

ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: THE PERFORMANCE OF HISTORY: MOTIVATIONS FOR
REVIVALIST PARTICIPATION IN SACRED HARP OF THE
CHESAPEAKE BAY AREA

Brigita Lee Sebal, Master of Arts, 2005

Thesis directed by: Dr. Jonathan Dueck
Department of Musicology and Ethnomusicology

Sacred Harp performance exists in the Chesapeake Bay area of Maryland, Virginia and southern Pennsylvania primarily inside a revivalist setting of folklore societies. Singers identify both the musical sound and the community of singers as their primary motivation for participating in Sacred Harp. Many singers are originally attracted to it because of its harmonies and structure and explore new repertoire through the use of recordings and attendance at conventions. The convention system further enables a community with local, regional, and national levels, which then helps deepen commitment to Sacred Harp performance. Finally, singers interact with historical practices through performance, which results in a transformation and rejuvenation both of the singer and of Sacred Harp itself.

THE PERFORMANCE OF HISTORY: MOTIVATIONS FOR REVIVALIST
PARTICIPATION IN SACRED HARP OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY AREA

by

Brigita Lee Sebald

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2005

Advisory Committee:

Dr. Jonathan Dueck, Chair
Professor Robert Provine
Professor Carol E. Robertson
Dr. Boden Sandstrom

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Chapter I: Introduction

Sacred Harp performance in the Chesapeake Bay area is based upon an American hymnody tradition dating back to the colonial era. In order to foster greater participation in worship services, ministers advocated teaching sight-singing and note-reading, which was carried out by itinerant singing school masters. These singing school masters wrote the polyphonic tunes¹ sung in churches, and thus became the first published composers in the colonies. To ease the process of learning sight-singing, publishers developed an ingenious notational system which assigned a differently shaped notehead to each solfège syllable at the turn of the nineteenth century. When singing schools lost popularity in the original colonies, the tradition moved west and south, and eventually became rooted in rural singing practices. Through the course of the nineteenth century, many tunebooks were compiled; however, the most popular, the *Sacred Harp*² by B. F. White and E. J. King, gave its name to the community that performs it.

In the Chesapeake Bay area,³ Sacred Harp began its current practice through folklore societies, but then grew its own network of interconnections on the regional and national levels. In my fieldwork, which began in September 2003 with two local groups and by February 2005 had extended to include three monthly groups, a weekly group, and several conventions, I immediately noticed that some singers were extremely active in the community and traveled huge distances to participate in Sacred Harp events. My primary

¹ Within the Chesapeake Bay area, individual compositions are referred to as “tunes.”

² When italicized, “Sacred Harp” refers to the tunebook; otherwise, it refers to the movement of singers that participate in its performance.

³ This label derives from an online email group that serves as communication for several local meetings in Maryland and Virginia.

question, then, was why these singers displayed such a high level of devotion to a group formed through voluntary participation. I could not explain a reason for this based upon my introduction to Sacred Harp. I originally heard about some of the repertoire performed by shape-note singers in a religion class as an undergraduate in Western Washington State. However, I first heard recordings of it in a seminar in American music at the Peabody Conservatory. The immediate attraction for me was the idea of a performance group that did not have a strict hierarchical structure, such as that of a symphony orchestra. I had no idea that Sacred Harp attracted such a high level of devotion in its participants in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. I became interested in examining the particular aspects of it that appealed to its participants. Through several formal interviews, as well as numerous informal encounters with singers, I discovered that most singers described their attachment to Sacred Harp as dependent on two aspects. First, most singers were initially drawn to Sacred Harp because of its musical sound; they enjoyed the open, resonant quality of its harmonies and the relative complexity of its structure as compared to other genres they had encountered. This initial exposure either happened through attendance at a large singing event or, more commonly, through recordings. Because of this, local singers then began to seek out performance activities in their area. However, the intensity of dedication displayed by some singers was due to the community formed through participation in singing. Simply put, singers enjoyed the social experience of performing and interacting with other Sacred Harp singers and were willing to travel large distances to experience both the musical sound and fellowship with each other.

