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Sacred Harp traditions in Texas

Hardaway, Lisa Carol, M.M.
Rice University, 1989

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RICE UNIVERSITY

"SACRED HARP TRADITIONS IN TEXAS"

by

LISA CAROL HARDAWAY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTERS OF MUSIC

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Houston, Texas

May, 1989
ABSTRACT

"SACRED HARP TRADITIONS IN TEXAS"

Lisa Carol Hardaway
Rice University
May 1989

Sacred Harp singing has been a tradition in American music for almost two hundred years. Studies of this practice are important since the older singers who are our vital links to the past are rapidly disappearing.

The Sacred Harp tradition is largely undocumented in Texas. Primary sources of information for this study include minutes of Texas Sacred Harp organizations, interviews, questionnaires and correspondence with singers. In addition, the five Texas singings that were observed have been tape recorded and photographed for this study.

The resulting study shows that Sacred Harp music has increased in importance since a low point a dozen years ago. It is kept alive through regular singings and through singing schools. Certain families have also played a crucial role in its maintenance. Although the social makeup of the singers appears to be changing, the practice itself seem as if it will survive.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the cooperation of a great many people. I would like to extend my thanks to all of the Sacred Harp singers who have given their time in the form of interviews, questionnaires, correspondence, telephone conversations, and for their hospitality at singings and in their homes. I would also like to thank the archivists at the Zavalla State Archives of Texas, the Barker Texas History Center, and the Institute of Texan Cultures for their time and effort in locating documentation on the Texas Sacred Harp tradition.

I express my gratitude to faculty and staff of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University for their support of this project and their belief in my abilities to pursue it. There are too many people to name, but I would like to mention Dr. Anne Schnoebelen, Dr. Honey Heconi, Dr. Bill Bailey, Dr. Marcia Citron, and Dean Michael Hammond, all of whom have been instrumental in guiding my vision.

I would like to thank Jarrett Olen Woodrow Jr. for his nearly unfailing patience with me, and for always being there to motivate me when things were difficult.

Lastly, I have to express my deep appreciation to my parents for teaching me the value of music in my life through their own musical lives.
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Chapter I.

The Evolution of Sacred Harp Music

Sacred Harp or shape-note hymnody is an American national treasure. It is a rural American sacred music in which note heads of certain shapes are assigned to solmization syllables. The shape-note system, which was developed in the late 18th century, has proven itself to be a valuable teaching aid for many Americans who still use it to learn how to sight-sing.

The development of Sacred Harp music is inextricably entwined with the civilization of America. The repertory reflects a celebration of religious freedom, making it a veritable time-line in early American music. It includes genres derived from the English, such as psalm-tunes, odes and anthems, but the addition of fuging tunes, folk hymns, and spirituals make Sacred Harp music distinctly American. These genres are discussed more fully in Chapter II.

The oldest printed tunes in Sacred Harp music first appear in Calvinistic Psalters developed during the Reformation. It was at this time that Protestant sects

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rejected the singing of texts that were not in the Bible. The Calvinists' austere musical stance made them concentrate on unaccompanied, unison psalm singing. The Psalters they produced were rhymed metrical translations of the Book of Psalms. The French Psalter, begun in Strasbourg in 1539 and completed in Geneva in 1562, was the first and most influential Psalter. The notated tradition in these psalters is eventually replaced by an oral tradition in which the psalm is lined-out by the minister; a transition which is detailed more fully below.

There were two important Psalters that were used by the colonists in New England.² The Book of Psalms: Englisched Both in Prose and in Metre, a Psalter by Henry Ainsworth, was published in Amsterdam in 1612, and it was used by English Separatists in Holland. Ainsworth's Psalter was first brought to Plymouth Bay colony in 1620, and was used by the Separatist Puritan sect, who became known as the Pilgrims. Ainsworth had been educated at Cambridge and was a strong Hebraist, as well as a pastor of the group at Leyden, Holland. The objective for the translations of the 150 Psalms was to be as close to the original Hebrew version as possible. Commentaries regarding the text were printed

along with each Psalm. In order to facilitate a more "user friendly" Psalter, the Psalms were arranged in metrical order, and presented in rhymed form. The Psalter consisted of thirty-nine melodies from Dutch and French Psalters in sixteen different meters. The music is complex from a rhythmic standpoint, requiring a well-trained congregation for its performance. It is printed in white mensural notation. One of the most familiar psalm-tunes from this repertory, Psalm 100, appears in Sacred Harp books where it is listed as number 49a. **Old Hundred L.M.** ³

The 1563 edition of the **Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter** was also brought to America. It was used by the larger group of Puritans which settled the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1628 and 1630. The original version appeared about 1547 and contained 19 Psalms and did not include any music. They were "designed to be sung to familiar ballad tunes of the time."⁴ Later that year another edition came out with 18 new Psalm translations by Thomas Sternhold. Several editions came out in ensuing years, but it was not until 1557, in Geneva, that a new edition was published which included music. In England, in 1562 a new edition printed by John Day appeared; it was the first to contain all 150 Psalms.

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³L.M., or long meter, refers to the poetic meter used for the text. In long meter the iambic meter is utilized for each of the four lines of verse. Each line contains eight syllables.

This complete version was physically bound in one volume with the Book of Common Prayer. It contained forty melodies, but four-fifths are in ballad or common meter, a much simpler rhythmic arrangement than those found in the Ainsworth. In 1563 a new edition appeared which provided four-part harmony with the melody in the treble voice. After twenty years of use, the Puritans decided to create their own translations of the psalms. They wanted to convey the meaning of the scripture in a more faithful manner. This resulted in the appearance of the *The Whole Book of Psalms Faithfully Translated into English Metre*, better known as the *Bay Psalm Book* published in Boston in 1640. It was the first book printed in America, and had a wide circulation in England and Scotland as well as in America. Its popularity lasted through seventy editions, the last one in 1773.

The Pilgrims at Plymouth had been superior to the Puritans at the Massachusetts Bay Colony in congregational singing, but eventually the complex metrical patterns in the Ainsworth Psalter became too difficult even for them. In 1685 they too adopted the use of the *Bay Psalm Book*.

No music was supplied in the early editions of the *Bay Psalm Book*: the singers were instructed to sing well-known melodies from *The Whole Book of Psalms, with the Hymnes Evangelicaall, and Songs Spirituall* (London, 1621) by Englishman Thomas Ravenscroft. Ninety-seven four-part
harmonizations of psalm tunes by leading English composers such as Thomas Morley, Thomas Tallis and John Dowland were included in this collection. This Psalter is one of the first to give place names for tunes, a model followed later by composers and compilers from the New England school to the present. By the ninth printing, in 1698, music was included. Thirteen two-part settings of psalm tunes were included, most of them taken from an *Introduction to the Skill of Musick* (1654), a popular instruction book compiled by another Englishman, John Playford. The letters FSLM, which are placed underneath the music, are a derivative of the Lancashire Sol Fa, or fasola, solmization system, described more fully below. This notation also appears in the Playford edition of 1672, and it seems likely that the compilers of the *Bay Psalm Book* were aware of it.

The state of congregational singing, however, had declined substantially. This is the case both in England and in America. A lack of books combined with the fact that fewer singers could read led to this disintegration of congregation singing. "The cultivation of music was neglected, until in the latter part of the 17th century, the congregations throughout New England were rarely able to sing more than three or four tunes....Every melody was 'tortured and twisted'...until their psalms were uttered in a medley of confused and disorderly noises, rather than a
decorous song." There were only remnants of an oral tradition left. This breakdown of musical literacy was initially remedied in church through the "lining-out" of a psalm. This practice began in English churches and is described in the Ordinance of 1644. The Westminster Assemblies of Divines (London, 1644) states "For the present, where many in the Congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the Minister, or some other fit person appointed by him do reade the Psalme, line by line, before the singing thereof." The minister, or preacher, would chant each line of the psalm and the congregation would duplicate the musical line as given. At least two English publications suggest that the tunes were freely ornamented. These books display both a plain and an ornamented version of various psalm-tunes.

The oral tradition, though still integral to this practice, became endangered by a new reform movement. A great controversy arose between the advocates for "Common Singing", or the oral tradition of lining-out psalmody, and those for "Regular Singing", or reading music by the notes.


A general belief, especially among the better educated theologians, was that the variation of the oral tradition, which had developed as the Common way of singing resulted in a corruption of melodies. It is unfortunate that through their prejudice against melodic ornamentation the proponents of this idea almost completely annihilated this oral tradition in American music. The Reverend Thomas Symmes, a Harvard graduate and theologian, published *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing: or Singing by Note* in 1720. Although the reform movement was probably active before this date, this publication by Symmes is the first written evidence. This work stressed the importance of singing exact pitches and exact rhythms. In another writing *Oltile Dulci: or A Joco-Serious Dialogue Concerning Regular Singing* he established the need for Regular singing, for the Common Way includes more "supernumerary notes and turnings" of the voice and thus is more like a secular song.  

The excessive ornamentation created a heterophony which was considered by some, such as Symmes, a musical chaos. This was a long tradition and style that its singers, known as the "Old Regulars", had grown to love.* Because


*The manner in which black Sacred Harp singers embellish their version of Sacred Harp tunes is a modern day example of the manifestation of ornamentation in the oral tradition.*
advocates for the Common Way of singing were not very involved with the polemics of the time, facts regarding their practice are mostly found by the advocates of the Regular Way of singing. These writers include Reverend Thomas Symmes, Reverend Thomas Walter and Reverend John Tufts.

The first music instruction books in America which provide a systematic approach to reading music were written by two ministers Reverend John Tufts and Reverend Thomas Walter. The date of Tufts' book, *A Very Plain and Easy Introduction to the Art of Singing Psalm-Tunes*, is uncertain, though it may be as early as 1714. It is generally accepted as coming before Walter's book, *The Grounds and Rules of Musicke Explained*, published in Boston in 1721.

Tufts' book includes thirty-seven three-part psalm-tunes with the air, or melody in the top voice. The notation uses a five-line staff, however Tufts uses letters only, in the same manner as Playford's book mentioned above, F, S, L, and M, to represent the syllables fa, sol, la and mi, instead of using traditional notes. This application of the "Lancashire sol-fa system"\(^{10}\) is the first instance in printed American music.

\(^{10}\)Early musical examples of sol-fa are implied in John Horley's *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597). This practice extends as late as 1879 in England, James Freewood published *The Sol-fa System, as Used in Lancashire and Yorkshire*. 
This system is a modification of the medieval system of solmization described by Guido d'Arezzo. The ascending major scale is sung: fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi, fa. The relative minor retains the same syllable for each note: la, mi, fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la. It is likely that this system was well established in England by the middle of the sixteenth century, as it appears in the notation of the Day Psalter of 1562.

Another minister, Reverend James Lyon, published Urania in 1761. It was "A choice collection of psalm-tunes, anthems and hymns." This tunebook was unusual in that it was published in an oblong format, but even more unusual was the inclusion of anthems and fourteen hymns along with their melodies. It was also unique in that a handful of the songs are attributed to American composers.

The purpose of these books was to improve psalm-singing in church. Thus, 1714 marks the beginning of the singing school movement in Boston. Reverend Symmes, along with other supporters of the Regular Way of singing, promoted the idea of holding gatherings for the express purpose of improving church singing. These gatherings, which soon became known as singing schools, filled a social as well as a religious function for the singers.

Singing schools were instituted to teach the elements

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of music and repertoire. They were taught by an itinerant singing school master who would arrive at a town and stay for a few weeks and teach class at least once a week.

The oblong book used, commonly called an "end-opener", was sold by the singing master. By 1800, there were more than 130 tunebooks published in America. These collections, often compiled by singing school masters, contained unaccompanied three- and four-part choral music for church use. Some of the compositions were written by the singing master, but the majority of tunes, since there were no copyright laws, were unashamedly borrowed from other tunebooks available.

The First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s in New England was an evangelistic revival movement led primarily by Jonathan Edwards, pastor of the Congregational church in Northampton, Massachusetts. George Whitefield, an English revivalist, visited America in 1739 and fueled the fires of revivalism in the colonies. Whitefield was a great advocate of the hymns of his fellow Englishman, Isaac Watts. Watts was of the conviction that freely-composed hymns could express the gospel as well as the traditional psalm-tunes. The spread of Watts' hymns through this movement spurred the demand for his publications in America, and Benjamin Franklin was among the publishers who supplied Watts' texts.

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22This is documented in Allen P. Britton, "The Musical Idiom in Early American Tunebooks" (Journal of the American Musicological Society, III/3, Fall 1950), 286.
between 1729 and 1778.

The movement became very strong and the need for teachers and new music generated the so-called first New England school of composition.

