

# *Sacred Harp Colorado*

*February 2008*

## **Who We Are and What We Do**

The Rocky Mountain Shape Note Singers exist to preserve and promote the music and the traditions of American shape note harmony along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. We sing principally from the 1991 Denson revision of the Sacred Harp (Red Book), but use some songs from the Cooper Book (Blue Book). From time to time we will sing from other traditional books such as the Missouri Harmony and Norembega Harmony depending upon the spirit and the occasion. We welcome any and all to join us at our monthly singings held in the cities along the Front Range. Loaner books are available for use or purchase. Our monthly singings are usually held to the schedule supplied at the end of this newsletter, but holidays or special circumstance may dictate that we move a singing date. If you are new to us, please contact one of our members listed below for current location, day/date and time of a singing in your area.

## **Editorially Speaking**

This month brings us a most excellent article on the the role of William Marion Cooper in the development of the Sacred Harp. Written by Robert Vaughn, a Baptist preacher in Eastern Texas, and pillar of the East Texas Convention at Henderson, TX. Robert has previously written an excellent documentation of that convention's 150 year history and now takes on the task of clarifying the place of W.M.Cs Cooper Book in the history and culture of Sacred Harp singing. The article which appears below was the first in a series of explorations into a diverse range of "myths" which permeate our tradition such as the nature of the music added to the original 1844 publication thru the years and the use of pitch pipes when keying the music. To gain an insight into the scope of his effort, please go to Robert's blog found at: <http://baptistsearch.blogspot.com> and search in the December 2007 archive for those entries concerning "Rethinkin our Thinkin".

Also rifled from Robert Vaughn's site is a listing of and information concerning shape note singing schools. Those underlined have websites so do a little additional research and add one to your summer travel plans.

Remember also the range of annual singings which will be available to you in the month of March – Near and far. From Tucson, AZ to Hoboken, GA to Colorado Springs and McMahan, TX, While February will be a slow one, March is a great month to be traveling and singing and meeting Sacred Harp friends old and new. By the time you get back from Texas, the snow should be gone and it will be time to get out there and plant a garden.

## **History, Traditions And Culture – W. M. Cooper the Interloper** by: Robert Vaughn

Winston Churchill said that history is written by the victors. Much of Sacred Harp history has been written by the "victors" -- that is, the majority who are followers of the James/Denson tradition of Sacred Harp -- beginning with [Joe S. James](#) and his "Brief

History".

*Myths* is a loaded term. Perhaps a little too strong for the subject. But maybe it will get the attention of some who unintentionally perpetuate the following "myths" as absolute fact.

Myth # 1. [W. M. Cooper](#) was an interloper, somehow outside the Sacred Harp establishment.

It is not uncommon to read that W. M. Cooper and his revision of 1902 was not in the tradition of the Sacred Harp of [B. F. White](#). Two main reasons are usually given: (1) Cooper added some songs in a *style* outside the tradition [e.g. [Rock of Ages](#)]; (2) Cooper was not part of White's "inner circle" of Sacred Harp singers, nor from the "Sacred Harp territory". I believe there are some anachronistic glasses being used here -- reading the future back into the past -- as well as conclusions based on things that have not been sufficiently investigated.

First of all, the Sacred Harp of B. F. White was never static, but a progressive work. Compiled and published in 1844, the book had been enlarged in 1850 and 1859, then revised in 1869.

Songs in the pre-20th century versions of the Sacred Harp can be studied to develop a frame of reference to determine the musical "loyalty" of the Cooper and James books to their predecessors. Most songs in the older books fit the modern concept of "dispersed harmony"<sup>1</sup> -- though defining that in itself is problematic. There are a few songs I consider suspect (though I don't have the musical expertise to really debate it that well). I will touch on that in another post. A thorough study of 1869/70 revision would be helpful here. As far as I know this has never been done. Such a study would undertake to compile information about all the songs that were deleted and all the songs that were added -- as to style (e.g. camp meeting songs, hymn tunes, fusing tunes), makeup (e.g. 3-part or 4-part, major or minor, dispersed or close harmony), etc. This compiled data would be analyzed to determine any trends in the 1870 book -- perhaps away from the "style" of the original compilation, or reflecting only that "style". In so doing, we might learn whether the 1870 showed a move toward the type of song that Cooper would introduce into the book in 1902.<sup>2</sup>