Although several singers mentioned spiritual expression as a key component in their performance, it is not examined here because it does not seem to be a primary motivation for initial involvement for the majority of local singers. Local performance is framed with religion: the texts of tunes in the *Sacred Harp* are explicitly Christian and conventions begin with prayers. Nevertheless, many singers do not begin participating in Sacred Harp due to spiritual motivations. Rather, they are first drawn to it because of its musical sound. Even though Sacred Harp performance has these Christian components, it is considered to be a secular activity, and many singers do not have any kind of aspirations to connecting with spirituality. In fact, one singer from Richmond, Virginia deliberately removes the religiousness from the most sacred texts by spontaneously modifying them in performance to a more secular version. According to one of my informants whose own performance is a form of worship to him, he does not openly express a spiritual intention because it would drive away those singers that do not share his them. He also believes that Sacred Harp is one his few activities that affords spiritual expression within a group situation that is at the same time entirely personal.⁴ Spiritual motivations have not been explored here for several reasons. First, this study focuses upon the qualities that serve as an initial attraction to Sacred Harp, which was identified by the majority of singers as lying in the musical sound and the community of singers. Second, it is unique as a motivation to only a handful of singers, rather than the majority. Third, because spiritual motivations only apply to some singers rather than the entire body, it is not an explicit part of the performance and is not one of the factors that binds the community together.

⁴ Personal communication, 19 April 2005.

My method in examining why singers become involved in the Sacred Harp community was comprised of several formal recorded interviews, many informal ones during potluck dinners in the intermission of local meetings and conventions, and creating a listing of the tunes sung at particular times in particular meetings in order to examine the formation of local repertoire. I have chosen to give excerpts from the interviews with my primary informants and from a few of my fieldnotes at some length in order to give the reader the opportunity to draw his or her own conclusions. The quotations from my primary informants are all either sections from their descriptions about their first encounters with Sacred Harp or their advice to me as I was encountering Sacred Harp. My own fieldnotes describe my first experiences with local Sacred Harp groups and at conventions. All of my primary informants, with whom I conducted recorded interviews, are active participants in multiple singing groups within the Chesapeake Bay area. Joan,⁵ a retired federal employee, has participated in Sacred Harp for over ten years and helped found a monthly sing in the Baltimore area. Gladys, a librarian, encountered Sacred Harp while studying abroad in England, resumed performing when attending graduate school in Boston, and has sung in the Baltimore, Washington, DC, and northern Virginia areas for four years. While Lorenzo has only sung for the past year, he is one of the most active participants in the Chesapeake Bay area and, thus, exhibits one of the strongest immediate attachments to Sacred Harp. Bob, an employee at a public university in Baltimore and a recent convert through the efforts of Gladys, gave the unique insights of one who was still in the initial stages of attraction to Sacred Harp. While I did not conduct formal interviews with them, Wendy, Rachel,

⁵ In accordance with the policy of the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board, all names have been changed.

Katie, and many other singers are also active performers who have contributed to insights into Sacred Harp.

My study of the motivations influencing Sacred Harp performance in the Chesapeake Bay area is divided into sections according to the order in which singers described them to me. Since Sacred Harp is locally cradled by folklore societies, who explicitly seek to preserve performance practices for their traditional, historical value, the first section describes the history of shape-note singing in general and Sacred Harp in particular, as well as the way this history has been encapsulated by the major authors local performers use for information. The next section describes the activities of local performing groups and how they relate to each other. Since for many local singers the source of instant attraction to Sacred Harp is usually the musical sound, the third section describes the repertoire utilized by several different local groups and how that repertoire has been shaped through the use of recordings as source material and through attendance at large singing events, such as conventions. Because the community of singers inspires a deep level of devotion from some of its participants, the fourth section examines the ways singers move from their initial exposure to a high level of integration into the community. Finally, the last section describes the ways in which Sacred Harp singers engage with their historical counterparts and form new practices. Through my primary informants' experiences, as well as others I encountered in my fieldwork and my own when I was exposed to Sacred Harp, it can be demonstrated how a community bound together only through amateur musical performance is built and how it expands.