The first New England school of composers, or Yankee tunesmiths, become the first native-born American composers and music teachers. The premier tunesmith was William Billings (1746-1800), a tanner, singing master, and self-taught composer from Boston. His works include six volumes of original music; they were the first complete books of music by an American composer. His first tunebook, *The New England Psalm-Singer*, published in 1770, was the first collection of American music published. It was published in oblong format, and included a prefatory section of rudiments, as well as 126 compositions consisting of psalm-tunes, hymns and anthems, usually written in four parts. All of the tunes were written by Billings. Billing's books established the norm for all successive tunebooks, both in format and musical style. The desire for new music for singing schools results in the distinct musical style of the New England school which produces the characteristic sound of the Sacred Harp repertory. The traits from this school include the unusual doubling of parts in different vocal ranges, the use of parallel fifths and octaves, and compositions written in the style of a fuging tune (discussed more fully in Chapter III. below).
Other composers of the first New England school include Daniel Read, Stephen Jenks, Supply Belcher, Timothy Swan, Justin Morgan and Jeremiah Ingalls. Their songs were incorporated in the tunebooks used in singing schools.

By the late eighteenth century, just as the lively New England school of composition had become established, America's musical interest turned towards European music as their cultural centers began to grow. The music of the first New England school was harshly criticized for such things as their use of parallel fifths and "incorrect" voice leading. In addition, the European method for musical training was introduced at this time.

The most notable early figure in the Euro-centric movement was Andrew Law. Andrew Law (1749-1821), himself an early tunebook composer, was of a more elevated social rank than his colleagues, being the grandson of the Governor of Connecticut and a graduate of Rhode Island College. He was a self-taught musician and an active itinerant music master. His first tunebook, from 1778, *The Select Harmony*, was "A Collection of Psalm-Tunes and Anthems from the most celebrated authors in Great Britain and America". The title reflects the new reform movement in its inclusion of, (and prime billing for), music from Europe. "Law was to devote the remainder of his life to convincing the American people that their native sacred music was crude and inferior and
that it must be replaced with European-style music." In his best efforts to increase musical literacy, Law introduced a new notation system in his tune book *The Musical Primer* of 1803. The system offered four different shapes, the diamond, square, oval and triangle, to replace the customary round notes. The staff was not used, and the pitches were indicated by the relative positions of the shapes. This shape-note system was met with poor success. Oddly enough, it was an earlier innovation similar to this which became the most successful sight-reading system ever used in America.

This is the system developed by William Little and William Smith in their tunebook *The Easy Instructor*. The book was copyrighted in 1798, but not published until 1801. It was incredibly successful, with reprints appearing until 1831. Little and Smith's system was the first to combine shaped notes with solfege syllables, and unlike Law's notation, this system retained the use of the staff:

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\[ \text{FA SOL LA FA SOL LA MI FA} \]
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This method of sight-reading simplified music for untrained singers. As was the norm for tunebooks, the section which prefaced the music discussed the rudiments of

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music and provided an explanation of the shape-note system.

Shape-note notation functions as a mnemonic aid in the teaching of intervals. The system is limited with respect to accidentals, yet the music it was designed for, which often uses modal or pentatonic scales does not require notated chromatics. One of the advantages of this system is that singers without musical training could learn to sing at sight with little or no knowledge of key systems or of pitch recognition. This is because of the way the different shapes are used. A singer always knows which syllable to sing because of the the shape of the note. Whereas, in the doremi system, computations for scale degrees must be made for the notes in each new key. In the shape-note system this knowledge is plugged in instinctively. This new concentrated approach of sight-singing studies helped to raise the musical literacy in frontier America.

As pioneer America began to push out into the wilderness, the settlers could carry few of their belongings with them, but they often had a Bible and an oblong tunebook in their possession. In many cases these tunebooks were the first printed music in the newly settled territories. The music of the New England school was viewed with disdain by Lowell Mason and his followers, described by George Pullen Jackson as the "better music boys" remained a vital part of American culture through the wholehearted acceptance of this music by the pioneers. The continuity of this earliest
American music is the result of a fortuitous chain of events. It is ironic that it is the arch enemy of the shape-note tradition who is most responsible for its survival today.

It was Lowell Mason, the most influential and financially successful musical figure of the Euro-centric movement mentioned above, whose reforms in American musical training pushed shape-note music into the hands of the rural folk. He was an educator, composer, organist, music director and anthologist, and was primarily responsible for the direction of the reform movement in American church music based on European models. In order to establish musical literacy among children he taught singing schools, wrote books designed for children, and in 1838 he instituted a music curriculum in the Boston public schools. This Euro-centric movement was the catalyst in the movement of shape-note music into rural areas of the country.

It is important to mention that the shape-note tunebooks were originally used in singing schools and were eventually used at singing conventions developed during the first half of the 19th century. At no point were the four-shape tunebooks a part of the liturgy of an established church.

The singing schools, which used the new shape-note tunebooks, were promoted by pioneer singing school masters, most notably the Chapin family. Lucius Chapin (1760-1842)
organized singing schools in New England. He eventually travelled south and held the first singings in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Between Lucius and his brother Amzi, singing schools were held throughout Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and western Pennsylvania.

There had been a lull in religious activity following the First Great Awakening, but by the 1790s a new religious vitality had taken hold and was moving across the frontier in a renewed revival movement. Circuit-riding preachers travelled thousands of miles to bring religion to the pioneers, and eventually the pioneers began to meet in one place to receive the word of the Lord. The first campmeeting of this Second Great Awakening was held in Logan County, Kentucky in 1800.

The campmeeting was a gathering which attracted thousands of people. The meetings lasted from four to five days, and involved various religious groups, including Methodists, Baptists, Adventists, Presbyterians, and Shakers. Activities included the "holy laugh", which involved leaping, dancing and rolling; the "barking exercise" where the men would bark at trees, symbolically treeing the devil; and the holy singing of thousands of voices which went on all hours of the day and night. This phenomenon was known as "singing ecstasy". Out of this

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\text{Details on the campmeeting phenomenon are explored in Ellen J. Lorenz, Glory, Hallelujah! The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980).}\]
environment the spiritual and revival hymn entered the shape-note repertory. Both of these forms will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III.

Another new item to enter the shape-note repertory is the folk hymn, or spiritual folk song (a term coined by George Pullen Jackson.) This new genre, of a religious text set to the music of a folk tune, whose antecedents can be traced to Anglo-Celtic folk music, or other secular tunes, began to appear in collections on the fringes of the frontier. They are first found in the Repository of Sacred Music Part Second (Harrisonburg, Pennsylvania, 1813) by John Wyeth. The overall structure and content of Wyeth's tunebook is largely similar to the tunebooks of the New England school. In these hymns the folk music indigenous to America, previously only transmitted orally, can be found in writing.

Shape-note publications coincided with the migration of settlers into the South and Midwest and publications of shape-note tunebooks occurred along the routes of travel. The first tunebook that became very popular in the South was William Walker's The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion published in 1835. Though published in Philadelphia, it reflected the repertory he knew in South Carolina. It was

18There are a variety of forms in folk hymnody which Jackson outlines and describes. However, due to the close relationships of genres, it is often difficult to determine what type of hymnody is exemplified in a song.
the first of the early southern tunebooks to be distributed nationally. Walker included folk hymns and spirituals, and wrote and arranged ninety tunes. It is here for the first time that *Amazing Grace*, which had previously circulated orally, appears in a tunebook.

After 1844, all shape-note music was generally called Sacred Harp music following the publication of *The Sacred Harp* by Major Benjamin Franklin White. This unusual title was derived from the biblical passage Rev. 14. 2-3:

"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth."

This four-shape collection was immensely popular and enjoyed enlarged editions in 1850, 1859, and 1869. This book and its later revisions are discussed more fully in Chapter II. It should be mentioned here that of the thirty-eight different four-shape tunebooks published between 1798 and 1855, *The Sacred Harp* is the only one which has remained in common use today.

As early as 1830s the primacy of the four-shape system was challenged. Northern composers, such as Lowell Mason, were advocates of the seven-syllable solmization system of the Europeans. This solmization system slowly became accepted in the South, but the shape-note system was adapted to it through the addition of three new shapes to the four
shapes from the fasola system. The most popular system appeared in Jesse B. Aiken's *The Christian Minstrel* in 1846. Aiken's seven syllable, seven-shape system was:

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\[ \text{DO RE MI FA SOL LA TI} \]
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There are several other differences besides the shapes between the four and seven-shape repertoires. The repertoire of Aiken and other seven-shape collections features less folk hymnody and music from the New England composers. Instead there is greater emphasis on European music, music from the Lowell Mason school, and early southern gospel hymnody. In addition, Aikens's system is still in use in church hymnals of the 20th century, especially those of the Primitive Baptists, whereas the four-shape system never had ties to a church service. Examples of such books in current use are Elder C.H. Cayce's *The Good Old Songs: The Cream of the Old Music* (Thornton, Arkansas: Cayce Publishing Co., 1913), the *Old School Hymnal* (Birmingham, Alabama: Old School Hymnal Co., Inc., 1983), and *The Harp of Ages*, second edition. (Muleshoe, Texas: Harp of Ages, Inc., 1977, first edition 1925). Finally, most seven-shape books are not produced in the oblong shape of tunebooks, but in the vertical format more usual for hymn books. However, *The Good Old Songs* is
somewhat unusual in its inclusion of much early four-shape repertory.

George Pullen Jackson was the first to note the commitment of the Primitive Baptists to the old Sacred Harp songs. They were considered by Jackson to be the sole religious group which "practically exclude[s] all other sorts of songs" while maintaining the old Sacred Harp songs in the highest esteem. ¹⁶

The Primitive Baptists, or Hardshell Baptists, are part of the conservative, independent Baptist church in America that is not linked in any centralized administrative associations. In 1832 they broke off from the mother church as an answer to the growing dissension over missionaries, Sunday school, Bible societies, and other issues which were contrary to their belief that God has already chosen his elect, therefore there is no point in the conversion of others.

They have retained most of the old tenets of the early Baptists including, as mentioned above, predestination. Their articles of faith also provide for the antiquated practice of the washing of the feet "We believe that as our Lord and Saviour washed His disciples feet, we ought to wash

They are a congregational church which maintains that each church govern itself according to the laws of Christ, and that no minister, association or convention has any authority over the local church. Candidates for the ministry, following approval, are ordained with a "laying on of the hands". There is no formal training; they contend that human institutions were never authorized to prepare people for the gospel ministry.

It seems appropriate that a fundamentalist group which maintains several older traditions became the main guardian for the old music found in *The Sacred Harp*.

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17This information is taken from the Articles of Faith of the Primitive Baptist, posted at the Dallas Primitive Baptist Church.
Chapter II.

"The Sacred Harp" and its Revisions

The Sacred Harp was originally published in 1844 by B.F. White. He produced this book with E.J. King, of whom little is known. However, B.F. White was well known as a singing-school teacher, and was responsible for the formation of the Southern Musical Convention in Upson County, Georgia in 1847.

Benjamin Franklin White was born near Spartanburg, South Carolina in September 1800. He had very little education but became interested in music at a very early age. He committed himself to learning music, though musical sources were undoubtedly scarce. He became aware of the need for tunebooks to include the many songs that were a part of the Southeastern oral tradition. He joined forces with his brother-in-law, William Walker, and they proceeded to compile such a book. The book produced in 1835 was The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion. Walker took the manuscript to New Haven to be published, and neglected to credit his co-author for his work. This so enraged White that he left South Carolina and settled in Hamilton, Georgia.

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in the late 1830s. He became editor of the county newspaper, *The Organ*, led singing schools, and was a court clerk. It is here that he began a new collection of songs, which were published one at a time in *The Organ*. The whole collection was published as *The Sacred Harp* in 1844. This tunebook was adopted as the official book of the Southern Musical Convention in 1845, and by many other newly formed conventions in the following decades in Georgia and further west as far as Texas. As mentioned previously, there were three enlarged editions in 1850, 1859 and 1869. A fifth edition was planned, but the death of B.F. White in 1879 ended plans for the new revision.

The 1844 edition, like those editions which follow, consists of the standard tunebook ingredients of a prefatory rudiments section followed by hymns, anthems, and fuging tunes. The 18th-century four-part fuging tunes were numerous, but White and his colleagues did not compose in that style in the first editions. Their main vehicle for expression in the 1850 edition was the three-part folk hymn. The 1859 edition included songs written in four parts, several in the style fuging tunes. This trend continues in the 1869 edition where a dozen new fuging tunes are introduced, and even more songs are written in four parts. Each successive edition grew larger and included new music by the southern composers.

In 1884, after the death of B.F. White, two of his
sons, J.L. White and B.F., Jr. published *The New Sacred Harp: A Collection of Hymn-Tunes, Anthems, and Popular Songs*. This collection contained music from the new gospel song repertory, and it was printed in seven-shape notation. Despite their obvious connection to the established tradition, this collection did not attain a wide or lasting audience.

The first truly important revision of *The Sacred Harp*, was published by William M. Cooper of Dothan, Alabama, in 1902. Its publication was timely, as there had been more than thirty years since the last revision by B.F. White, and a new revision was needed to incorporate songs added to the repertory.

