small group of us were in casual conversation as we visited in the sanctuary of Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church after the June 27, 2021, annual singing. David and Joe Sarten thanked Whaley for leading number 72, MY MOTHER'S BIBLE,³⁸⁸ that day in honor of the Sarten family. They remembered their grandmother and aunts singing it while doing dishes and working around the house and garden. Whaley's response piqued my interest: "I'd never really heard it. It was pretty much gone since whoever had sang it had stopped leading it...and we didn't know it...and no one was around who remembered it, so we had to guess and sing it how it is written in the book."³⁸⁹ I questioned his statement of it being "gone." David Sarten clarified that the songs they know so well are the ones they can sing "because they've stayed on."³⁹⁰ Green interjected, "Nobody has picked up number 98 either. It's been gone."³⁹¹ The small group started all talking at once about other numbers that are "gone," and I asked for more clarity. I wanted to know the rules of engagement for owning songs and leading others' songs and songs being "gone" when, clearly, they were still in the book.

Green began the enlightenment: "Well, like, 99 was always mine, and then I moved to Oklahoma for three years, and when I moved back another lady was leading 99..." she trailed off

³⁸⁶ Durham, *New Harp of Columbia*, 47.

³⁸⁷ Sharee Green, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, July 2, 2021.

³⁸⁸ Arr. by M.L. Swan, MY MOTHER'S BIBLE, in *New Harp of Columbia*, ed. M.L. and W.H. Swan (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 72.

³⁸⁹ Andrew Whaley, interview by the author, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, June 27, 2021.

³⁹⁰ David Sarten, interview by the author, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, June 27, 2021.

³⁹¹ Sharee Green, interview by the author, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, June 27, 2021.

and gave the evil eye to lady in her memory. We laughed and I asked if this got as territorial as church pews and seats did with the old Baptist ladies. They laughed but agreed that it had gotten a little good-naturedly territorial at times. Green continued her story, “So, I had to learn some more songs. That’s how I got 56. It had been Lena Headrick’s daughter Lois’ song, but she stopped coming to singings so I took it. Now it’s mine and I lead it all the time.”³⁹²

Whaley took up for the rudiments again, as he often does, “That happens more now because we’ve learned more, and can sing more of them correctly...now people can sing more than just one song.”³⁹³ He and David Sarten both suggested I look at the singing minutes from the 1970s and note all the repeated songs with different leaders. They only led the songs they knew, and they only knew the songs they had learned pretty much by rote. But now, the men pointed out, more songs were coming back because the community had learned how to read the music properly through singing schools and the institution of monthly practice singings.

I had been quietly listening to the four of them while occasionally uttering, “Interesting,” in response. But now I had grabbed the end of a thread—so I pulled: “So what you all are saying is if certain songs, like MY MOTHERS BIBLE,³⁹⁴ are going to be *actively* preserved they’ve got to be picked up by an owner, so to speak?” There was a collective pause broken almost simultaneously by everyone as they “yeped,” smiled, and nodded heartily at my question. David Sarten took up Whaley’s rudiment cause for a moment and added, “I believe this will become, and has to a degree, become less important as we take up learning and being open to learning more as Andrew says...but yes, for the time being, yes.”³⁹⁵

³⁹² Sharee Green, interview by the author, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, June 27, 2021.

³⁹³ Andrew Whaley, interview by the author, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, June 27, 2021.

³⁹⁴ Swan, *New Harp of Columbia*, 72.

³⁹⁵ David Sarten, interview by the author, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, June 27, 2021.

The center of the square had suddenly crystallized as a sacred space in my mind. Once again, the mountaineer experience revealed itself as one hallmarked by navigating the tension between resilience and fragility. The fact that these tunes existed in a nicely bound tunebook in 2021 was inconsequential. Without an owner to ensure survival each tune was an endangered species. The center of the square was a bridge between history and modernity, the literal interstices of realities, into which leaders stepped to offer their lesson to the class. A lesson that, while clothed in different musical techniques to be mastered or theological meaning to be applied at its core bore the one and same message for all: do not forget. A lesson that if all entered, a sound could be produced that, as David Sarten put it, “you can stand up and walk on it.”³⁹⁶

Song ownership became the next logical step in my journey to becoming an old harp singer. Enjoying harmonies and marrying tunes and texts to personal experiences in addition to linking them to loved ones who have passed are a few of the criteria to song ownership. I have a handful that fit those categories which hopefully will soon become some of “Mandy’s songs.” Since song ownership is a vital stage of not only becoming an old harp singer, but also preserving the music, my next task is to dive into the book and come up with some unclaimed tunes to revive and make them mine.