Chapter II: The Use of Historical Sources

In the first few months I participated in local groups, I had difficulty seeing the outlines of the community formed around Sacred Harp performance. I also could not see how other new singers besides me gained entrance into the community after expressing initial interest. To satisfy my curiosity, I interviewed Joan, one of the original members of the Sacred Harp group in Baltimore, Maryland about her initial exposure and initiation into the community and about the local history of the community centered in Sacred Harp in the Chesapeake Bay area:

The basic shape of Sacred Harp history is that it started in New England with singing schools and that's where the Billings stuff and the book comes from. Then it migrated south and found its home in the South in the Baptist church, and it lived there for a while even after it disappeared in the North. After World War II, with this kind of folk revival, there started all these folk music societies. That's how it spread. There's a guy, his name escapes me right now but it will come back to me. He was in charge of the Sacred Harp foundation in the '50s and he was very interested in proselytizing. He saw that it was sort of dwindling in the South, and they needed new blood. He figured out how to get in touch with all these folk societies. And [the folk societies] were interested because it was an indigenous folk tradition. And he actually deliberately went around and encouraged people to start sponsoring shape-note [activities]. When somebody would be interested in setting up a new convention, like the first Potomac [River] Convention, which was in the late 80s, he came up and taught a singing school, and so he helped build all these things. If you looked around, what you'd see is that he would find somebody that was interested, maybe even a group, and then he would sort of nurture them for a while and go and visit, and one of the things that he wanted to make sure that he did was to keep them in touch with the Southern tradition. Because another thing that happened, and again, I'm by far not an expert on this, is that there was a bunch of people in New England who rediscovered

shape-note music and there's a guy named Larry Gordon in Vermont and he started doing shape-notes up there and he started writing a lot of new shape-note music. My husband was first exposed to shape-note music in the late seventies in Vermont at Bread and Puppet,⁶ and what they would do is [perform] some of the shape-note songs as written, but they also wrote new words to them. And [that] school of people is less intensely Baptist than this other folk. [Larry Gordon] put out a hymnal called the Northern Harmony,⁷ which are almost all new songs, many of which are by him, and many of which are not at all religious. So there was tension between the advocates of people who were interested in the sound and the music, but not necessarily their tradition. If you look at Buell Cobb's book or if you talk to some of the other people, there are a lot of people who know a lot more about this than I do.⁸

When I asked her about the formation of local Sacred Harp groups in the Chesapeake Bay area, Joan made a point of directing me to published histories of Sacred Harp for authoritative information, such as Buell Cobb's *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music*.⁹ Novels and ethnographies about traditional Sacred Harp singers are a key way that contemporary singers in the Chesapeake Bay area learn about Sacred Harp.¹⁰

⁶ According to Bread and Puppet's website: "Bread and Puppet Theater is one of the oldest noncommercial, self-supporting theaters in the country. Since 1964 Bread and Puppet has created politically and socially aware shows, with commitment to community participation, often involving large groups of volunteers in its productions. At present, our show are anti-war, anti-Capitalism, anti-Globalization, and pro-Vermont independence." [www.theaterofmemory.com/art/bread/interns.html, accessed 19 April 2005]

⁷ Anthony Barrand and Larry Gordon, *Northern Harmony: Plain Tunes, Fuging Tunes, and Anthems from the New England Singing School Tradition* (Plainfield, VT: Northern Harmony Pub. Co., 1990).

⁸ Personal communication, 11 March 2004.

⁹ Buell Cobb, *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978).

¹⁰ In his interview, Lorenzo mentioned that Amanda Denson, a member of the family that has guided several revisions of the *Sacred Harp*, had also advised him to read Buell Cobb's book. Similarly, an information sheet for new singers developed by a longtime member of the Arlington group advises them to use Buell Cobb's book for information: "[The *Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* is] an excellent and unique scholarly account of all aspects of the Sacred Harp tradition. Required reading for every serious Sacred Harp singers. The author is an Alabamian who was drawn into Sacred Harp in his college years and later wrote his Master's thesis on the subject. Whereas other scholarly studies by musicologists examine

According to my informants, there are several books which in particular have served as a conduit of traditional practices. Because local Sacred Harp singers for the most part have not been surrounded by Sacred Harp performance, most of them must learn about it through alternative means, such as research in books that include references to Sacred Harp and the acquisition of recordings of shape-note music, as well as tunebooks other than *Sacred Harp*. Several historical accounts of Sacred Harp have been particularly instrumental in encapsulating its practices for Northern performers. They not only contain information about its history and performance practices, but the attitude taken towards Sacred Harp in the descriptions aids in its transformation from a largely religious to a folkloric practice. Other accounts of shape-note activities, while not necessarily having been actively used by performers, contribute to the scholarly literature on the subject through descriptions of the colonial origins of shape-note hymnody, including its most prominent composers, and analyses of the part-writing procedures used by them. This chapter examines the tone taken towards Sacred Harp by its major writers, as well as looking at the actual historical content contained therein, in order to see the way that Sacred Harp has been encapsulated for Chesapeake Bay area performers.