Cooper was interested in keeping close to the model set by B.F. White, and though he made changes, they were not as radical as those made in *The New Sacred Harp*. He transposed many songs into lower keys; substituted descriptive titles for many of the old songs, and added some gospel songs to the repertory. A more substantial addition was the inclusion of alto parts to all the three-part songs. Although the songs from the New England school, especially the fuging tunes, were in four-part harmony, early Sacred Harp songs from other sources, especially the folk hymns, were in three parts. Over the 19th century, more and more

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10 This suggests original performance practice was at pitch. Today all songs are intoned with the use of relative pitch.
altos were added. Although the new alto parts changed the character of the music somewhat, it was a move which may have helped the survival of this music. Other editions of the Cooper book which follow the 1902 edition are those from 1907, 1909, 1927, 1949, and 1960.

With each new edition, the repertory was expanded. The original B.F. White edition had 262 pages; this number has increased to 577 in the 1960 edition of the Cooper book. This book is presently under revision, and it is likely that the repertory will be enlarged still further. One hundred "new" songs were sung at the Alabama convention in 1987. Of these, some were newly composed songs, but others were old songs that had been deleted from earlier editions. No doubt some will be added to the new Cooper book.

Of all of Cooper's changes, the decision to retitle songs for accessibility is the most questionable. There is a legacy of composers, poets, counties, cities, and states in the list of titles, which often have no bearing on the text of the song. These titles serve as identifying characteristics for concordance and should not be removed. This is one example of the issues that confront this music as its two-hundredth year approaches.

The Cooper book, is the one book presently employed both in Texas and southern Alabama Sacred Harp singings. There are several editions that appear at the singings, but only in the case of a song or two do those with the older
books have to look on with another singer.

The chief rival of the Cooper book is a new revision produced by Joe S. James in 1911. This revision was called the Original Sacred Harp. It contained over 600 songs; James included the 480-page 1869 edition of The Sacred Harp by B.F. White in its entirety.\(^{20}\) In addition to many new songs, of which 34 are attributed to composers from Alabama and Georgia, James also included many additional verses for the older songs and notations of historical or biographical information about the songs and composers. Like the Cooper book, there are alto parts added to all of the older songs. The later revisions of James' Original Sacred Harp were directed by several generations of the Denson family of Georgia and Alabama. This family had been very active in Sacred Harp music since 1844, when a tune by James Denson, "Christmas Anthem," appeared in the 1844 edition of The Sacred Harp. Two of James Denson's nephews, Thomas J. and Seaborn Denson, were instrumental in the later publication of the James edition in 1936. They were well known as singing school teachers in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas from 1874. Buell Cobb in his book The Sacred Harp\(^{21}\) mentions that Thomas J. Denson was recognized for having

\(^{20}\) Cooper was more selective of the songs included from the 1869 B.F. White edition.

taught more Sacred Harp singers than anyone else in his singing schools from Georgia to Texas.

Four editions sponsored by the Sacred Harp Publishing Company have followed the initial Denson revision of 1936. The music committee for the 1960, 1967 and 1971 editions included the daughter of Thomas J. Denson, Ruth Denson Edwards. The most recent revision, published in 1987, is the first edition which does not include a member of the Denson family, though it is still called the Denson revision, 1987. A more sophisticated presentation of the rudiments appears in this edition. Unlike the question and answer style maintained in the 1960 Cooper edition, the Denson offers more comprehensive explanations of the elements of music, and provides this information in a less antiquated English than that found in the Cooper.22 One wonders whether the forthcoming edition of the Cooper will reflect the 1987 Denson revision.

The Denson edition is more traditional than the Cooper.23 The original song titles are retained, and a


23 Buell E. Cobb, Jr., The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1978). Cobb discusses on page 110 that the editors of the Denson book were aware of the deep abyss which was growing between the singers as a result of the new forms which were being included in other collections such as the one by Cooper. The Densons and their followers repudiated these modern trends and only included older songs.

It should also be mentioned here that there is one other tunebook, William Walker's Southern Harmony, which is
great deal of historical information is provided along with each song. There is also a fairly clear delineation of the typical tune book format in the Denson revision.\textsuperscript{24} The Denson revisions of the \textit{Original Sacred Harp} continue to be used in Northern Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, and Tennessee.

A healthy rivalry existed between the singers of different regions over their preferred books. Curtis Owen, the patriarch of a Sacred Harp family in Texas, when questioned on this matter remarks that "there is less rivalry today than there has been in the last 50 years. Why there was a time when Northern and Southern Alabamans wouldn't sing together because of this book business. If you showed up to a singing in Southern Alabama they would tell you to leave that red book [Denson revisions] outside".\textsuperscript{25}

William Cooper and Joe S. James, in their respective editions derived from the original \textit{The Sacred Harp} (1844) by Major Benjamin Franklin White, retain many of the original page numbers for the songs they chose to include. This practice extends into the latest editions as well. This was still in use. However, it is only used by one group in Kentucky which uses this book at an annual singing.

\textsuperscript{24}Though the Cooper edition blurs the divisions of the song sections, many songs are found in the appropriate area in the book.

\textsuperscript{25}Interview with Curtis and Edith Owen on October 29, 1988.
the logical solution to an otherwise potentially chaotic situation, in which the congregation would have to relearn the new numbers for a song. When the original song from B.F. White's edition is not used, another song is inserted. However, it will be seen below that the disparity which did exist between song numbers in the different books was cause for confusion.

The song numbers act as the titles for the songs at a singing; their real titles are rarely mentioned. This is especially useful because often different tunebooks use different titles for the same songs, so singers associate the song with its number. As mentioned above, the Cooper edition changed the titles from the old names (representing geographic locales and people's names) to titles which were often the first line of text. A newcomer would not think to look up New Britain in the song index for the familiar hymn Amazing Grace and certainly would not know that in all the books this song is 45A.²⁶ The songs themselves often appear exactly as in previous editions, despite present-day performance practice which often alters the printed version of familiar songs.

The tunebooks have a long tradition of being organized into three sections: psalm and hymn tunes for worshipping

²⁶The letter 'A' or 'B' following a song number refers to the top and bottom songs on a single page. This identification, previously ignored in minutes of singings in early Texas, is presently employed at all Texas singings, and is recorded in present-day minutes.
assemblies, pieces used in singing schools and societies, and odes and anthems. In new editions, many of the new songs are added following the third section. In the Cooper book there is no formal division following the first song section, but the songs usually appear in the above mentioned order.

Texas Sacred Harp singers presently use the 1960 edition of the Cooper book, but a variety of books have been used in the past. A history of their use is partially documented in the minutes of the State Sacred Harp Association between the years 1912 and 1931. In 1912, "Article (4) section (1) Shall read as foll[ow]s. The Sacred Harp gotten out by B.F. White in 1869 and its revisions shall be the text book for this association." 27

By 1921, a committee on State Work "also [made a] recommendation that the J.S. James Revised Book, [be adopted] as our Legal Authorized Text Book, but not to the exclusion of other revisions of the B.F. White book of 1869." 28 This same recommendation was made the following year, suggesting that the effort was not easily accomplished. In 1925 a more emphatic plea to unite in the use of one book is made:

"Be it resolved by the Sacred Harp Singers Association of Texas that since it is a recognized fact that several song books

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27 Minutes of the State Sacred Harp Association, n.p., 33.
28 Ibid., 86.
of the fourshaped note notation are being used in our Convention both county and district, and each one bearing the name of "Sacred Harp", and each one differs in a large measure as to a oneness of page, oneness of words and key, thereby causing confusion among the singers and a loss of time to the leaders, that this Sacred Harp State Association adopt one Sacred Harp song book of the four-shaped note notation as its standard, to be used in the State Sacred Harp Singers of Texas." 29

Although they include no mention of which book is to be used, minutes of 1931 indicate that the James was certainly still used: "...W.T. Coston offered a resolution that the State Sacred Harp Association [to] revise the J.S. James Sacred Harp song book..." 30

The James edition was in use in Central Texas (McMahan) until it was replaced by the Cooper in the first decades of the twentieth century. An important figure in present-day Sacred Harp tradition, Curtis Owen from McMahan, Texas, remembers using the James edition which eventually became very difficult to find. The Cooper edition was adopted in this area when it was brought from East Texas. Neither Curtis nor Edith had seen the Denson edition of Original Sacred Harp until they met Hugh McGraw from Northern Alabama. 31

29Ibid., 121.

30Ibid., 175.

31The subject of the revisions of B.F. White's Sacred Harp is a fascinating study that is discussed at length in Buell Cobb's The Sacred Harp. Although there is less rivalry today than 50 years ago "there was a time when Northern and Southern Alabama wouldn't sing together because
Three songs which relate to Texas and Texans are represented in the later part of the Cooper edition: song number 422, *A Song of Texas*, song number 521, *A Golden Crown to Wear*, and song number 522, *Shades of Night*.

Song number 521, *A Golden Crown to Wear* (1910), was written by B.L. Vaughn of Jacksonville, Texas. His great-nephew Lewis Vaughn (b. 1910 Mt. Enterprise, Texas), attends most Texas singings today, and often leads this song. His son Robert Vaughn is also a Sacred Harp singer so it seems likely that this song will remain in the repertory another generation. A comparison study of the songs sung at the East Texas Musical Convention and the State Sacred Harp Musical Association between 1923-1939 show that 521 and especially 522 were well represented in both locations.

*Shades of Night*, song number 522, is attributed to John Miller of Athens, Texas and is dated August 18, 1911 in the 1960 edition of the Cooper book. Mr. Miller was president of the East Texas Musical Convention, so this song too had frequent exposure in Texas. However, compared to songs sung in Texas in 1987-88, 521 is performed at every session, while 522 has only been represented infrequently.

Both of these songs are composed in a typical fuging of this book business," comments Curtis Owen. There continues to be an ongoing controversy concerning the favored edition. The main regional rivalry at this time is between the Northern Alabamans and Georgians who use the Denson revision, and Southern Alabama and Texas who use the W.M. Cooper edition.
song style. Neither of these songs are included in the Original Sacred Harp editions. Nor is song number 422, A Song of Texas attributed to S.W. Palmer and H.S.R. Unlike 521 and 522, this song is a hymn written in the old Sacred Harp tradition, which includes a homophonic texture, a pentatonic melody in the tenor voice, and open fifths at three of the four cadence points.
Chapter III.

Song/Text Types in Sacred Harp Music

It has been seen that the tunebooks produced in the 18th and 19th centuries mirrored the changes of the time. First, as an implement of the singing school movement in New England, the tunebooks aided the cause for Regular Singing by teaching by notes instead of by rote. The singing schools were very successful in raising the level of musical literacy, and the musical appetite was whetted with the new skills obtained. Sacred Harp music reflects various social trends matching religious movements. The metrical psalms, the only musical forms considered appropriate for worship by the Calvinists, are largely replaced by the hymn during the First Great Awakening.

The music for many of the psalms is written in a pervasive homophonic style, with a variety of repetition schemes for the largely four-phrase songs. They are also occasionally written in the form of a fuging tune. Examples of repetition schemes are ABB (usually the form of the fuging tune), and ABA\textsuperscript{1}B\textsuperscript{1}, with the most prevalent being ABB. The best-known example of a psalm tune is "Old Hundred", or number 49 in Sacred Harp books. The tune is thought to have been written by Louis Bourgeois. He served as a music editor for Calvin's psalters in Geneva in the mid-16th
century. The tune appears in the Ainsworth psalter, and is shown in comparison with the four part texture from B.F. White's 1859 edition of *The Sacred Harp* in example 1 below.

![Example 1. O come, loud anthems let us sing](image)


Example 1.

It is not easy to document the transition from psalmody to hymnody, for each influenced the other, and many tunes were used by both psalm and hymn singers; however, there is a clear text distinction.\(^\text{32}\).

**Hymn texts by such writers such as Watts and Wesley were widely disseminated in America by Evangelical preachers during the 1730s and 1740s.** Their texts are largely concerned with the repentance of sinners, anticipation of death, and the judgment hour. The earliest texts were published without music and were evidently introduced to be sung to well-known melodies. The earliest publication containing music used what would later be

classified as folk hymns.

A frequently sung folk hymn today in Texas is *Arnold*. C.M. This song is written in an AABA repetition scheme and is largely homophonic and homorhythmic among all the parts; although the tenor voice includes a few passing notes which the other voices do not. The text given below was written by Charles Wesley in 1759:

Come let us join our friends above,
That have obtained the prize.
And on the eagle wings of love,
To joy celestial rise.

Let all the saints terrestrial sing
With those to glory gone.
For all the servants of our King,
In heaven and earth are one.

One family we dwell in him,
One church above beneath.
Though divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.

One army of the living God,
To his command we bow;
Part of the host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now.

Another type of folk hymn utilizes folk texts instead of those by Watts, Wesley and the other hymn writers. The earliest collection of folk texts is by Joshua Smith: *Divine Hymns or Spiritual Songs for the Use of Religious Assemblies and Private Christians* published in 1784. A collection of this type of text with musical settings is *The Christian Harmony* compiled by Jeremiah Ingalls and published
in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1805.\textsuperscript{22}

One of the most popular folk hymns of this type which is performed in Texas today and in the past is White. This tune, dedicated to B.F. White, was composed by Elder Edmund Dumas in 1856. This folk hymn is composed in a homophonic, homorhythmic style similar to Arnold above. Its repetition scheme is slightly different: AABB\textsuperscript{2}. The complete text is provided below.