Another factor to consider is the actual practice of the singers at the conventions. In the late 19th century, many other shape note tune books were being compiled and conventions were using these books as well as *The Sacred Harp*. The first convention founded by B. F. White -- the Southern Musical Convention -- succumbed to this trend and eventually moved away from the Sacred Harp. So while we look at the songs and the book on one hand, on the other hand we must understand that these songs in that book were not the only songs Sacred Harpers were singing. Sacred Harp did not exist in a musical vacuum. The entire Sacred Harp movement was in a state of flux between 1870 and 1902. The seven-shape note system and gospel songs garnered popularity in the Sacred Harp regions. Most new music was being written in four-part harmonies. Most Sacred Harp songs were in three-part harmonies. "Should we accept the new shapes or reject them?" "Should we sing the new songs or ignore them?" Some Sacred Harpers were not happy with the changes; some embraced them. Some Sacred Harp singers moved in both circles. We should not read future developments back into the past record and determine who were "real" Sacred Harp singers based on the outcome. What happened with the revisions of W. M. Cooper, J. L. White and J. S. James reflects not that some parties were "real" Sacred Harp singers and some were not, but rather that different groups of "real" Sacred Harp singers responded in different ways to the

changing musical world in which they lived. [Interestingly, Cooper, James and [J. L. White](#) were all "second generation" Sacred Harpers, born within three years of one another.] The second part of the "charge" against Cooper is based partly on incorrect interpretation and partly on lack of information. It seems to be incorrect to determine from our side of history that W. M. Cooper and south Alabamians were not part of the "inner circle" and outside the foundational territory. On a map it looks like south Alabama is about as close to Harris County, Georgia (where White published the Sacred Harp) as north Alabama is. Oh, I think there is an element of truth about the territory.<sup>3</sup> But the fact remains (perhaps since history is written by the victors) that up until recent years little research has been done on the south Alabama connections to White's movement. There is evidence that B. F. White taught singing schools in south Alabama. It is in the realm of possibility that W. M. Cooper was taught by White. Some of the Georgia crew drifted into south Alabama -- Reuben E. Brown and [David P. White](#) (B. F.'s son and a music teacher) lived in the very area from whence the Cooper book arose.

Maybe there is even a little circular reasoning going on here -- W. M. Cooper was not part of the "real" Sacred Harp establishment, so he couldn't properly revise the book. And since he didn't "properly" revise the book, he wasn't part of the "real" Sacred Harp establishment. I think "W. M. Cooper the interloper"<sup>4</sup> is a myth that needs to be laid to rest. By 1902 south Alabama likely had a long and well-established relationship with Sacred Harp and its conventions. Further study should be conducted on this relationship.<sup>5</sup> Cooper's revision of the existing songs in the book -- particularly the alto parts -- indicate he was familiar with the style of the old songs. Wallace McKenzie's *The Alto Parts in the "True Dispersed Harmony" of The Sacred Harp Revisions* indicates that Cooper had at least as good, if not better, record in maintaining the "dispersed harmony" while adding an alto part to the three-part harmonies. Specifically, McKenzie notes that "no changes were made in the existing parts to reduce the parallel intervals or fill in incomplete triads" and that "the added alto parts actually increase the total number of parallels..." Further he noted that "Cooper's altos maintain some features of the contrapuntal-harmonic style...more closely than do those of Denson" though "many of the Denson altos make more interesting melodies...", finally stating that "the alto melodies are consistent with the contrapuntal-harmonic style of the three-part pieces." So McKenzie sets forth some empirical evidence that W. M. Cooper understood the general nature of the songs -- unless one argues that he just accidentally maintained the style of them. The fact that he included other songs not in this style is really another discussion altogether.

So I'd say: (1) There have always been some different kinds of songs in the Sacred Harp -- hymn tunes, campmeeting songs, fusing tunes, anthems -- and a few of the songs may not be strictly in the pervasive style of the rest of the book. If it's OK to have a few, why wasn't it OK for Cooper to add a few more? (2) *The Sacred Harp* gives us a view into what music was popular among and preferred by its original compilers and editors. We probably should place as much emphasis on that fact as on viewing them as making a concerted effort to compile a book containing only dispersed harmony songs. The southeast Alabama revisers were probably doing the same in principle. (3) Analysis of Cooper's work vindicates him of the charge that he did not understand the style/harmony of the songs that were in *The Sacred Harp*. One can contrast his work with some of the songs rewritten by J. L. White, which shows White understood the need to reharmonize entire songs (as opposed to just adding alto) in order to bring them into the newer style. (4) More study needs to be done on the spread of Sacred Harp into south Georgia, south Alabama & Florida, and a better

understanding needs to be developed concerning their relationship to the Harris County center of Sacred Harp.