One of the tunes that I love is number 35 (NINETY-FIFTH)³⁹⁷ that previously belonged to Gideon Fryer (1921-2014), a much-loved member of the old harp singing community from Blount County, Tennessee. To my knowledge Number 35 is currently without a leader, although Sherry, one of the group’s non-traditional singers, always calls it, she does not lead it. Perhaps we can develop a Whaley and Sharp style of co-ownership. I have studied it to learn the shapes and how to lead a fugue. The poetry of this song also connects me with my kids, and we

³⁹⁶ David Sarten, interview by author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

³⁹⁷ Chapin, *New Harp of Columbia*, 35.

exchange big smiles and head nods every time we sing verse two. These verses remind us of how the three of us have survived a very traumatic series of events in our lives right before I embarked on this study:

Verse 1:
When I can read my title clear,
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to ev'ry fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.

Verse 2:
Should earth against my soul engage,
And fiery darts be hurl'd,
Then I can smile at Satan's rage,
And face a frowning world.

Verse 3:
Let cares like a wild deluge come,
And storms of sorrow fall;
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my heaven, my all.

Verse 4:
There shall I bathe my weary soul,
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast.³⁹⁸

I attempted to lead this for the first time at the practice sing on April 20, 2021. The square was surprised that I was branching out. But I am resolved to make this my song, as the poetry and harmonies cause a swell deep within me that connects me to my children and to my faith. I ask for a pitch, and then chord the group—they respond expectantly. In the moment, I remember being caught up in hearing the four parts crash on all sides of me as the harmonies chased each other in the fuguing chorus. I remember being happy I was beating the time right and bringing each part in correctly as I spun in time to face that side of the square while continuing to sing.

³⁹⁸ Chapin, *The New Harp of Columbia*, 35.

The last chord held, faded, and died. We all smiled at each other around the square. David Sarten broke the silence, “Excellent. Gideon Fryer would be proud. That was his song.” I sat down.

But I was still soaring.

The second song that I had hoped to claim as mine is number 143, WONDROUS LOVE.³⁹⁹ (I now understand that this is considered one of David Sarten’s songs and will probably consider learning a new one.) This is a song that is still sung in groups and churches outside of the old harp singing tradition usually listed in hymnals as *What Wondrous Love is This?* I have always loved it, but more so in recent years as it reminds me of my father who died two years ago. He was a missionary and had an unfathomable love for missions, so when the verse ends “...While millions join the theme, I will sing,” rolls right into “And when from death I’m free, I’ll sing on,” my heart is in my throat.

The first time I led this song at a practice sing was March 16, 2021. This is a community favorite and had been sung at many of the previous singings I had attended—but only the first verse. As I called it and stepped to the center of the square, a singer inquired: “Would you like to sing the extra verses?” I was taken off guard—extra choices and decisions throw me off when I am in the center. I also learned something new: A lot of the one verse tunes have additional verses printed in the back of the book. David Sarten gently prodded, “Try them and see if you like them or not.” I consented to all of them. A pitch was blown for me to chord the square and we began.

It was hearty and unified from the start with strong accents on beats one and three. It produced a mesmerizing work song style with sledgehammer-like effect that sent goosebumps up my neck. The waves of the hammer-like chords overpowered me when the verse came to “While

³⁹⁹ Christopher, *New Harp of Columbia*, 143.

millions join to sing,” followed immediately without missing a beat to “And when from death I’m free...” My voice cracked. I closed my eyes and let the song take over. I was no longer leading it; it was leading me. It ended and “I’ll sing on,” rang on for a moment. I opened my eyes and David Sarten said softly, “Isn’t the center of the square a good place to be?” I nodded and took my seat, not trusting my voice.