Ye fleeting charms of earth farewell,
Your springs of joy are dry;
My soul now seeks another home.
A brighter world on high.

I'm a long time travelling here below,
I'm a long time travelling away from home.
I'm a long time travelling here below,
To lay this body down.

Farewell, my friends whose tender care
Has long engaged my love;
Your fond embrace I now exchange,
For better friends above.

I'm a long time travelling here below,
I'm a long time travelling away from home.
I'm a long time travelling here below,
To lay this body down.

The verse for "White" is provided in musical example 2.

\textsuperscript{22}Henry Wilder Foote, Three Centuries of American Hymnody, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1940), 174.
The musical definition of a folk hymn is very broad. Dorothy Horn defines it as "a contrafactum of a secular folk tune...an original tune composed in the idiom [melodic idiom] of secular folk music, or...a tune patched together, either wholly or in part, from pre-existing melodic fragments, a process known to musicologists as centonization."34

As mentioned above, psalms and hymns are often of the same musical style: solidly homophonic with repeated sections. It is likely that these songs were performed much more freely than they appear in the book. Many of these folk hymns display remnants of the ornamentation which existed in the oral tradition. An example is "New Britain," or as it more commonly known, "Amazing Grace." The text was written by John Newton in 1789.35 Though largely homophonic, there is more ornamentation in the individual voices, especially in the tenor, the voice which normally carries the melody. Quite possibly this song was originally disseminated in the oral tradition, and the rhythmic activity in the printed version reflects the improvisatory


aspect of this tradition. Musical example 3. provides a comparison of the beginning measures of "New Britain" as collected by Jackson and as recorded in The Sacred Harp, 1960 edition.

Example 3.

A separate yet related category of music is the fuging tune. This early American art form from the New England composers is utilized to the present day in the setting of folk hymns, and the form is used for psalm texts as well. Fuging tunes were used extensively in the singing schools of the 18th century. They are composed in two clear sections: a one-phrase, homophonic section which usually cadences on the tonic, followed by an imitative section of staggered entries, which is repeated. Musical example 4. provides the imitative section of the folk hymn "Blow Ye the Trumpet" written in the form of a fuging tune.

An ornamented version of "New Britain" collected and transcribed by George Pullen Jackson in 1936 can be found in Gilbert Chase America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 181. Jackson described this ornamented version as "an excellent illustration of the widespread southern folk-manner in the singing of hymns of this sort."
written in the form of a fugging tune.

Example 4.

Another branch of folk hymnody is the genre of the religious ballad. George Pullen Jackson describes ballads as "bible-story songs (carols) and songs of religious experience, exhortation and farewell." He mentions that "the total known number of American folksongs which tell a religious story is but little over a hundred." Jackson has provided examples of these songs in several of his publications. Some of these religious ballads are a part of The Sacred Harp tunebook. Titles for these songs include: "Holy City", "The Dying Christian", "The Dying Californian", "The Dying Minister", "The Dying Boy", "Complainer", "Lone Pilgrim", "The Royal Band", and "Wayfaring Stranger". Their stories are told in a narrative manner, often in the

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George Pullen Jackson, Another Sheaf of White Spirituals, (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1952), 57.

Death was evidently a common preoccupation among ballad writers.
texture, and often in a repetition scheme of AAB. Jackson believed that these songs were intended to be sung by a solo voice and accompaniment; evidently modern day singers find this to be the case as well. "Lone Pilgrim", attributed to B.F. White, is the only song in this genre performed in Texas both in the past and now. Jackson describes the function of these songs: "The story-singer often sang before religious gatherings, either on his own initiative or on request, as properly pious entertainment which was not foreign to the chief purpose of saving souls." The text given below unfolds the story of the "Lone Pilgrim":

I came to the place where the lone pilgrim lay,
And pensively stood by his tomb,
When in a low whisper I heard something say,
How sweetly he sleeps alone.

The tempest may howl, and the loud thunders roar,
And gathering storms may arise,
Yet calm are his feelings, at rest is his soul,
The tears are all wiped from his eyes.

The cause of his Master propelled him from home;
He bade his companions farewell;
He blessed his dear children who for him now mourn,
In far distant regions they dwell.

He wandered an exile and stranger from home,
No kindred or relative nigh;
He met the contagion and sank to the tomb,
His soul flew to mansions on high.

O tell his companion and children most dear,
To weep not for him now he's gone;
The same hand that led him thro' scenes most severe,
Has kindly assisted him home.

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The fact that the music is not very different from that of a folk hymn can be seen below in musical example below. This indicates that this type of narrative text is not popular in Texas.

Example 5.

The revival spiritual, or revival hymn, is a genre that resulted from the campmeeting phenomenon in the early 19th century. In some ways, revival music can be viewed as an extension of the hymn movement in New England. However, several environmental factors unique to the campmeeting atmosphere created special needs. These gatherings took place in the wilderness and were attended by thousands of people, and few, if any, music books were available. The teaching of the songs was therefore by rote, which demanded a certain simplicity from the tunes. A phrase or more from familiar folk hymn melodies are often used as the first part of these revival hymns. This is followed by a phrase which is repeated. No music was published for the campmeetings; only the texts were printed in pocket sized books called campmeeting songsters. These texts are written very simply
and are mostly concerned with the salvation of the sinner. In his book *Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America*, Jackson describes the development of revival spirituals as a process of verse simplification from the New England texts. In some of these songs the verse was probably lined out, according to Jackson, but the refrain section was sung by the rest of those gathered. In the most simplified form, "one short phrase is sung three times and then followed by a one-phrase refrain." The key element in these songs is repetition. The refrain is often the most recognizable feature of these songs as they are catchy tunes which are repeated a number of times. An example of this repetitious type of text is from the song "Sweet Canaan", song number 87 in *The Sacred Harp*:

**VERSE 1**
0 who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the land of Canaan,
I'm bound fair Canaan's land to see,
I am bound for the land of Canaan,

**VERSE 2**
I'll join with those who're gone before,
I am bound for the land of Canaan,
Where sin and sorrow are no more,
I am bound for the land of Canaan.

**CHORUS**
O Canaan, sweet Canaan,
I'm bound for the land of Canaan,
Sweet Canaan, 'tis my happy home:
I am bound for the land of Canaan.

The chorus from "Sweet Canaan" is provided in the following musical example:

Example 6.

The tunes used for their texts were simple and folklike in character. They were eventually recorded from the oral tradition in The Sacred Harp and other shape-note tunebooks beginning in the 1840s. From the "One Hundred One Revival Spiritual Songs" provided by Jackson in his book Spiritual Folk-Songs of Early America, there are twenty that are in The Sacred Harp. Of these twenty, only two are not recorded as having been sung in Texas. They are all composed in a homophonic style, which, coupled with the memorable refrain, aids in teaching these songs to a large gathering. There are many examples of songs of this style represented in The Sacred Harp, and unlike the religious ballads, they have been frequently performed. Some of the most popular revival spiritual songs in The Sacred Harp which are performed in
Texas are (in descending order) "Ragan", "To Lay This Body Down", "Alas! And Did My Saviour Bleed?", "Ecstasy", "Antioch", "Exhilaration", and "The Golden Harp".

It is possible that the lack of a clear delineation of the song sections in the Cooper book could be due to the incredible variety of spiritual songs. This term covers religious ballads, folk hymns, and revival hymns, all of which are related in different ways.

The songs from the middle to the end of the book includes odes and anthems and also includes many of the new songs. An ode is "a poem in free meter and verse structure, frequently addressed to a deity." The Sacred Harp. These are not well represented in the Cooper book and there are only a few in the Denson book. However, anthems are well represented and can be considered the high art songs of The Sacred Harp. These sectional pieces are much longer than any of the other song types, often four to seven pages long, and they involve several changes of meter and a variety of solo and duet passages for the different voice parts. (See musical example 7. below). These pieces are the most difficult to lead and to sing compared to the other genres found in The Sacred Harp. Even though there are about a half dozen anthems included in the Cooper book written by composers from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, their...

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great length makes them a substantial part of the book. The overwhelming favorite in Texas is song number 235, "Easter Anthem" written by William Billings. It was performed at every single singing in 1988 as well as at singings in the past in Texas.

Example 7.
Chapter IV.

The Spread of Sacred Harp Music Through Texas Sacred Harp Musical Associations

Sacred Harp music is music of rural American families and they have been responsible for its preservation up to the present time. It spread to various parts of the country as the frontier moved West and South. Pioneer groups settled in Alabama and Mississippi between the 1830s and 1850s, but due to the lack of modern agricultural methods, they exhausted the soil after a short period. They continued the movement southward and westward, eventually settling in Texas.22

The first evidence of Sacred Harp music in Texas is that of the East Texas Musical Convention, originally organized in Grayson County, Texas, in 1855.24 The annual singings have been continuous, with the exception of a few years during the Civil War. This singing is still active. The 1988 gathering celebrated 120 years of consecutive annual singings.

It is impossible to pinpoint the number and location of...

22Information obtained from conversation with Dr. John Kilpatrick, March 1989, Houston, Texas.

singers, singings and conventions over the 134 years of Sacred Harp music in Texas since record keeping has not always been consistent. Undoubtedly much has been lost. The best sources of information on Sacred Harp traditions in Texas are the minutes of Sacred Harp singings. Although the documents are not always consistent or complete, they are representative of how and where meetings were run, who ran them, and who led which songs. In addition they provide information regarding singings in other locations. They also are a vital key to the determination of a core repertory of songs in the Texas Sacred Harp tradition. A list of existing minutes are given in Table I.

Table I.

Minutes of Texas Sacred Harp Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization or Source</th>
<th>Dates Available</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Texas Musical Convention</td>
<td>1868-1974</td>
<td>Zavalla State Archives, Austin, Tx.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Sacred Harp Association</td>
<td>1907-1959</td>
<td>Zavalla State Archives, Austin, Tx.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Union Singing Convention (renamed Southwest Texas Sacred Harp Singing Convention)</td>
<td>1900-1902; 1985-1988</td>
<td>Privately held by John Baker, Lockhart, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith County Sacred Harp</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conventions & Singings Across Texas

Texas Interstate Sacred Harp* 1929, 1933 Mineral Wells, Texas.
Musical Association

Texas Young People's Interstate* 1936 Nacogdoches, Texas.
Sacred Harp Musical Association

*These minutes were not consulted for this study.

A call to organize by convention and district at the 1913 State Sacred Harp Association produced the only information pertaining to the size of the various classes that attend this convention. The groups of singers from a particular region are called classes or conventions. Although these terms are not exactly clear, classes appear to meet more frequently than the conventions, which often result from combined classes, and meet on an annual or semi-annual basis. The various names of these groups appear for the first time in the financial records for contributions given to the State Sacred Harp Association. Unfortunately the information provided is incomplete as to their size, and location. There are no new groups mentioned beyond 1928. A list of all groups mentioned is provided below in Table II. In addition, the map located in the Appendix provides a visual aid for this geographic distribution. A description as to exactly what "class" and "supporting strength" represent in Table II. is not provided in the minutes. However, it is likely that the class consists of the certified singers from a region who are eligible to attend
the State Sacred Harp Association convention. The
supporting strength, then, is the remainder of the
community. The leaders would obviously be chosen from the
class. See Table II below.

**Table II.**

**List of Sacred Harp Classes and Conventions**

*Affiliated with the State Sacred Harp Association*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Convention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bell and Falls Counties:</td>
<td>Little Flock Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class of 350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting strength of 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee County:</td>
<td>Cherokee County Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class of 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting strength of 2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas County:</td>
<td>Dallas County Sacred Harp Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class of 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting strength of 700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class meets 1st &amp; 3rd Sunday each month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual Convention: 3rd Saturday and Sunday in May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erath County:</td>
<td>Erath County Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class of 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting strength of 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>200 Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Sat and Sun in May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin and Titus Counties:</td>
<td>Franklin/Titus Co. Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class of 290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting strength of 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100 leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt and Delta Counties:</td>
<td>North Texas Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting strength of 2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old East Texas Convention:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class of 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting strength of 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>400 leaders (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The information listed above can be found in the minutes of the State Sacred Harp Association 1907-1959.*
It has also been possible to determine the number of people at some of the conventions of the State Sacred Harp Association through the use of these minutes. Lists of names of singers were organized into different categories, although these categories varied from year to year: names registered, visitors and singers, officers and members, and leaders. See Table III.

**Table III.**

**Number of Singers at State Sacred Harp Association Singings 1921-1939**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several other singing groups are in attendance at the State Sacred Harp Association Conventions. The reason these groups are not listed are not clear. Their presence is known because the place of origin of the individual singers is given along with their name. Their home location is not among classes which are mentioned. The list in Table IV. was compiled from the information in the State Sacred Harp Association Minutes between 1912-1928. The organization,
its location, and annual singing dates are provided. It is
typical of Sacred Harp folk to talk of the singings as
falling, for example, on the "third Sunday and Saturday
before".