#### Footnotes

1. My personal working definition of [dispersed harmony](#) is harmony with open chords and freely moving parts (that is, parts not merely following and complimenting the melody).
2. In my opinion, songs like "Loving Jesus" and "Let Us Sing" prefigure the call and response of some gospel songs.
3. Considering that B. F. White moved north to Atlanta before his death.
4. But there is a sense in which I would consider both W. M. Cooper and J. S. James "interlopers" -- it seems the White family had the rights to revise the book rather than others. Apparently the Sacred Harp community as a whole did not view it that way.
5. Buell Cobb lists about seven Sacred Harp conventions formed in southeast Alabama between 1855 and 1889, and the 2006 Minutes of Cooper Book Conventions (published by the Sacred Harp Book Company) lists singings of at least nine southeast Alabama and west Florida conventions that are over 100 years old. The Southeast Convention (org. ca 1858) is "the oldest Alabama singing assembly still in existence." (Cobb, p. 139) I believe it is the third oldest Sacred Harp Convention in existence in the U.S., after Chattahoochee and East Texas.

### **Annual Shape-note Singing Schools by Robert Vaughn**

Following is a list of annual shape note singing schools, with location and latest web information

- [Alabama School of Gospel Music](#) Boaz, AL
- [Alva School of Music](#) Alva, OK
- [Ben Speer's Stamps-Baxter School of Music](#) Nashville, TN
- [Brockwell School of Gospel Music](#) Brockwell, AR
- [Camp FaSoLa](#) Anniston, AL
- [Camp DoReMi](#) Little Switzerland, NC
- [Cumberland Valley School of Music](#) Pulaski, TN
- [Do Re Mi Gospel Music Academy](#) Lebanon, TN
- [Foundation School of Church Music](#) Buda, TX
- [Four States Praise Camp](#) Canfield, AR
- [Gospel Singers of America School of Gospel Music](#) Pass Christian, MS
- [Grace Primitive Baptist Church Singing School](#) Houston, TX
- Haralson County School of Gospel Music, Bremen, GA
- [Harmony Highlands Singing School](#) Jasper, AL
- [Harmony Hill Singing School](#) Azle, TX
- [Harmony Plains Singing School](#) Cone, TX
- Harmony Valley Singing School, Pontotoc, MS
- Haskell Singing School, Haskell, TX
- [Jeffress School of Gospel Music](#) Crossett, AR
- [Leoma School of Gospel Music](#) Lawrenceburg, TN
- Melody Grove Singing School, Warren, TX
- [National School of Music](#) camps in CA, TN & TX

North Georgia School of Gospel Music, Cleveland, GA  
[Singing School at Wilburton](#) Wilburton, OK  
Texas Southern Gospel School of Music, Corsicana, TX  
[The Singing School at ACU](#) Abilene, TX  
[Tosh School of Gospel Music](#) Fort Worth, TX  
Tri-City Gospel Music Camp, Kingsport, TN  
Tri-County Singers Association School, Charleston, WV  
[West Virginia School of Gospel Music](#) Kenna, WV

All of the 30 schools on the above list share in common: (1) they are held annually, and (2) they teach participants to sing using [shape notes](#). Some are strictly a cappella. Some use musical instruments. Some may simply introduce to shape notes; some may delve in music theory and even composition. Some are "denominational" (usually designed to support singing in a particular church/group). Some are "non-denominational" (usually designed to support singing in singing conventions). All except one are 7-shape. Camp FaSoLa is 4-shape (Sacred Harp). Of the 7-shape schools all use the "[Aiken system](#)". Camp DoReMi also supports William Walker's 7-shapes. [Click here to see various shapes](#).

The oldest (known) existing school is the Singing School at Abilene Christian University, which is a continuation of the Texas Normal Singing School established in Sabinal, TX in 1946. This is also the oldest existing school supported by the Churches of Christ. The oldest Primitive Baptist school is Harmony Hills, established in 1954. The oldest non-denominational school is the Brockwell School of Gospel Music, formed in IZARD County, AR in 1947. There are perhaps others older that have not come to my attention (and perhaps other annual schools not listed). Many other shape note singing schools are held on a rotating and variable "as requested" basis.

*Biennial singing school* (occurring every other year)

[Christian Harmony at John C. Campbell Folk School](#) Brasstown, NC

## Looking Ahead

Fourth All-Day Singing and Dinner on the Grounds (Denson Book) 1 March 2008 in Tucson, AZ. The Arizona SH singers have expanded this event to include a Saturday evening social and a Sunday (2 March) morning singing. More details are forthcoming. Your contacts for this event are: Maggie Leonard (520)323-5049 and Paige Winslett (520)743-1268 or [tucsonfasola@earthlink.net](mailto:tucsonfasola@earthlink.net). Susie and I attended this singing last March and found it to be one worthy of your support.

Hoboken All Day Singing (Cooper Book) 15 March 2008 in Hoboken, GA. This singing features an evening singing from Lloyd's Primitive Hymns - a words only hymnal dating to 1841. Now that you have met David Lee, give me a reason for not going.