The oldest literature used by Sacred Harp performers was written by a group of Southern writers from the 1920s to the 1940s, the most prominent of whom was George Pullen Jackson. While he was not born in the South, Jackson's family moved to Birmingham, Alabama when he was a young child.¹¹ Even though Alabama was at that

the tradition from the outside, Mr. Cobb, whose phenomenal treble voice is heard at many singings each year, observes and analyzes the musical and social aspects of the Southern tradition from the inside, yet with objectivity and perspicacity." [www.fasola.org/introduction/cobb.html, accessed 19 April 2005]

¹¹ John Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 89.

time a center of Sacred Harp performance, Jackson did not begin his acquaintance with it until the 1920s, when he was a professor of English at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.¹² In the period between his residence in Birmingham and his encounter with Sacred Harp, Jackson studied in Germany, where he was heavily influenced by German Romanticism and its emphasis on folk culture; later he wrote a set of four articles analyzing the structure of German folk-songs.¹³ After his return to the United States, Jackson berated his fellow academics for their lack of interest in folk music in “American Indifference to Study of Folk-Lore,”¹⁴ but he soon found his muse through Sacred Harp performers in Tennessee.

Although he wrote several books and articles about shape-note music and its singers, Jackson’s most widely read work is *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*.¹⁵ He devoted the first chapter to the foundations of the shape-note repertoire in colonial New England, but quickly moved the focus to nineteenth-century publishing in the Shenandoah Valley. However, the bulk of his book dwells upon important historical figures within shape-note performance, such as B. F. White, William Walker, and other tunebook compilers and singing-school masters; his account can be read as a genealogy leading to the most current revision of the *Sacred Harp*. He also includes descriptions of

¹² Ibid, 90.

¹³ George Pullen Jackson, “The Rhythmic Form of the German Folk-Songs, I,” *Modern Philology* 13, no. 10 (February 1916), 561 – 581; “The Rhythmic Form of the German Folk-Songs, II,” *Modern Philology* 14, no. 2 (June 1916), 65 – 92; “The Rhythmic Form of the German Folk-Songs, III,” *Modern Philology* (October 1916), 357 – 383; “The Rhythmic Form of the German Folk-Songs, IV,” *Modern Philology* 15, no. 2 (June 1917), 79 – 102.

¹⁴ George Pullen Jackson, “American Indifference to the Study of Folk-lore” *The Journal of American Folklore* 32, no. 125 (July – September 1919), 438 – 439.

¹⁵ George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Songs, Singings, and “Buckwheat Notes”* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1933).

various singing genres in different regions of the South¹⁶ as well as analyses of the form of many of the most commonly used shape-note tunes.¹⁷ However factual Jackson's account of Sacred Harp singers may be, his attitude towards Sacred Harp is revealed in his introduction, where he describes his first encounter with the "lost tonal tribe"¹⁸ of its singers:

It may take on importance and arouse more interest...when we learn – as we shall in the course of the following pages – that this not antiquated solmization was and is associated, precisely as the country singers assert, with a likewise surviving primitive vocal-music theory and practice, and with a great body of song constructed in manners that have been forgotten, as it seems, everywhere else for generations; and that it is graphically represented in a notation form of which present-day urban musical folk know nothing.¹⁹

According to Jackson's somewhat fanciful description, the musical origins of Sacred Harp date back all the way to the beginnings of the world, and its practitioners are remnants of the earliest Americans. Although the group of people Jackson examines exists in the same time period as him, he portrays them as living in an earlier, simpler, and purer age.

¹⁶ In "William Hauser's Hesperian Harp and Olive Leaf: Shape-Note Tunebooks as Emblems of Change and Progress," Daniel Patterson calls into question the extent of Jackson's knowledge about shape-note tunebooks other than the *Sacred Harp*. [*Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 399 (January – March 1988), 25].

¹⁷ Although Jackson's description of the folk derivations of many shape-note tunes is similar to that of many other prominent scholars, his work is unique in attempting to prove that African-American spirituals are derived from Euro-American models, both lyrically and musically.

¹⁸ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 – 5.

A similar writer from the same school as Jackson is Carl Carmer, another Northern urbanite. His novel *Stars Fell On Alabama*²⁰ contains a series of vignettes depicting a period of six years in which Carmer taught at a university in Tuscaloosa, including one of a Sacred Harp group at Sand Mountain. That story is only one of many, and thus does not represent the general slant of Carmer's work, but his first chapter exhibits a similar technique of distancing Alabamans from Northern urbanites. He blatantly states that Alabama is an enchanted land, separate from the rest of the United States.