Table IV.*

Locations and Dates of Annual Singings for Conventions

Affiliated with the State Sacred Harp Association

Bosque County Sacred Harp Convention: Meets at Fairview,
3rd Saturday and Sunday before in May.
Central Texas Musical and Singing Convention: Henderson/
Van Zandt Counties: Thursday before the 3rd Sunday in
July.
Central West Texas Convention: [Taylor class becomes
incorporated here by 1927] Taylor County: 5th Sundays.
Coleman County Sacred Harp Class: Meets 1st and 3rd Sunday
each month.
County Line Convention: Eastland and Callahan Counties:
Semi-annual meetings as arranged.
Fort Worth Class: Tarrant County: 2nd and 4th Sundays.
Hill Country Sacred Harp Class: Time and place as arranged.
Hubbard City Class: Hill County
Garrett Class
Grandma Smith's Class: Dublin, Erath County: The Class
meets every 1st Sunday, semi-annual singings in winter
and summer. Established in 1913.
Hood County**
Lafayette Annual Convention: Upshur County: Friday before
Second Sunday in August.
Midway Sacred Harp Association (renamed Texas Interstate
Sacred Harp Association in 1929): Dallas/Ft. Worth
Classes: Annual Convention meets variable dates 2nd
Saturday and Sunday in May, or June. First annual
convention: 1924.
Mineral Wells Class: Palo Pinto County: Meets 1st and 3rd
Sunday afternoons each month.
Navarro County Convention
North and West Texas Sacred Harp Association: One singing
listed as located in Anson, Jones County: 1st Saturday
and Sunday in July. Established 1921.
North East Texas Convention
Professor A.N. Whitten's Class: Knox County: Annual
Convention meets Saturday before the 5th Sunday in
June.
Somerville County**
State Sacred Harp Association: Meets 2nd Saturday and Sunday in July at various petitioned locations.
Taylor County 5th Sunday Class: Meets each 5th Sunday, location for singing decided by group.
Teachers and Singers Institute of Henderson County: Meets semi-annually, 3rd Saturday and Sunday of April and September.
Waco Sacred Harp Class: McLennan County: Meets each 4th Sunday at the Primitive Baptist Church.
West Texas Convention
Williamson County Convention
Wise County Convention
Wood County Convention
Wortham Class: Freestone County

* Information obtained from the State Sacred Harp Association Minutes 1907-1959.
** Group name is not listed.

There is a variety of other topics for which the minutes offer enlightenment. These topics include: the structure of the organization; the need for correspondence with, and unification of the various districts; aspects of performance practice; book usage; and attitudes about other music. Details of problems between regions as well as problems relating to individual singings, such as "no water, city pump turned off" are also cited.**

The Preamble of the Constitution and By-Laws states:

"We the "Sacred Harp Singer of Texas," deserving to perpetuate the songs of our fathers, and to improve and better systematize our church music, to have a more perfect organization of our singing conventions, societies, memorial meetings and county organizations, and to have a State Association in which all lovers of Sacred Songs of all religious denominations can participate; invoking the aid and guidance of Almighty God

**State Sacred Harp Association minutes page 248, 1954.
do ordain and establish this constitution.

Article I.

Section 1. This association shall be known by the name of the "Sacred Harp Association of Texas".

Section 2. This association shall meet annually at such time and place as shall be fixed at each meeting, and shall continue for as many days as shall be designated by each annual association; provided this clause shall not prohibit call or special sessions, which be called together by the President.

Section 3. The officers of this association shall be a President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, Chaplin, Sergeant-at-Arms, and members of standing committees as hereafter provided for."

The 1907 constitution originally provides for five committees which are appointed at the beginning of each annual session by the President. The committees are described as follows:

"The Committee on Arrangement shall consist of 5 members. They shall make all necessary arrangements for time and place of meetings for the Association."**

"The Committee on Program shall consist of 1 member from each Sacred Harp musical convention that maintains a permanent organization in Texas...Their duty shall be to arrange the music and leaders for the different sessions..."***

"The Committee on Finance shall consist of 7 members. All matters on this subject shall be referred to and considered by this committee."**

"The Committee of Examinations for certificates shall consist of 5 members, each to hold a valid certificate recognized by their respective association or convention. Their duty shall be to examine all applicants desiring

**State Sacred Harp Association of Texas Minutes, 1907-1959, page 296.

***Ibid., page 295.

**Ibid.
certificates from this association to teach vocal music in Texas."\(^9\)

"The Committee on Obituaries and Resolutions shall consist of 7 members whose duty shall be to draft all resolutions and obituary papers for the association.\(^9\) 1925:

In 1925 eight committees are listed, many of their titles are different from those of 1907. The new committees were called: Song Book, Examining Board, Memorial, Finance, Correspondence, Department, Teachers and Singing Schools, and Music.

There is no set of guidelines established for these committees at this time. The fifth resolution describes what type of person preferred for a committee:

"Resolved further that men of thought and positiveness be placed at the head of each committee, knowing full well that it is not so much what we refrain from doing as what we do that makes useful members in this organization. Men without a fixed and positive mind to carry our work forward and upward will fail in making it a success. Every member of our organization is an asset or a liability. A negative member is always doubtful and fearful and it is difficult for him to decide on any objective and when he does, he is equally hesitant about the matter. A positive man or member, if he or she makes mistakes, make them in an effort to do something constructive. He would rather make mistakes in an effort worthwhile than to have no errors recorded against him and remain a worthless member. An organization composed of positive members is producing something for the preservation and comfort of humanity. Every member to the extent of his or her

\(^9\)Ibid.

\(^9\)Ibid., page 297.
influence upon others, either helps or hinders. If he puts his shoulders to the wheel of human endeavor, he encourages others to do likewise. Lack of faith in God and humanity mean lack of hope, and lack of hope means despair, and despair means ruin. We should therefore, have [faith] in our officers, for without faith—mankind, no business can be carried on. When every member of our organization determines in his or her mind to be a helper, our officers will have a lighter load to carry. An organization of thought and then of action gets its inspiration from a sense of duty and not from covetousness."\(^3\)

There is a recommendation made that "several of the committees working as a whole shall be fixed for our... plans for [State] Work."\(^2\)

The desire to reach out to other organizations in order to unify is seen throughout the minutes, beginning with a call for correspondence from the various factions present at the 1916 convention. "By order of the Convention, a letter of Greeting be sent to the United Sacred Harp Musical Association at Atlanta, Georgia, September 8, 1916."\(^3\)

The cause for the promotion of Sacred Harp music surfaces in 1925. There is interest in creating a journal "giving the public, and especially Sacred Harp Singers, the

\(^1\)Ibid., 121.

\(^2\)Ibid., 122.

\(^3\)Ibid., 57. This letter "to be sent" actually meant to be delivered in person by a chosen delegate who would attend the United Sacred Harp Musical Association convention on September 8, 1916.
widest information possible as to the doings of our work."\textsuperscript{54}

Another measure to promote the spread of the music is suggested in the same convention:

"We observe a hopeful tendency to having vocal music taught in our public schools and we should instantly seize upon this opportunity to place Sacred Harp music to the forefront as the best possible, to be imparted through this channel to the youth of our land."

One instance of successfully bringing the music to an audience outside of the convention is given at this time as well:

"As an avenue of getting our music before the public-at-large, we have been most favorably impressed with what limited experiences we have had in Broadcasting over the radio, where we have the largest possible hearing estimated at ten to twelve million people as an audience, and the response of whole-hearted approval has been phenomenal indeed."

In 1927 the Association was preparing to resist a new development in music that was threatening their cause.

"Realizing as we do, that the time has come when Sacred Music shall claim its own in the home, community and church, we feel that the foundation upon which we desire to build is sufficient to rear a structure that will be unshak[able] and immovable when time has set its everlasting seal upon the so called jazz music of the world."\textsuperscript{55}

This is the only inference made to any type of music in

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., page 114.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., page 155.
all minutes examined.

The conventions were rather large gatherings for the rural hamlets upon which they would descend for their meetings. Thanks are given in each convention in the closing announcements to the residents in the area for their "hospitality during our stay". They opened their homes, and apparently their stables, to the vistors:

"People would come from far and near. They had a Sacred Harp singing convention over here at Pine Grove one time...My grandpa would tell all these singers to come and bring their pillows and quilts and things for pallets. And they would feed them all. Well, he said he left there one Monday morning and he said there were 14 visiting horses and mules in my grandpa's lot pen. And some of the people had gone home the day before."

1921-1930 seems to have been the most industrious period for this organization. The 1930s are not documented fully, but the ensuing years up to the closing of the minute book in 1959 display a decline in organization and membership, which is reflected in the progressively sloppy minutes.

The East Texas Musical Convention has a longer history than that of the State Sacred Harp Association, but the minutes of the first group are not as informative. Facts directly pertaining to the convention are given, such as the presiding officers, the date, the building in which the

**"Loblolly", Gary School newspaper, Panola County, Winter 1974, 26-27.**
meeting is held, and the county. From 1868–1921 names for leaders are given, and starting in 1922 song numbers are coupled with their leaders.

Unlike the State Sacred Harp Association, which met in only a few different locations, the East Texas Convention met in numerous places. A list of counties with towns and churches underneath is provided in Table V.:

Table V.

Locations of East Texas Musical Conventions 1868–1974

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GREGG</th>
<th>PANOLA</th>
<th>RUSK</th>
<th>SMITH</th>
<th>UPSHUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pea Town*</td>
<td>Beckville</td>
<td>Chalk Hill</td>
<td>Starrville</td>
<td>Painted Rock*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chapman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harmony Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks Chapel*</td>
<td>Henderson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pine Tree*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carthage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mt. Mariah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Prospect*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebinezer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oak Hill*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairplay</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pine Grove*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Baptist*</td>
<td>Pinehill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumbo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pine Grove*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebolth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tatum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walton School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Churches

The Constitution and By-Laws of the East Texas Musical Convention show that they hold similar goals to that of the State Sacred Harp Association:

"We the vocalist[s] of the above named convention are feeling it the duty of the present age to do still greater effort in balancing the state of sacred music; believing it essential to the prosperity of the church; and the social well-being of the rising generation that it is one of the highest human attainments well calculated to harmonize the conflicting event of human mind; producing a
oneness among all classes, and as such, worthy of our best efforts for advancement, do adopt this the following situation."

A rather unusual circumstance is documented following the first pages of the constitution and by-laws:

"From a survey of the past we find that Lemonade Stands and such like has been detrimental to our convention in many ways in confusion and against the interest of the community when we convene. And as we claim our convention a part of the worship of the most High God, therefore resolve that we denounce Lemonade Stands and such like, as being detrimental to our convention and against the interest of community where we convene."

This convention was originally set up by the by-laws "to meet annually on Wednesday at 2 p.m. before the fourth Sabbath in July at such place as be designated by the convention." Nowhere does the constitution provide for the number of days the convention is to meet. However, the more detailed minutes beginning in 1922 reflect three-day conventions beginning on Wednesday afternoon. This pattern is only occasionally altered, depending--literally--on the weather. At the 1941 convention, "owing to inclement weather, the President decided to close the convention."

The number of days for the convention is not specified, but

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"7 The East Texas Musical Convention Minutes, 1868-1974, unnumbered page which opens the book.

"8 Ibid., p. 4.

"9 Ibid.

"0 Ibid., p. 200."
from 1922-1942 these conventions lasted three days. This pattern is broken in 1942, when it is reduced to two days, Thursday and Friday. In 1944 the convention began a pattern of meeting on Friday and Saturday. In 1955 a motion was carried to meet for one day, the Friday before the fourth Sunday in July. Following 1956 the minutes are kept only sporadically, but from 1968 to the closing of the minutes in 1974, the convention was active for two days, Saturday and Sunday. This is the current schedule used for the East Texas Musical Convention.

The 1930s were the high point of the tradition in Texas. East Texas was the most active region, but evidence that singers and singings fanned out across the state can be seen in the minutes; where announcements of area singings are made. For a time there was a singing group as far west as Big Bend. Each singing association consisted of a number of classes, or regional groups of singers as mentioned above. Classes are made up of the singing school population in their respective areas. Singing schools were especially prevalent in East Texas where they were led by teachers such as Tom J. Denson, Oran Wade, Travis Rousseau, Wilber Wilson, Clay Hudson, Elder H.D. Cash, and R.E. Bartlett. Singing schools were also convened in central Texas, but the center of activity appears in East Texas.**

**This information was obtained from the author's questionnaires which the singers were given between May and November 1988.
Another major source of information regarding early Sacred Harp activity in Texas is the older singers. Since many years are largely undocumented, their memories of singing-schools and singings in Texas are significant. These singers could be the only source of information about Sacred Harp singing in its original sociological setting. Since the sociological make-up of the group is changing, it is particularly important to record the memories of these older singers now. Without their accounts of Sacred Harp in the 1920s and 1930s, only scattered bits of information will be available. A concerted effort is needed to reach these singers in the near future.\textsuperscript{a2}

The only other documentation for an early singing in Texas is recorded in George Pullen Jackson's 1933 book \textit{White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands}. In this book he describes the 1930 convention of the Texas Interstate Sacred Harp Musical Association, which consisted of a congregation of about two hundred people. Jackson describes them as being "the same type, precisely, that I had met in many other Sacred Harp conventions. This was evident from their work-browned faces and their absence of 'style'. Callouses were much in evidence."\textsuperscript{a3} Each singing group represented at the

\textsuperscript{a2}Information from my conversations with these singers and questionnaires which they filled out is cited throughout this chapter.