Pikes Peak Sacred Harp Singing (Denson and Cooper Books) 22 March 2008 in Colorado Springs, CO. Saturday evening will be hosted at the Mathewson's with seven shape singing from the Harp of Ages and perhaps a book signing with Kathryn Eastburn – Join us, please !!

Southwest Texas Convention (Cooper Book) 29 and 30 March 2008 in McMahan, TX. Bethel Church is a perfectly wonderful place to sing and hopefully this year, we will be able

to attend the Harp of Ages singing on Saturday evening.

Camp Fasola (Denson Book) 27 June thru 4 July 2008 at Camp Lee in Anniston, AL. An old fashioned week long singing school in two parts. See the January 2008 on line issue for details.

## *Where We Sing and How to Find Us*

**BOULDER** Regular singings are 2nd Friday of each month 7-9 pm, at the home of Peter and Mary Lou Van Laanen. Contact Mary Lou for details at 303-447-9379 or e-mail her at [ymarylou@indra.com](mailto:ymarylou@indra.com)

**DENVER** Sings weekly each Monday except the first Monday from 6:40 – 8:40PM at St. Andrew's Church, 2015 Glenarm Street or St. Mark's Orthodox, 1409 S. Vine when St. Andrew's is not available. This group also sings monthly on the fourth Sunday, from 1:00 to 3:00 PM in one of these two locations. Bring a dollar as a contribution to the book fund. For the location of any specific singing, please contact Pat Dolan at 303-778-6297 or e-mail him at [ruralplain@aol.com](mailto:ruralplain@aol.com) or Sharon Kermiet at [skermiet@goodwilldenver.org](mailto:skermiet@goodwilldenver.org).

**COLORADO SPRINGS** - Sings regularly on the 2nd Sunday from 1:30 to 3:30 pm at the Pikes Peak Primitive Baptist Church 12<sup>th</sup> and Pikes Peak on the Westside. Please bring a dollar donation to the book fund. Pete Mathewson is the contact at 719-469-5241 or e-mail him at [71mgbgt41@gmail.com](mailto:71mgbgt41@gmail.com).

**FORT COLLINS** - The singing is normally the first Monday of each month 7-8:30 pm at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 2000 Stover Street. Contact Hill Grimmer for specifics at 970-231-1197 or e-mail him at [hill@sacredharpcolorado.org](mailto:hill@sacredharpcolorado.org)

## **Sacred Harp On The Web**

Our local websites are Sacred Harp Colorado at [www.sacredharpcolorado.org](http://www.sacredharpcolorado.org) and the Rocky Mountain Shapenote Singers at <http://lamar.colostate.edu/~dakspk>. The national web site is [www.fasola.org](http://www.fasola.org)

## **Sacred Harp Colorado Newsletter Editor:**

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*Come Join Us At The Foot Of Pikes Peak For An All Day*

# *Sacred Harp Singing*

**Saturday March 22nd 2008**

9:00AM to 3:00PM

## **Our Saviour's Lutheran Church**

1128 E. Boulder Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80903

The Pikes Peak Sacred Harp Singing is an opportunity for you to sing at the foot of the mountain that inspired Kathrine Lee Bates to pen the lyrics to one of our most beloved patriotic hymns – America The Beautiful. On Saturday the 22nd of March 2008, we will again sing from both the Denson and Cooper books. Come share a great day of shape note singing and our fine Front Range hospitality including dinner on the grounds at noon.

Sacred Harp is four part a cappella harmony using a four shape notation. Since we sing for ourselves rather than an audience, new singers are always welcome and encouraged to participate. Interested listeners are equally welcome. Books are available for loan or purchase. Admission is free with donations accepted. Come and bring a friend.

**Directions from Interstate 25 North or South:** Take Exit 143 Unitah Street. Go East seven blocks to Wasatch, South eight blocks to Boulder then East eight blocks to Hancock. The church is on your left as you come to Hancock Street. Park in the parking lot to the West of the church or on streets adjacent to the church.

**For lodging information, please contact:** Joyce Wood at 719/332-1162 or [joycewood@q.com](mailto:joycewood@q.com).

**Other Activities:** Saturday evening social at the home of Pete and Susie Mathewson to clean up the leftovers - Conversation, food and song beginning at 5:00PM. Sunday services at Pikes Peak Primitive Baptist Church 12<sup>th</sup> and Pikes Peak on the West side. Seven shape singing at 10:30AM, preaching at 11:00.

**For additional information please contact:** Pete Mathewson at 719/469-5241 or [71mgbgt41@gmail.com](mailto:71mgbgt41@gmail.com)

*Come Sound His Praise Abroad And Hymns Of Glory Sing*