An hour later, as people were clearing out and heading home, David Sarten approached me: “I could tell you were really feeling it tonight.” His eyes had a knowing in them. “Miss Mandy, I believe you’re a harp singer. You feel it like the rest of us do.”

This seems to be the final stage of becoming an old harp singer: “feeling it.” Yes, it is ambiguous and vague. I asked for some light to be shed on the matter with the singers with which I spoke. Across the board from younger to older, all the harp singers indicated that a harp singer is anyone who fundamentally loves the music and the raw emotion or pleasure of music that comes from hearing the songs. David Sarten added that it was the devotion to the tradition that this love of the music brought out of people that defined a harp singer.

Upon further reflection on the idea of the making of a harp singer, Whaley weighed in: “When I look at my life, I see tasks that God has given to me as a way of service. My family, my church—and harp singing. I see this as a calling, Miss Mandy, I do. There have been, as I see it, divinely appointed people over the generations that have kept harp singing. In the early 1900s it was Burl Adams, in the mid-1900s it was Larry. And Larry was the one who really bridged the gap from the old ways to the new ways. After Larry died, in the early 2000s, people like David here and Ann Strange, Tina, Kathleen and Bob, David’s brother Joe all stepped up to keep it

going...” He continued, “...harp singing as done so much for me that I see it as a debt now. It’s a debt I owe.”⁴⁰⁰

Larry Olszewski, whom Whaley referenced, and original compiler of the *Old Harp Newsletter*, commented on this confluence of ownership and feeling of it: “Everyone at a singing can have a moment when the singing belongs to them.”⁴⁰¹ He says elsewhere that “...the most important part of Old Harp Singing is not the music or the poetry, but the people who are there to share their spirit.”⁴⁰² Olszewski recounted his own experience well in the Spring of 1994 newsletter:

Don’t wish to slow the singing so I call #30, a powerful minor tune called SION SECURITY. The pace is rapid, but stately and demanding. I spend my time leading the tune by heart and capturing individual’s eyes as I keep time, wandering around the “Choir,” listening to the feet keeping time, watching smiles grow as everything, everyone is as one.⁴⁰³

But perhaps Olszewski’s most insightful comment into the making of a harp singer came in 1999 where he states: “There are no good singers, there are no bad singers, there are only keepers of the spirit.”⁴⁰⁴ A sentiment echoed by Whaley, as well when he reiterated Olszewski’s words to me and added: “We don’t sing for those listening, this isn’t performance music. We sing for ourselves.”⁴⁰⁵

This emphasis on meaningful participation is the final key that the community looks for in bestowing the title “old harp singer” on someone. Olszewski’s and Whaley’s comments would support this. The rudiments and singing the tunes are the gate, the poetry is the connective path, and the journey ends at the center of the square where there, bridging time,

⁴⁰⁰ Andrew Whaley, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

⁴⁰¹ Olszewski. “The Changing of Traditions,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no 10 (Fall 1992): 11.

⁴⁰² Olszewski. “On Old Harp,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 11 (Spring 1993): 6.

⁴⁰³ Olszewski. “Diary on an Old Harp Singing,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 13 (Spring 1994): 10.

⁴⁰⁴ Olszewski. “On Tradition,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no 23 (Spring 1999): 9.

⁴⁰⁵ Andrew Whaley, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

history, and memory, the spirit is kept and passed from one singer to the next as all in “perpetual covenant join, I am bound for the promised land.”⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁶ Durham, *The New Harp of Columbia*, 47.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study began as a consideration of the impact tourism and the constructed hillbilly/romantic mountaineer identity has had on local arts and music—old harp music being part of that—and asked the question: what makes someone an old harp singer? The key difference I discovered between mountain music as presented to tourists and the particular mountain music this is old harp singing, is this: old harp singing is not performance music. It is participation music informed by rudimentary education. These are the two pillars of old harp song owning and thus, old harp identity. It is knowledge of the rudiments that enable singers to participate in singing and also resurrect songs that are “gone,” giving the song and the community a new breath of life.