\textsuperscript{a3}George Pullen Jackson, \textit{White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands}, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 111-126.
convention elects from five to ten singers--delegates--who will lead. Jackson describes these delegates as each wearing a ribbon denoting their singing school or convention affiliation. This type of identification is no longer employed. Currently before each song is sung, the singer's full name and location are cited, which allows most of the singers to become familiar with one another.

Jackson also talks about the role of women at the 1930 convention. He mentions that, in comparison to other singings, women in Texas were not "declassed". Although men were more numerous, the women were also chosen to lead songs and "their conductorial work was on a par with that of the males."**

The Texas Interstate Sacred Harp Association promoted excellence in the education of children through singing contests at conventions. Jackson was witness to one such contest in 1930 involving fifteen children ranging in age from six years to the early teens. They were judged on tempo, accent, pronunciation or the "notes", rendition or performance style, and conducting ability. These terms are somewhat unclear as described by Jackson: "The contest was in reality a test of ability in conducting, solmization and music memory." *** Incentives for the child singers were cash prizes up to $30. This was a great motivation, for $30

**"Ibid., 116-117.
***"Ibid., 119.
was a huge sum at that time. This type of contest took place during the 1930s during the heyday of Sacred Harp music in Texas. Today this aspect of Sacred Harp singing in Texas has disappeared. The children still lead songs; in fact they start at a much earlier age. There are no longer cash prizes; the incentive to do well comes from family and friends.

Indications of changing interests appear immediately following the second World War. With the increasing mobility of American families there was a noticeable decline in attendance at singings, and fewer singing schools as well."

However, the state of this tradition has improved a great deal since 1976. A study of the Sacred Harp tradition of East Texas was written by Margaret L. Rounsavall. Though this study is not helpful for other areas examined in this thesis, it is valuable to use for comparison of present-day East Texas singings. Her 1976 master's thesis "Sacred Harp Music: An East Texas Tradition" states "No longer do Sacred Harp conventions in East Texas require auditoriums to accommodate crowds. Singings today are held in small rural churches, chiefly Primitive Baptist churches. Few singers

"The noticeable decrease in attendance following World War II can be seen in minutes from the State Sacred Harp Association and those from the East Texas Musical Convention. This was confirmed through the interview with Myrl Jones in August of 1988 who described how her family and others became "scattered across America". 
attend the singings today, but the singing groups do persist." In contrast to this, almost six hundred people, representing eight states, sang for two full days and an evening at the East Texas Musical Convention held at the Henderson Community Center in August 1988.

If this trend continues, it seems likely that Sacred Harp music will live into the 21st century.

Chapter V.

Who Sings?

One of the most striking features of the Sacred Harp tradition is the part that families have played in its preservation. The atmosphere of the singing community is very familial, and the singing school and singing conventions provide environments in which several family needs are met. The gatherings provide spiritual nourishment, a feeling of community, an atmosphere of learning, a sense of unity through song, and above all, love. They are joyful events in which all members of the family can participate.

There are many Texas families who have upheld the Sacred Harp tradition in the past and continue to do so at present. Although this topic proves to be an exhaustive study in itself, and too vast for this thesis, some aspects of it will be discussed below.

The survival of the Russell family singing in Huntington, mentioned in chapter IV. A., is one example of the tenacity with which this tradition can take hold. It may only be because the children in a large family, such as the Russell's, were required to learn to sing that a residual group, like that of Huntington, exists at all.

Another family which was vital to the Texas Sacred Harp
tradition is the Smith family of Smith County, Texas. Myrl Jones is an important member in a vast network of Sacred Harp singers created by the Smith family. In 1899 or 1900, her grandmother, Pinkie Melinda Smith, and her nine children moved from Alabama to Garden Valley, Smith County, Texas. These children were the foundation of the Garden Valley Sacred Harp Singing Class in 1919. By 1930 this class had about thirty members, all members of the Smith Family. From the early 1920s until the early 1940s, this family became known as the Smiths of Smith County Texas at the singing conventions. Myrl's parents had six children, all of whom learned to sing Sacred Harp at the Garden Valley Primitive Baptist church, a Smith family church. In addition to Myrl and her siblings, fourteen of their children and grandchildren are still singing Sacred Harp music. Myrl and her sister Myra still attend ten to twelve singings in Texas and Alabama each year. When questioned as to her thoughts on the future of Sacred Harp tradition in Texas, she replied "We find today that [when] young people marry into families that do not know or love Sacred Harp Music that we lose them in the singings and conventions."

Another East Texas family, the Rousseau's, have an equally interesting background. Travis and Julia Rousseau, 

"All material on the Smith family was gained through interviews and correspondence with Mryl Jones in 1988.

"Ibid., Letter attached to questionnaire, August, 1988."
born in 1824 and 1832 respectively, moved to Rusk county, Texas in 1867. Their marriage resulted in eighteen children, of which fifteen lived, and most of them sang Sacred Harp. Travis taught singing schools in Panola and Rusk counties. An article which appeared in the Rusk County News of June 14, 1905 describes his abilities at age 80: "If you want to feel that sensational thrill akin to heavenly emotions, you have only to hear Uncle Trav and his trained vocal class." Marion Rousseau, the great-granddaughter of Travis Rousseau, who has grown up in the tradition through singing schools and conventions, has been a valuable source for information on the Rousseau family, and early Sacred Harp activity in East Texas.

The Owen family is a dynamic force in the practice and preservation of the Sacred Harp tradition of Texas at this time. They are busy maintaining and reviving the tradition in three different regions of Texas.

Curtis K. Owen is the patriarch of this well-known Sacred Harp family. He is a third generation Sacred Harp singer, born in McMahon, Texas on October 19, 1919. Curtis is the son of Odus Owen and Mary Elizabeth Handley Owen, whose families have been in farming for several generations. His great-great-grandfather was a Primitive Baptist preacher in Dozier, Alabama beginning in 1828. His grandfather Handley was raised in Dozier, Alabama and moved to Texas with his family in 1893. Curtis comments that Grandfather
Handley was a Sacred Harp singer and teacher, and that "he was a good singer and all his family [wife and seven children] were good singers."\(^7^0\) When he moved to Texas he brought his B.F. White Sacred Harp book written in three-part harmony, as well as the Lloyd's Primitive Baptist Hymn Book.\(^7^1\)

Curtis led his first song when he was six years old. He and his siblings studied Sacred Harp music with Pink Meredith, Lonnie Combes and Walter Reed in singing schools held in schools and churches in McMahan between 1930 and 1940. In addition he attended many singings. Curtis is held in high regard as a fine singer and keyer by the singing community.\(^7^2\) Curtis' education was typical for singers of the time, but his family has maintained the Sacred Harp tradition in such an unusually vigorous way in spite of the pressures from the changes in American society today.

Curtis married Edith Morrow in 1944. She also grew up in a farming family, but her family did not sing Sacred Harp music. In 1934 Edith attended her first singing school in De Witt County, and one other in 1949 in Combes, Texas. Edith has been an active singer since she married Curtis and

\(^7^0\)Curtis and Edith Owen interview October, 28, 1989.

\(^7^1\)Grandfather Handley's church originally used this hymn book which contains 17th- and 18th-century texts. The tunes used were of an oral tradition which becomes a part of the repertory of the Sacred Harp in the mid-19th century.

\(^7^2\)A definition of a 'keyer' is provided in Chapter VI.
is very dedicated to the activities of the Bethel Primitive Baptist Church. In addition to extensive involvement with church matters she is instrumental in the organization for the annual two-day singing. Curtis and Edith actively pursue singings in many parts of the United States, and have collected a valuable library of tapes from these singings over the years.

Their three children and their spouses and their grandchildren are deeply involved with the Sacred Harp tradition. They all attend many singings in Texas, and are also involved with the organization of singings in the three different regions where they live.

Diane Owen Ross and Judge Donald Ross are both Sacred Harp singers. They are largely responsible for the organization of the East Texas State Convention which meets in Henderson in August each year. The Judge is a reliable keyer like his father-in-law, Curtis Owen. As mentioned above, he is active as a Sacred Harp singing school teacher at Zion Hill church in Rusk county. Their two teenage sons, Owen and Ryan, have been raised with the tradition and are frequent leaders at singings.

Dallas county, which lies to the north and west of Rusk county, is home to another branch of the Owen family, Beverly Owen Coates and Bruce Coates. They live in Lancaster, a suburb of Dallas, but they worship at the Dallas Primitive Baptist church. Bruce often chairs the
gatherings of the Southwest Texas Sacred Harp Singing Association. Beverly, like her mother, is active in the Primitive Baptist church. She is well known as being an excellent singer, and has learned to sing the notes for both four-shape and seven-shape music exceptionally well. They have three children, of which only one leads at singings.

Edith and Curtis' third child, Tom, and his wife Mary Ann, live in Lockhart, Texas. Tom is visible at many singings as a very active singer, leader, and is often chairman of singings. Their two children, Amanda and Jeb, have been singing and leading Sacred Harp music since they were toddlers. Mary Ann participates in the singing, but does not lead.

These families are the traditional keepers of Sacred Harp music. However, there is another group of singers which appears to be on the rise. These are the people who hear this music for the first time and decide that they must sing.72 One statement that has been used freely to describe Sacred Harp music is that it is a singer's music, not a listener's. This is a broad generalization that is actually untrue. To a newcomer to this music, there is nothing that stirs the soul more than the sounds of the a cappella voices. This is particularly beautiful when one listens to the music from outside. There is a constant timbral shift in

72Including people like me.
the open harmonies of the just intoned chords.\textsuperscript{74} There is something instantly appealing about this vigorous music.

New singers bring with them a new sociological makeup for the Sacred Harp tradition. Great diversity is displayed in their occupational makeup. Information from questionnaires indicates jobs which include that of engineer, high-tech employee, archaeologist, writer, student, historian, and teacher. Although some of those questioned had some singing school training, most have only participated in singings.

This new singer is graciously, perhaps even gratefully, invited to join the Sacred Harp community by those raised within the tradition. If the tradition is to survive, there must be singers, regardless of their background.

\textsuperscript{74} A description of just intonation appears below in Chapter VI.
Chapter VI.

Texas Sacred Harp Singings
Performance Practice Now and in the Past

The format for a singing has not been significantly altered since its original documentation by George Pullen Jackson in the 1930s. Singers still meet for singings in small rural churches of the Primitive Baptists. Although the distinction is not universal, if a meeting is one day it is called a singing; if two days it is called a convention.

The singers arrive with covered dishes for dinner and the women tend to the organization of the noon meal. Participants fill out registration cards which contain the singer's name, address, and information as to whether or not the singer is willing to lead. This is a newer development in the tradition; previously leaders were chosen by the chairman of the singing association or by a special committee. Formerly the level of musicianship was evidently higher, making the choice of leaders a more selective process. The 1925 minutes of the State Sacred Harp includes the following statement: "We openly insist and hope that it may be adopted as the policy of this convention to see that none appear upon the floor to conduct our music except those
who are competent and well equipped..." The decreased population of singers today permits the less able to lead as well as those with more experience.

When it is time to begin, the singers arrange themselves in the traditional hollow square formation according to the part they intend to sing. The leader stands in the middle of a square facing the tenors, with the altos directly behind, the basses on the leader's right and the trebles on the leader's left. Despite the four-part physical arrangement, the music is sung so that some tenors sing the treble part, and some treble singers sing the tenor part. Other alterations of the voice parts are not uncommon. This practice, which expands the music into six or more parts, creates a wide spectrum of vocal timbre. It is often referred to by the singers as dispersed harmony. The effect of the extensive doubling is accentuated through this spatial arrangement. Some singers who cannot read the music, yet want to sing, can be observed grabbing familiar melodies as they occur. This is certainly evidence of a living oral tradition. More evidence is found in the infrequent clashes of harmony which arise out of

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75 Minutes of the State Sacred Harp Association, n.p., page 114-115.

76 I have observed doubling of the alto line an octave higher as well.
disagreement as to the mode of a song. \(^7\)

The singings usually open at 9:00 or 9:30 in the morning with a prayer led by the chairman. This prayer often gives thanks for the gathering once more of the singers to sing the "good ol' songs", and voices the desire that the group's music will be worthy of the Lord. The chairman leads the first song. Leaders are then called one by one to lead. Unless there is a particularly small congregation, each leader is requested to lead one song at a time. This is another departure from the past when each leader would lead anywhere from one to four songs at a time. \(^8\) At that time also leaders were appointed by the committee on arrangements to make up lists of songs to be sung, whereas now the choice is up to the individual leader.