Many an Alabamian to this day reckons dates from "the year the stars fell" – though he and his neighbor frequently disagree as to what year of our Lord may be so designated. All are sure, however, that once upon a time stars fell on Alabama, changing the land's destiny. What had been written in eternal symbols was thus erased – and the region has existed ever since, unreal and fated, bound by a horoscope such as controls no other country.²¹

While Carmer's distancing is much more fantastical than Jackson's, it accomplished the same objective. According to Carmer, the inhabitants of Alabama are under a magical spell, separated from the urban North not so much by time as by enchantment.

Jackson's and Carmer's accounts of Sacred Harp singers deal with a time earlier than the present, both through their historical focus and because they were written in the first half of the twentieth century. Two other sources of information commonly used by local Sacred Harp singers portray Sacred Harp in a more modern light. The earlier of the two sources, *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and its Music*, was written in 1978 by Buell Cobb, Jr., an English professor at West Georgia College, and was revised in 1989. The

²⁰ Carl Carmer, *Stars Fell On Alabama* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, Inc., 1934).

²¹ Carmer, *xiv*.

book is broken down into several sections, starting with a general description of contemporary performance in the South. According to John Bealle, this section has proved useful in promoting Sacred Harp in the North because it outlines the core values of the tradition, such as the general structure and outline of a sing and a convention and other such performance practices. Its importance as a source of information has been borne out through my own fieldwork.²² Cobb's work contains much of the same information as Jackson's, although its presentation is quite different. Cobb gives a more extended version of the early history of Sacred Harp, although in a more delayed and thus less prominent position. Cobb's description of the tunes focuses less upon their folk origins and more upon the different structures and styles of ornamentation frequently encountered. In addition to his general description, Cobb also briefly lays out the network of social activities singers use.

While much of Cobb's factual information is largely the same as Jackson's, his introduction gives a markedly different tone. Jackson portrayed Southern Sacred Harp singers as relics from the colonial American past, thus distancing traditional singers from the urban present. However, Cobb connected with the future of Sacred Harp in his introduction to the 1989 revision. During the 1980s, shape-note singing spread rapidly throughout much of the United States, forming an extension of the older social practices.

The bridging of such distances is chiefest of gifts that the Sacred Harp brings....Converts from an altogether different way of life can come to the experience free of all that. What they then make of the tradition in a different place – with, in many cases, a different set of assumptions about the world and God and humankind – is an interesting prospect, yet to be fully realized.²³

²² Bealle, 197.

According to Cobb, traditional singing is rapidly dying away, so Northern singers have become its indirect descendants. Even though Cobb acknowledges a distance between rural Southerners and urban Northerners, he sees it as an advantage, because Northerners do not associate Sacred Harp with provincialism.²⁴ Furthermore, Cobb includes Northern singers as part of Sacred Harp's developing history by describing the inclusion of modern Northern compositions in the newest revision of the *Sacred Harp*.²⁵

In *Public Worship, Private Faith*, John Bealle shares Cobb's goal of showing modern Sacred Harp practices. Unlike Jackson, Carmer, and Cobb, Bealle is a folklorist, not a literature professor. In fact, Bealle's central premise is the process by which Sacred Harp has moved from a religious practice to a folkloric one.²⁶ Bealle begins by giving the historical background of Sacred Harp, but he focuses upon how it was envisioned both as a sacred and a secular practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thus allowing it to develop into an almost purely secular folkloric context. He then goes on to show the ways by which Sacred Harp was encapsulated as folk music, which, for him, occurred through reading literary accounts such as those of Jackson, Carmer, and Cobb. Finally, Bealle recounts the birth of Sacred Harp's folkloric practices in the North, particularly in Chicago. Bealle's book is the furthest departure in attitude from Jackson and Carmer because it explores the relationship between the simultaneous characterization of Sacred Harp as a current, living extension of a traditional practice and as a folkloric reconstruction.

²³ Cobb, *ix*.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ Cobb, *xi – xii*.

²⁶ Bealle, *xiii*.