Many community members have pointed this out with some version of Andrew Whaley’s comment, “We sing for us.”⁴⁰⁷ David Sarten and others have observed that it is not performance music in that it is not very pretty or necessarily pleasant listening. There is a quote that harp singers use from four-note shaped note historian and singer Hugh McGraw, “I wouldn’t cross the street to hear it, but I would drive five hundred miles to sing it.”⁴⁰⁸ This participatory element is what separates this tradition from parkway tourism and is what has kept local old harp music from becoming commercialized. When asked specifically about this, Sarten replied, “We don’t sing for people. We sing for the joy of it—for the personal experience you gain.”⁴⁰⁹

Furthermore, tourists come for a voyeuristic experience of the “end of the line,” primitive, mountain existence. Speer and Fisher have called it, “hermetically sealed”⁴¹⁰ and

⁴⁰⁷ Andrew Whaley, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

⁴⁰⁸ Andrew Whaley’s paraphrase of Hugh McGraw, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

⁴⁰⁹ David Sarten, interview by the author, Sevierville, Tennessee, June 30, 2021.

⁴¹⁰ Speer, “Hillbilly Sold Here,” 216.

“stale.”⁴¹¹ I prefer the image of a glass partition. Much like a museum glass, this separation is intended to keep the past at an observational distance. However, by keeping old harp singing in the past, performance-minded observers deny old harp singing a modern existence and relevance--modern people having modern thoughts and experiences who participate with the past, yes, but for the purpose of better understanding it and drawing its meaning into the present.

I concur with Miller that there is a politics of nostalgia⁴¹² constantly in play in Appalachia. Old harp singers sing with a foot in both worlds—the antiquated and the contemporary. They reject the mythology of Appalachia—both in person and in place—in favor of the Appalachian reality of resilience and fragility. Old harp singers do not politicize nostalgia, nor do they commoditize and commercialize it. Instead, old harp singers actively reverse the “end of the line” narrative by making continuous effort to shift visitors from performance to participation at every singing. Participatory lived musical experience separates old harp singing from other local music traditions. And they view nostalgia as a vehicle which serves to guard and preserve what the National Park Service and tourist industries could not: the spirit and heart of the people.

By owning songs, harp singers own a connection to the past in a way other constructed Appalachian images and identities cannot. Harp singers use this ownership of the past as a living and active preservation of a singing tradition and the community it created. This song ownership comes from a place of love and devotion to the music itself—the community’s definition of what makes someone an old harp singer. Participation in the past through song ownership creates a meaningful present to carry into the future—the holy triad of old harp singing that exists only and briefly in the center of the square. And it is to that flicker that Jackson and Olszewski refer

⁴¹¹ Fisher, “Identity as Symbolic Production: The Politics of Culture and Meaning in Appalachia,” 30.

⁴¹² Miller, *Traveling Home*, 206.

when they call this community “traditional bearers”⁴¹³ and “keepers of the spirit.”⁴¹⁴ It is that brief flicker that one “feels.” It is that moment in the square that is transferable and unites people from varying backgrounds and worldviews, rural and urban, traditional and non-traditional singers wherever the square is formed. In contrast, the “hillbilly” image and identity offers a completely opposite effect—one that is insular and closed-minded and geographically isolated. The spirit and tradition Jackson and Olszewski refer to are both resilient and fragile and merit preserving—they are communal, momentary, lived experience of the whole historic community. And it is participation in that spirit and tradition that separates this community and its music from the constructed image of the “hillbilly” and mythic mountaineer that exists on the parkways.

I paid attention to my own shifts in consciousness while attempting to be musically in this community, and I begin to experience a new phenomenon on multiple levels. First, I knew what I was experiencing was American music and Western harmonies—two things in which I was fluent. However, I was also highly aware that what I was experiencing was also simultaneously something in which I was *not* fluent. Hood’s bi-musicality model was helpful in my initial acquisition and understanding of old harp singing. The more I settled into the tradition and felt fluently un-fluent, the more I felt disingenuous I felt I was being in my usage of Hood’s bi-musicality model. Yet, I did not know what else applied or could apply to what I was experiencing in acquiring this new musical language.