The morning session consists of two groups of songs with a recess in between. The first group of songs lasts about an hour to an hour and a half at which time there is a short recess. The singers reconvene and sing until noon at which time there is a mealtime prayer preceding the dinner on the grounds. According to minutes of past meetings, the noon meal, a time for socializing, was often

\(^7\)This kind of variation is examined in the works of George Pullen Jackson and Dorothy Horn. I, too, have experienced this matter of modal ambiguity. The familiar folk hymn Amazing Grace is a good example of a tune in which the mode is often in disagreement.

\(^8\)This information is from the minutes of the East Texas Musical Convention and the State Sacred Harp Singing Association.
given an hour and a half. This has been reduced to one hour. The reason for this is not known, but it may have to do with the long distances people have to drive to get home.

The afternoon session is almost identical to the morning session as they sing for an hour or so and then take a short break. Following this break a memorial service is held for those singers who have died since they last met. An individual from the memorial committee, appointed by the chairman, asks the congregation to rise, and a few words are said about the deceased. This is followed by three to five songs which are often specially requested. Occasionally they are requested on the spot, but normally the memorial committee will be receptive to information about deceased singers from other singers in the course of the day preceding the service. In some areas songs for a departed singer are sung at every singing for a period of one year. In a two-day singing this service is reserved for the second day. The last group of songs follows this service. The singers rise for a final prayer and the last song. At this point the gathering breaks up.

An important aspect of performance practice is the way in which the singers pitch the songs. This is universally referred to as "keying". The success of a singing is largely dependent on the experience of the keyer. George Pullen Jackson establishes in his account of the 1930 convention that each leader "keyed" the tune that was to be
sung by "singing its tonic and opening tones without the help of even a tuning fork." This apparently is not considered the norm by Jackson. In his book White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands of 1933, he supplies a photograph of William Walker of South Carolina, the compiler of Southern Harmony, with "Singin' Billy's" larger than life tuning fork. He describes its role in Sacred Harp music: "...after over a hundred years of 'keying' tunes, [it]is still in use in rural singing schools and conventions."  

However, it is still the case today that all of the songs in Texas are intoned using relative pitch without the aid of a tuning fork or musical instrument. The question of pitch is raised in the 1925 minutes of the State Sacred Harp Association. A resolution regarding the confusion caused by the use of different Sacred Harp books in both the county and district comments: "each one differs in a large measure as to a oneness of page, oneness of words and key."  

This intimates they may have relied more on the written keys and not on relative pitch. There is some evidence that tuning forks have been used in the past in Rusk county, but that it was not the norm. In an article which interviews Hall Rousseau, the son of the Texas singing school teacher, 

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80Minutes of the State Sacred Harp Association, n.p., page 121.
Travis Rousseau, Hall comments, "The older ones of the Sacred Harp singers had what they called a tuning fork."\footnote{Sing Singing Schools, Loblolly, a publication of the Gary high school, Panola county, Fall 1974, page 27.} Comparisons made between songs recorded in 1988 and the written music reflect an overall tendency to pitch the songs lower than written. Jackson, speaking of the women leaders, states that "due to their lack of volume it was customary for some man to key the tune for them." However, today the keying of all the songs is done by the elder males only, who are most often tenors. Whether or not it is because the women's voices lack volume, or is merely a result of established tradition, women today do not key.

One other aspect of pitch in Sacred Harp music, which is neither addressed by scholars nor recognized consciously by the singers, is performance in just intonation. In his book Tuning and Temperament, J. Murray Barbour comments that "to many people [just intonation] is a sort of ideal system" and that there are many different just intonations, and "of these, the best is that which comes closest to the Pythagorean tuning."\footnote{J. Murray Barbour, Tuning and Temperament, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 89.} Just intonation is a system of tuning in which all the intervals are derived from the natural, or pure fifth, and natural, or pure third. "As the various chromatic notes were added to the scale during the later Middle Ages, they were tuned by pure fifths or fourths
to notes already present in the scale". This tendency to tune to these intervals is displayed in the intoning of Sacred Harp singers before the song is sung. Aside from a cappella music, this system is largely unuseable, especially in light of modern ears which are so accustomed to equal temperament. It seems likely that this tendency in Sacred Harp music has been retained because a piano or other equally tempered instrument was never used to provide the pitches to the singers.

Once the song has been keyed in all the voices; the leader, or conductor, takes his or her place in the center of the hollow square. There is a tremendous variety in the leader's style. The most prevalent style is one in which the book is held in one hand and the free arm merely indicates the tempo in an up and down motion. Though the style is somewhat conservative in comparison to other manners of leading discussed below, it embraces a wide variation of leading songs. The variations range from a very precise, reserved, up and down motion using the hand and the forearm, to a very exaggerated motion, to that which includes the use of the whole body swinging back and forth.

Many singers do not use the book and are therefore free to use both arms in leading the group. This is possible since many members of the group have memorized the songs

**ibid.**, 105.
over the years. This style is more emphatic and is especially helpful to bring in the voices in a sectional piece like an anthem, or to cue the successive entries in a fuging tune. Some children as well lead without books. Often they have learned the song by heart and cannot read the music.

A more unusual type of leading, which exists in only a few black singings in Alabama, is known as "walkin' it off". The leader uses the entire floor space available inside the hollow square while he energetically struts around among the various sections of singers.**

There is a common practice today for singers to lead in groups of two or three as well. There is no documentation to indicate whether or not this practice is peculiar to the present. This activity acts as a support for both the young and the old. Songs of special significance are chosen by the leaders when this type of leading is done.***

Accentuation of the text, or singing the text clearly and with the correct syllabic stresses, is considered of utmost importance by the Sacred Harp singers. Each singer present freely engages in the up and down arm motions to

**This was observed on video tape at the home of the Owen family in Dale, Texas, October 1988.

***A song led by group leaders in Henderson in 1988 was led by two sisters who used the opportunity to sing their mother's favorite song to her memory.
maintain and communicate the common beat; the room is filled visually as well as aurally with their rhythm. Tempo, however, is one aspect of Sacred Harp music which is variable in performance depending upon the region and the leader, and there is not agreement regarding the tempos that best reflect the true accent. B.F. White, the compiler of the first Sacred Harp tunebook, indicated that all modes of common time and compound time be directed with two beats per measure, at the rate of 2 1/2 seconds to each measure.

Controversy over tempo arose in the first decades of the 20th century, initiated by Tom Denson, a successful singing school teacher in Alabama and Texas. This continues to exist between the singers of Texas/southern Alabama and those of northern Alabama/Georgia. Denson preferred the tempos to be quicker than those indicated by B.F. White, while the Texas and Southern Alabamans remained true to those of White. When questioned on this issue Curtis Owen replied:

"Freeman Moody told me about the fast and slow singing, said it like to tore up singing in Alabama. Some people just got disgusted and quit, some of them just didn't like that fast singing. Originally they did not sing that fast. My Grandfather Handley, I've seen him pull out his watch and we'd count the measures in a song, you're supposed to sing 4/4 time at two-and-a-half seconds to the measure. We'd multiply how many seconds or minutes it took to sing a song to figure out how we'd done to see how close our timing was. My grandfather was a stickler for that, singing music in correct time. It takes time

**Current information on the issue of tempo in other areas is not available at this time.**
for a man to put the power to the notes."

In conclusion, the main differences between singers from Texas and elsewhere are those of tempo and the choice of books. In comparison with practices in the past, some aspects of Texas singings have changed, such as the selection of leaders, and possibly keying techniques, as well as the frequent practice of leading in groups of two or three. However, the structure of the day—the prayers, songs, dinner on the grounds, the unusual doubling of parts, and the hollow square formation—have been retained.

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"This information is from an interview with Curtis and Edith Owen, October, 1988. It would be useful to compare the guidelines provided by B.F. White with the directions for tempo calculation provided by William Billings in his tunebook, Continental Harmony. He describes the process of using a pendulum of varying lengths to beat the crochets in Adagio and Largo. He follows this with directions as to how a pendulum should be made: "Make a pendulum of common thread well waxed, and instead of a bullet take a piece of heavy wood turned perfectly round, about the bigness of a pullet's egg, and rub them over, either with chalk, paint or white-wash, so that they may be seen plainly by candle-light." Hans Nathan, ed., The Continental Harmony, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 7-11.
Chapter VII.

Texas Singings Observed

Each of the singings I attended in 1988 were of a slightly different character. Differences in the size of the group, the spaces used, the location, and in the singing can be observed.

The first singing attended was on May 28-29 at the Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in McMahan, Texas. This church was established in 1852 and currently holds historical landmark status. The original church, a typical one-room wooden building, currently serves as the kitchen and serving area, having been replaced by a newer brick building. The new building provides the comforts of central air conditioning and indoor plumbing, yet the character does not match that of the original church. According to Pete Baker, who was the secretary of the organization for a number of years, Sacred Harp music was sung here before the Civil War. Singings were interrupted by the war and a later flu epidemic. The gathering celebrated its eighty-eighth consecutive singing in 1988.¹ The group gathered on Saturday was quite large, perhaps 75-100 people, but a large percentage were at their first singing and did not

¹This information provided by an unidentified singer at this singing.
participate. The group on Sunday was substantially smaller but the singing was equally vigorous. As one unidentified singer said, "only the hard core singers stay on for Sundays".

The singers are eager to promote the practice of Sacred Harp music. No longer is there only a very select group chosen to lead. They encourage everyone to try their hand at leading the group in song. Their patience with the new leaders, such as myself, is laudable. Experienced singers in the tenor section provide cues of direction for new leaders.

The dinner on the grounds takes place outside on endless row of benches under a wooden pavilion. The surrounding vista of the rolling green hills of the farms is largely ignored by the group as they catch up with old friends and make new ones.

The second singing attended was the Texas State Convention held in the Community Center of Henderson, Texas on August 12th and 13th. This is not representative of the typical Texas singing at this time, since as described earlier it was a large gathering of about 600 people. This large number of people, evidently is the norm at the State Convention, is accommodated in the spacious community center. A public address system is used for announcements and song numbers. The singers themselves admit to its lack of ambiance compared to the older church buildings. However,
once the singing starts the issue of the room fades in importance.

One unique feature of this singing is an evening session. This was common in the early days of Sacredng. However, the singing was hindered by the lack of enough experienced keyers. Many songs had to be stopped and re-keyed.

The dinner on the grounds at this singing was very rustic. Long planks were arranged at a comfortable height to eat at while standing, and they provided plenty of table space for all. Edith Owen told me how for many years they prepared coffee in a large cauldron on a wood fire, grounds and all. The usual assortment of homemade food was present, but then so was the unusual. This was the only singing I attended where squirrel and dumplings was served for lunch.

The fifth and final singing observed was "The Annual Sacred Harp Singing" on November 12th at the Dallas Primitive Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. This newly revived singing is an example of the increasing interest in this tradition. Although exact history is not known at this time, the group disbanded in 1959, and started up again only recently.

The Dallas Primitive Baptist church is a new building which is a light and airy space, especially when compared with the other places visited. The crowd was around 65-75
people. What was surprising was the number of new faces beyond the core group. Even more encouraging was the presence of young faces. At one point between songs a toddler, excited by the previous song, burst out in "There is a happy land, far, far away". The group continued to prepare for the next song, but allowed the child to finish, though not without a few laughs. There were a larger number of young families here, all of whom sang and led.

As in most of the South, Pre-Civil War migration to Texas brought a strong tradition of Sacred Harp singing from Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, along with singing school teachers. The circuit-riding singing school teacher held class in small churches or meeting halls along various routes. The period of time after crops were planted, in late spring and early summer was a time when whole families could attend singings and singing school together. The dates for singings, which revolve around the planting and harvesting of crops, has in most cases remained part of the tradition. The schools met for various periods of time, a few days to a few weeks.

Although the singing school tradition has continued in Texas, it has been in a decline over the past twenty years at least. Rather than the four-shape system it is the seven-shape system which receives the most attention today. One singing school currently meets in Houston at the Grace Primitive Baptist church for the third week of June. It is
taught by Harvey Bass of Muleshoe, Texas, and his two daughters. The book used for the school is Harp of Ages, published in Muleshoe, Texas, in 1977. The group literally camps out at the church\footnote{I was witness to the innumerable bedrolls and playpens at the Grace Primitive Baptist church on June 26, 1988.}, and all members have certain domestic responsibilities. This includes the children, whose attitudes were cheery while they performed their duties. The singing school provides a lasting bond between all of the participants. This is expressed at the evening of the closing session when often teary, heartfelt words of thanks and farewells to the group are presented by any individual who wishes to speak.