Second, I was hearing something new on my field recordings. There were many tunes in which pockets of singers clashed briefly perhaps melodically, harmonically, or rhythmically (or all) before continuing cohesively. My fieldwork revealed that these discrepancies, or variants,

⁴¹³ Jackson, *Spiritual Folksongs of Early America*, ix-x.

⁴¹⁴ Olszewski, “On Tradition,” *Old Harp Newsletter*, no. 23 (Spring 1999): 9.

were caused by social factors like congregational church singing or family unit singing, vestiges of aural learning. These discrepancies occurred at different times based on which singers were present. They also sometimes occurred as whole group, as in the GREENFIELDS⁴¹⁵ example in Chapter Four, when the entire group shifted from what was notated on the page and back again, even though they were all looking at the page and know the rudiments.

Hood's definition of bi-musicality—being fluent in two (or more) musical systems—is predicated on using the ears, eyes, hands, and voice to gain a fluency that leads to an ability to imagine within the system and perform.⁴¹⁶ John Baily also emphasizes these technical skills needed to perform as he, too, borrows from Hood's work but prefers the term intermusability.⁴¹⁷ Hood's bi-musicality model works well in the general acquisition of old harp singing: ears hear the singing, eyes read the shapes, hands beat the time patterns, voice shifts to mirror the local style. However, both Hood and Baily's terms fail to be flexible enough in describing the phenomenon of the old harp singers themselves moving fluidly between musical "dialects," or variants, and learning and understanding those variants myself. Hood and Baily's models seemed to need buttressing when it came to dealing with musical variants that create sub-cultures within a bigger system.

Additionally, Hood and Baily focus on musicality or music-ability and performance in their models to prove fluency. Old harp singing, fundamentally, is not about musical ability and being "on pitch" or "on rhythm" as trained musicians would define it. And I have already established that this tradition eschews performance. Also, opportunity for imagination and construction does not exist in old harp singing the way Hood and Baily mean because in the

⁴¹⁵ Edson, *New Harp of Columbia*, 16.

⁴¹⁶ Hood, "The Challenge of Bi-Musicality," 55-59.

⁴¹⁷ John Baily, "Ethnomusicology, Intermusability, and Performance Practice," in *The New (Ethno)musicologies*, ed. Henry Stobart (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008).

Swan seven-note system new compositions are not accepted. Therefore, no proving ground exists to show fluency as Hood and Baily define it. These factors became the primary reasons why I went in search of a new or auxiliary term to describe what I experienced in the old harp community.

Titon offered a little more help. While understanding the ethnomusicology academy's critique of bi-musicality, he saw bi-musicality as a heightened way of being musically in the world. It was a way in which scholarship and systems informed each other. To Titon, "bi-musicality helps me understand musiking in the world."⁴¹⁸ And while I agree with Titon that this method of learning and being offers a new experience and authority, the terminology stemming from ethnomusicology did not fit what I was witnessing—in the community and in myself. I needed a new term. I turned to linguistics.

I knew what I was experiencing was in effect a musical dialect of Western, American music. I was also aware of the community's ability to code-switch—move from one set of rules to another effortlessly. Most dialects reflect changes in language over time; however, a sub-set of dialects only exist if certain social criteria are in place.⁴¹⁹ I listened again to Hood's comment on social criteria to music acquisition: "Language, religion, customs, history, the whole identity of a society of which music is only a part..."⁴²⁰ Stephen Cottrell expanded Hood's original meaning to incorporate cultures that are more closely related to each other and the code-switching that happens between them.⁴²¹ I realized that what I was witnessing in the old harp singing community was a musical dialect that only existed when certain social criteria were present.

⁴¹⁸ Jeff Todd Titon, "Bi-musicality as Metaphor," *The Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 429 (Summer 1995): 287-97.

⁴¹⁹ "Dialects," accessed July 10, 2021, <https://www.cal.org/areas-of-impact/language-culture-in-society/dialects>

⁴²⁰ Hood, "The Challenge of Bi-Musicality," 55-59.

⁴²¹ Stephen Cottrell, "Local Bi-Musicality Among London's Freelance Musicians," *Ethnomusicology* 51, no. 1 (Winter, 2007): 90.

Whether as a whole group, as individuals, or as even smaller, familial groups within the community, they alternated between different sets of musical variants without problem.

Sociolinguistic variation is defined by David Britain as, “the way language varies and changes in communities of speakers and concentrates in particular on the interaction of social factors (such as a speaker's gender, ethnicity, age, degree of integration into their community, etc) and linguistic structures (such as sounds, grammatical forms, intonation features, words, etc).”⁴²² While the research is varied, debated, and wide—too wide to cover fully in this study—fundamentally sociolinguistics is “interested in how social groups variably select different dialect forms.”⁴²³

I submit that old harp music is a socio-musical variation of a larger Western, American music language and a sub-variation of an old, Southern-American musical style and tradition. If sociolinguistic variations answer the question of why people say something the way they do, I submit that socio-musical variation answers the question of why people sing something the way they do. Socio-musical variation is a term that is flexible enough to aid in describing the acquisition of old harp music fluency and at the same time allow space to describe the phenomenon of code-switching between musical variants that I observed in the community. Hood’s bi-musicality model serves to open the door to fluency in the bigger, broader musical system. Socio-musical variation is a term (and perhaps a future model) that accounts for the variants, and their acquisition, within that system that are creating sub-cultures and communities.

Moving forward further study is needed on this phenomenon of socio-musical variations. I recommend that a “bottom up” method be used that examines the deep structures influencing

⁴²² “Sociolinguistic Variation,” by David Britain, accessed July 7, 2021, <https://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/1054.html>.

⁴²³ Ibid.

what is found at the surface level. I also recommend that fieldwork be conducted in other local singing spaces where these tunes might be found in a different social context to test variations. Such spaces may include, but would not be limited to, local church congregations, familial groups of traditional singers, and other regional harp singing groups of both seven-note and four-note communities.

This study emphasized song ownership in old harp singing. Other factors that determine old harp singing identity need to be explored beyond and adjacent to this study. This would include, but not be limited to, theological beliefs and differences of belief among the harp singing community; a deeper exploration of the community's connection to the poetry; and the ability of the square to travel outside of the region and maintain its own cultural distinctives within different, broader cultures.

Specific to the Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia*, new recordings should be made and then contrasted with existing older recordings in an effort to determine exactly how returning to the rudiments has affected change in the tradition. Also, further in-depth ethnographic work needs to be done to expand the literature on the *New Harp of Columbia* and to preserve this particular community's way of musically being in the world.

Moving forward, I am dedicated to continue the mission of preserving the harp singing tradition as associated with the *New Harp of Columbia*. Plans are being made to form a singing school this fall in an effort to engage the community and attract new singers, but also to help the current singers become more solid in the rudiments. I hope to have opportunity to speak to the importance of owning songs as a way of keeping them alive and encourage the singers to find a new song, apply the rudiments to learn it correctly, and keep it alive.

David Sarten, Andrew Whaley, and I discussed the possibility of publishing a new revision of the *New Harp of Columbia* in the near future. They agree a revision should be more user friendly, correct mistakes in notation, and perhaps use cleaner note printing technology to facilitate easier reading. They are insistent the tradition be protected and maintained by not allowing any new compositions in the style into the revision;⁴²⁴ however, discussions are ongoing about inserting some of the old, Southern shaped note tunes that are in *The Sacred Harp* and other shaped tunebooks still in use. These tunes would need to be converted to seven-note shapes. Also, Whaley recommends forming a committee that would formulate a set of criteria each new song would have to meet in order to be allowed into the revision.

Finally, I recommended to the community and was met with approval that the writings and correspondences of Olszewski be compiled and published, the suggestion was met with approval. Olszewski was vital to the survival of the *New Harp of Columbia* in the mid-1900s and early 2000s. His devotion to the tradition and tunes led to the resurgence in rudimentary focus that began to shift the sound of the tradition—a shift that is still happening. To say he is beloved to the community is an understatement and his presence is still felt in the square at every singing I have attended.