There are two new four-shape singing schools which have surfaced in Texas in the past two years. One is taught at the Little Vine Primitive Baptist church in Austin, Texas by Gaylon Powell. They meet for sessions each Sunday afternoon. In addition, Judge Donald Ross has started a Sacred Harp singing school at Zion Hill church in East Texas; this class meets on Saturdays. This singing school is a direct result of a question asked at the Henderson singing in 1988. The grandson of a singer asked Judge Ross where he could learn to sing. He replied "If you can get a few more people for a class, I'll teach it." This grassroots approach is working to keep the singing alive.

My questionnaires show that the Austin area class has a
more diverse occupational background than the one in East Texas, possibly because it is a university city.³

Although I have not attended these singing schools, it is another aspect of the Texas tradition which has yet to be explored.

The rise of interest in this music in Texas is aided very much by exposure from the media. In August 1987 the magazine Texas Highways ran an article by Randy Mallory, a relative of veteran singer Myrl Jones. The following year a television crew from Marshall, Texas was present at the Henderson singing. Such publicity has been helpful in raising the awareness of the Sacred Harp art in Texas. Several singers have mentioned that new people are showing up because of this publicity, and that is just fine with them. Whatever it takes to keep "this old music" alive, is the attitude of most of the singers questioned.

Table VI. below provides a current list of locations and dates for singings in Texas as of 1989.

Table VI.

Locations of Texas Sacred Harp Singings in 1988

1. Annual Southern Baptist Seminary Sacred Harp Singing, in Ft. Worth, TX. Last Saturday in January.
2. Smith County Sacred Harp Singing, Lindale, TX. Second Sunday and Saturday before in March.
3. Easter Sacred Harp Singing, Mt. Aarat Primitive Baptist Church. Saturday before Easter.

³This information based on questionnaires received from the students of the Austin singing school.
4. Homecoming Sacred Harp Singing held in the New Prospect Presbyterian Church in Beckville, TX. Third Sunday in March.

5. Southwest Texas Sacred Harp Singing Convention at Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in McMahan, TX. The first Fifth Saturday and Sunday in the spring.


7. East Texas Sacred Harp Singing Convention, Henderson Community Center, Henderson, TX. Second Sunday and Saturday before in August.

8. Southwest Texas Sacred Harp Singing Convention, (alternates location between San Antonio and Austin each season) Fifth Saturday and Sunday before in October.

9. Little Hope Sacred Harp Singing Convention, Little Hope Primitive Baptist Church, Huntington, TX. First Sunday and Saturday before in November.

10. Sacred Harp Singing at First Primitive Baptist in Dallas, TX. First Saturday in November.

In conclusion, the main differences between singers from Texas and elsewhere are those of tempo and the choice of books. In comparison with practices in the past, some aspects of Texas singings have changed, such as the selection of leaders, and possibly keying techniques, as well as the frequent practice of leading in groups of two or three. However, the structure of the day—the prayers, songs, dinner on the grounds, the unusual doubling of parts, and the hollow square formation—have been retained.
Chapter VIII.

A Core Repertory of Sacred Harp Music in Texas

There are no previously documented studies of the specific song repertory of the Sacred Harp in Texas. However, as discussed in Chapter IV. A., the minutes of the singing organizations often kept song lists coupled with the singers' name and home county or town. These lists provide the opportunity to determine the propagation of songs in Texas. However, the information is not complete at this time, and may never be. Therefore, this study is based on a random sampling taken from song lists from thirty singings, in three regions of Texas, from the past and present. The song lists chosen are from three different sources of information: records from 1923-1932 in The East Texas Musical Convention Minutes; from 1926-1943 in the State Sacred Harp Association Minutes; and minutes or lists compiled from field recordings of singings of ten locations throughout Texas from 1987-1988.*

It would be dangerous to draw grand conclusions based on such incomplete information; however, this preliminary

*Three Sacred Harp books were used in this study to cross reference songs: a facsimile edition of the 1859 revision of The Sacred Harp by B.F. White, the 1987 edition of the Original Sacred Harp, Denson revision, and The B.F. White Sacred Harp (1960) commonly known as the Cooper book. The combinative use of these books was invaluable.
study has carved the path for future computer application.

The East Texas group sang 327 different songs for the years listed above, the State Sacred Harp Association sang 314, and the present-day Texas groups sang 282. Upon first glance it appears that the repertory could be shrinking. This may be the case, but the numbers at this time are misleading because of the small data base for present-day song lists. In the samples from the East Texas Musical Convention and the State Sacred Harp Singing Association, where information has been gathered over a longer period of time, new songs are introduced each year. This is significant even if it may only be a slow rate of a song or two per year. If this trend is applicable to the present, the number of total songs could possibly grow to numbers similar to the early groups with the East Texas Musical Convention and the State Sacred Harp Singing Association. Monitoring future singings in ensuing years will better determine the total song list for Texas today. At that time, we will be able to make more concrete conclusions as to what the core song list for Texas includes, as well as speculating as to why particular songs have remained or fallen out of the repertory.

In earlier singings, songs were often performed three or four times. This has not been taken into account in the current study, but eventually would be important to do in order to get a more accurate picture of the influence of a
particular song.

Although exact comparisons between the three groups are difficult to make, one noticeable difference is the decline in the total number of songs represented. Of the ten singings of the East Texas Convention sampled there were 327 different songs represented. The State Convention samples were taken from 1926-1943, yet only eleven of those years list song numbers in the minutes. However, out of those eleven sampled years there were 314 different songs sung. This number is substantially lower for the the 1987-1988 samples, only 282. It is interesting to note that these forty-four songs make up almost twenty-five percent of the total song repertory at this time. Initially it appears as if the repertory is shrinking, however this cannot be fully ascertained until more data is uncovered. Monitoring future singings is important for discovering more about which songs have fallen out of the repertoire, as well as those which continue to remain. In the samples over longer time spans new songs are introduced each year. If this trend is continued, the number of different songs performed will be increased slightly each year.

The frequency of performance of a song within a singing is not taken into account, but eventually would be important to provide a more accurate picture of the influence of a particular song. Curtis Owen remarked on the limited number
of tunes sung by the Powell Valley Primitive Baptists and that "you can sing Sacred Harp music all day and never repeat a tune". This is true in theory, there are 577 pages of music to be sung. However, songs do get repeated during a convention. This was more prevalent in the 1920's-1940's. Many songs were listed three and four times at a convention, maybe even two or three times during one day of a singing. This is less common at this time. The singer will often ask if the song has been led already that day, so generally repetetion is avoided if possible.

The song list which follows in Table VII. is ranked in descending order, from most performed to least performed. The distribution of genres for the forty-four songs is as follows: 20 fusing tunes, 10 folk hymns, 9 revival hymns, 3 revival spirituals, 1 anthem, 1 ballad, and 1 psalm.

**Table VII.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song #</th>
<th>Name of Song</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th># of times sung</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>Easter Anthem</td>
<td>AN</td>
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<tr>
<td>384</td>
<td>Longing for Heaven 8's</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>Liberty, C.M.</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>Exhortation, C.M.</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>192</td>
<td>Schenectady L.M.</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220</td>
<td>Mount Zion, S.M.</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>290</td>
<td>Victoria, C.M.</td>
<td>RH</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Lenox, P.M.</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Bound For Canaan</td>
<td>RH</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>Harmony, P.M.</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>24</td>
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</table>

*Interview with Curtis and Edith Owen, October 29, 1988.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>196</td>
<td>Alabama, C.M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>FH</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>101B</td>
<td>Holy City</td>
<td></td>
<td>FH</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Wondrous Love</td>
<td></td>
<td>FH</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>189</td>
<td>Montgomery, C.M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>Ballstown, L.M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>Mount Pleasant, C.M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>FT</td>
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<tr>
<td>358</td>
<td>Murillo's Lesson, 11.</td>
<td></td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>Struggle On</td>
<td></td>
<td>RH</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36B</td>
<td>Ninety-Fifth Psalm, C.M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>45A</td>
<td>New Britain</td>
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<td>FH</td>
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<td>168</td>
<td>Cowper, L.M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176</td>
<td>Ragan, L.M.</td>
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<td>RH</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222</td>
<td>Ocean, P.M.</td>
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<td>274A</td>
<td>The Golden Harp, L.M.</td>
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<td>RH</td>
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<td>47B</td>
<td>Indumena, S.M.</td>
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<td>FH</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>The Last Words of Copernicus</td>
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<td>203</td>
<td>Florida, S.M.</td>
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<td>128</td>
<td>The Promised Land, C.M.</td>
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<td>215</td>
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<td>299</td>
<td>New Jerusalem, C.M.</td>
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<td>332</td>
<td>Sons of Sorrow, 8,7.</td>
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<td>FH</td>
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<td>341</td>
<td>The Lone Pilgrim, 11,8.</td>
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<td>BA</td>
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<td>383</td>
<td>Eternal Day, C.M.</td>
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<td>FT</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>418</td>
<td>Reesefel, C.M.</td>
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<td>FH</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>Sweet Rivers</td>
<td></td>
<td>FH</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>282</td>
<td>I'm Going Home, L.M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>FH</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>The Morning Trumpet</td>
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<td>397</td>
<td>We'll Soon Be There, L.M.</td>
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<td>RH</td>
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<td>300</td>
<td>Calvary, C.M.</td>
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<td>FT</td>
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<td>335</td>
<td>Return Again, 8,7.</td>
<td></td>
<td>RH</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>127</td>
<td>Green Fields, 8's.</td>
<td></td>
<td>FH</td>
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<tr>
<td>401</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
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<td>RH</td>
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<tr>
<td>49A</td>
<td>Old Hundred, L.M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>PS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>406</td>
<td>New Harmony, 8,7.</td>
<td></td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IX. Conclusions

From this study we have seen many aspects of the Sacred Harp tradition in Texas. First, it is a lengthy tradition which extends back at least 134 years. Though they are largely undocumented, the early singings are recorded in minutes of several Texas Sacred Harp organizations. Without these minutes, much of the history would be lost, as singers from the earliest days have already died.

The work by George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, is the first to document the Texas Sacred Harp organizations. In addition, his account of the 1930 convention of the Texas Interstate Sacred Harp Musical Association has proven itself invaluable as a comparison of Texas singings today and those in the past. From his account of this convention coupled with the minutes that have been examined; it has been seen that the format for a singing convention remains largely unchanged.

The rural family in Texas has long been the backbone of the Sacred Harp tradition. There are still some active families, but it appears that they may not continue to be the mainstay of the Sacred Harp community in the future. There is an influx of many new singers which are from a variety of backgrounds, and thus, the sociology is gradually changing.
Though the Sacred Harp tradition is generally similar in Texas and elsewhere, there are some notable differences. These include the choice of book and preferences regarding tempo. Singers in Texas and southern Alabama use the Cooper edition of The Sacred Harp. They also strive to keep close to B.F. White’s recommendations for tempo. On the other hand, the Denson revision of The Sacred Harp is the book of choice for northern Alabama and Georgia, and the tempos in these areas are usually much faster than those in Texas.

This study has provoked many questions regarding Texas families, singing schools, and geographic distribution which can only be answered with more research. The most immediate concern is to consult more singers. Although the early Texas singers have died, many of the singers alive today were participants in singings and singing schools of the 1920s and 1930s; the height of this tradition in Texas. These people and their families must be interviewed before their story is lost. There are many families whose names are seen over and over again in the minutes. A comprehensive list of those families would be difficult to make, but in the end it would be worthwhile. This list could be used to trace the origins of the early singers, as well as linking these families with their descendents who still sing today.

The search for more minutes is a worthwhile endeavor. It seems quite likely that there are minutes which exist,
but have been forgotten and ferreted away. There are many questions that the minutes examined did not address, such as the size of the gatherings, number of classes represented, ratio of singers versus audience, lodging arrangements during a convention, type of transportation, and distances travelled to attend singings. However, the song lists that are included beginning in the early 1920s are especially useful in the further determination of the core repertory. These lists provide the only written record of the Texas repertory of Sacred Harp music. Although this thesis has attempted to portray a preliminary core repertory of songs for Texas, many more song lists from singings today are needed to balance the number of song lists from early singings.

It would also be valuable to prepare such a core repertory for regions outside of Texas for comparison. Although it was out of the scope of this study, a comparative study of the performance practice in Texas to that of northern Alabama/Georgia singings would undoubtedly be worthwhile.

The best way to learn more about the tradition is to observe more singings. They should be monitored by musicologists as biologists would an endangered species, for the format which has been a lengthy tradition seems likely to change. This transition deserves our full attention and documentation.
The future of Sacred Harp music in Texas, as elsewhere in America, seems assured, even if its sociological niche is changing. More people from outside the rural areas who are hearing the music for the first time want to sing it. It seems likely that the environment in which the music is currently sung will change. American society today moves at such a fast pace that it is doubtful that the new singers will be able to devote entire weekends at a time to attend singings. However, it is significant that singing schools for four-shape singing, which had all but died out in Texas, are slowly being revitalized.

Unlike wild animals, whose survival is endangered once their habitat has been eaten up by urbanization, it is urbanization with its mobility, media, and interested populous which will keep Sacred Harp music alive well into the twenty-first century.
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"The Origins of the Fuging Tune."


Appendix A.

Map 1. Geographical distribution of singings in Texas.