In closing, I join my voice with Olszewski's as these are now my sentiments as well: "Singing the 'Old Harp' out of the *New Harp of Columbia* on a regular basis will promote long life, new friends, spiritual uplift, emotional stability, singing ability, awareness and respect for others, and a sense of the past long, long ago."⁴²⁵ What makes someone an old harp singer? The

⁴²⁴ This is acceptable practice in the four-note *Sacred Harp* community and each revision includes several newly composed tunes. However, it is a practice to which the Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia* are adamantly opposed.

⁴²⁵ Olszewski, *Old Harp Newsletter*, Spring 1988, no 1: 9.

answer is found in finding your own song within the pages and past of *New Harp of Columbia* and using it in resilient building of a community, not untouched by time, but made better by it.

Appendix A
Questionnaire Used for Interviews

Interview Questions for

Holy Manna: How Old Harp Singing in East Tennessee is Surviving in a New Wilderness

1. How long have you/your family member been involved with harp singing? **[If answering for a deceased family member, “family member” to be used throughout in place of “you”]**
2. Have you always sung with the Friends of the *New Harp of Columbia*?
- 2b. If answer to the above is No, which other groups/gatherings did you sing with and for how long?
3. How did you get involved?
4. What made you want to stay active?
5. What part does harp singing play in your life on a daily or regular basis?
6. Why is it important for you to keep harp singing?
7. What part do you sing?
8. Do you ever switch parts?
- 8a. If yes, under what circumstance?
9. Do you sing 4 note or 7 note system? And why?
- 10a. If both, how did you come to learn them?
- 10b. Do you prefer one system over the other and why?
11. What are the musical rules to harp singing as you understand them?
12. Are there any musical elements that intimidate or confuse you? Why or why not?
- 12a. If yes, what do you do when you encounter them?
13. What is the most important musical element of harp singing?
14. Do you have any tunes/numbers that you consider are yours?
- 14a. What makes them yours?

15. Do you always lead your songs?
- 15a. If someone calls your song, do you lead it or do they? Conversely, if you call someone else's song, do you lead it or do they?
16. People have "their" songs that the community recognizes, sometimes even after that member has died. How does someone claim songs that become "theirs" even long after they are gone?
- 16a. Are those songs ever not considered as belonging to the deceased, or can they have another owner?
17. What is the general proceedings and order of a singing?
18. Are there specific rules or procedures to follow or traditions to honor?
19. What is your favorite part/s of a singing?
20. What is your favorite part/s of an annual singing?
21. Are there different rules and procedures or traditions to follow at an annual singing?
22. Have you attended a singing school? If so, what was it like?
23. What is your favorite part/s of a singing school?
24. Are there different rules and procedures or traditions to follow at a singing school?
25. Are you a person of faith? **[If the answer is No, skip to Question 31]**
26. Are you associated with a particular church denomination?
- 26a. If so, for how long?
27. Do you make any distinctions between the songs and hymnody used in your church and the tunes and poetry sung at harp singings?
- 27a. If so, what are the distinctions?
- 27b. Do you prefer one over the other? Why?
28. What part does harp singing play in your faith life?
29. Does your faith influence your harp singing?

30. Does your faith influence the songs you chose as your own or that you choose to call/lead?
31. What part does harp singing play in your family life?
32. Is it important to you that your kids/grandkids learn/get involved with harp singing? If so, why?
33. What part does harp singing play in your day-to-day community life and activities?
34. Do you see harp singing as musical art form, a cultural heritage event, a worshipping community, or a mix of all the above? Please explain you answer.
35. Do you believe harp singing is fading from existence or threatened?
- 35a. If so, what do you see as the biggest threat to its existence?
- 35b. If not, why not?
36. Regardless, of whether you believe harp singing is currently in crisis, do you believe harp singing should be preserved? Please explain your answer.
37. Are there any suggestions you would make to help ensure the sustainability of harp singing in the greater community?
38. What, if anything, separates harp singing from other mountain music and other Tennessee music?
39. What, if anything, separates harp singing and the harp singer from how mountain music and mountain musicians are portrayed on the tourist Parkway?
40. Do you think there is a difference between a “hillbilly” and his music and a “mountaineer” and his music? Please explain your answer.
41. What is the most important element of harp singing?
- 41a. How would you preserve that?
42. What makes someone a harp singer?
43. What does harp singing mean to you?

Appendix B
Photographs



Figure A.1—Middle Creek United Methodist Church
Location of the monthly practice singing I attended during my fieldwork. David Sarten’s home church. Photograph by author.



Figure A.2—Middle Creek United Methodist Church, Fall 2020
Fall mums blooming outside of Middle Creek United Methodist Church in October 2020. Photograph by author.



Figure A.3—Oldham's Creek Missionary Baptist Church
Site of the first annual singing of 2021. Andrew Whaley and Hal Wilson's home church.
Photograph by author.



Figure A.4—Lord Willin' and the Creeks Don't Rise
The creek behind Oldham's Missionary Baptist Church can be seen at capacity as there were flood warnings issued the day of the singing after heavy downpours overnight. Photograph by author.



Figure A.5—Tuckaleechee Methodist Church

Located in Blount County, Tennessee. Site of one of the oldest annual singings in the area dating back to the 1890s. Photograph by author.



Figure A.6—Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church

Sharee Green’s childhood church. I attended my first dinner on the grounds before a singing at this church. Photograph by author.

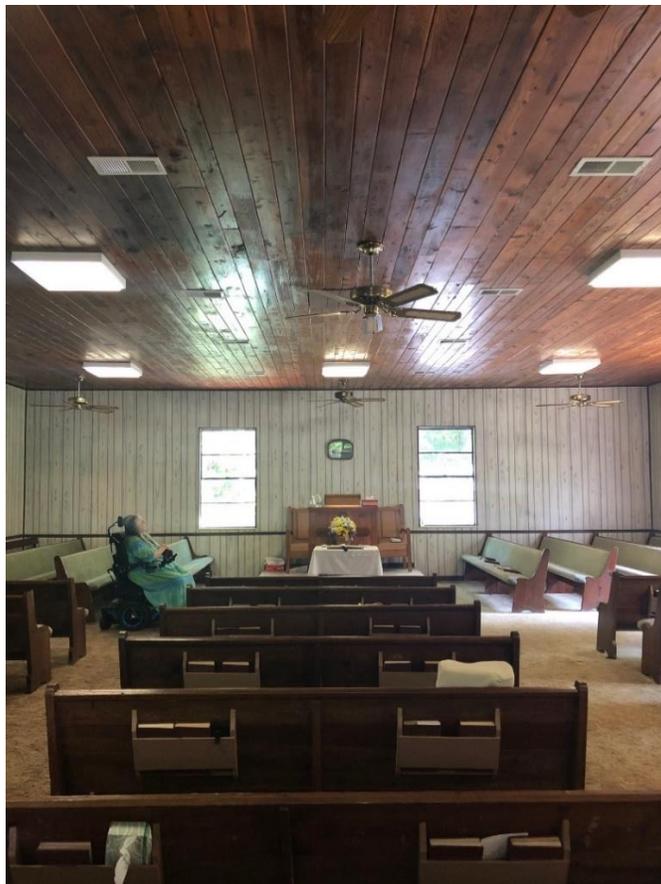


Figure A.7—Waiting

Singer waits for singing to start after dinner on the grounds inside Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church. Photograph by author.



Figure A.8—Little Greenbrier School

Little Greenbrier School was a part of the Little Greenbrier community, one of the last communities to exist in the mountains before the forming of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. It was built in 1882 and remained in use until 1936. David and Joe Sarten's relatives helped to contribute lumber and build the schoolhouse. Photograph by author.



Figure A.9—The *New Harp of Columbia*

The *New Harp of Columbia* ready for action before the Little Greenbrier singing. Photograph by author

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