My purpose is not so much to recount Sacred Harp history or to provide a comprehensive overview of the tradition – although certainly some of that will be necessary. Rather, I mean to examine particular defining events in the dramatic encounter of Sacred Harp tradition with American public culture.... I take folksong revival not as a cultural movement but as a site of encounter, one of many through which traditional discourses engage those discourses that have assumed the character and status of the cultural mainstream.²⁷

Because Bealle focused his book on the Sacred Harp revival, it is one of the few published academic sources of information about performance in the North. Bealle looks critically at accounts of Sacred Harp activity in the South to see how they have contributed to the molding of folkloric performance practices.

George Pullen Jackson, Carl Carmer, Buell Cobb, and John Bealle are the authors most frequently used by local performers as a source of information about traditional practices. However, there are a number of other scholarly sources about shape-note performers, composers, and musical styles authored by musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and folklorists. Malcolm Cole,²⁸ James Heintze,²⁹ Stephen Marini,³⁰ and Paul Osterhout³¹ have analyzed the origins of the shape-note repertoire through colonial performance practices. In a similar vein, Christina Mennel,³² Sterling Murray,³³

²⁷ Ibid., xii – xiv.

²⁸ Malcolm Cole, *Music in Performance and Society: Essays in Honor of Roland Jackson* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997).

²⁹ James Heintze, *American Musical Life in Context and Practice to 1865* (New York: Garland, 1994).

³⁰ Stephen Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

³¹ Paul Osterhout, "Note Reading and Regular Singing in Eighteenth-Century New England," *American Music* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1986), 125 – 144.

David Music,³⁴ Daniel Patterson,³⁵ Carol Pemberton,³⁶ David Warren Steel,³⁷ and Judith Steinberg³⁸ have all contributed musicological descriptions of individual shape-note composers and tunebook collectors, while Ralph Daniel,³⁹ Dorothy Horn,⁴⁰ Irving Lowens,⁴¹ Wallace McKenzie,⁴² Kiri Miller,⁴³ Daniel Taddie,⁴⁴ and William Tallmadge⁴⁵

³² Christina Mennel, "Timothy B. Mason and the Sacred Harp (1834)," *The Hymn* 49, no. 2 (April 1998), 30 – 34.

³³ Sterling E. Murray, "Timothy Swan and Yankee Psalmody" *The Musical Quarterly*, 61, no. 3 (July 1975), 433 – 463.

³⁴ David Music, "Ananias Davisson, Robert Boyd, Reubin Monday, John Martin, and Archibald Rhea in East Tennessee, 1816 – 1826" *American Music* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1983), 72 – 84; "Seven 'New' Tunes in Amos Pilsbury's *United States' Sacred Harmony* (1799) and Their Use in Four-Shape Tunebooks of the Southern United States Before 1860" *American Music* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 303 – 337.

³⁵ Daniel W. Patterson, "William Hauser's *Hesperian Harp* and *Olive Leaf*: Shape-Note Tunebooks as Emblems of Change and Progress" *Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 399 (January – March 1988), 23 – 26.

³⁶ Carol Pemberton, "Praising God Through Congressional Song: Lowell Mason's Contributions to Church Music" *The Hymn* 44, no. 2 (April 1993), 22 – 30.

³⁷ David Warren Steel, "Lazarus J. Jones of Mississippi and the Southern Minstrel (1849)" *American Music* 6, no. 2, 123 – 157.

³⁸ Judith Steinberg, "Old Folks Concerts and the Revival of New England Psalmody" *The Musical Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (October 1973), 602 – 619.

³⁹ Ralph T. Daniel, "English Models for the First American Anthems" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1959), 49 – 58.

⁴⁰ Dorothy Horn, "Quartal Harmony in the Pentatonic Folk Hymns of the Sacred Harps" *The Journal of American Folklore* 71, no. 282 (October – December 1958), 564 – 581; *Sing To Me of Heaven: A Study of Folk and Early American Materials in Three Old Harp Books* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970).

⁴¹ Irving Lowens, "The Origins of the American Fuging Tune" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1953), 43 – 52.

⁴² Wallace McKenzie, "The Alto Parts of the 'True Disguised Harmony' of the Sacred Harp Revisions" *Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1989), 153 – 171; "Anthems of the Sacred Harp Tunesmiths" *American Music* (Fall 1988), 247 – 263.

⁴³ Kiri Miller, "'First Sing the Notes:' Oral and Written Traditions in Sacred Harp Transmission" *American Music* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2004), 475 – 501.

⁴⁴ Daniel Taddie, "Solmization, Scale, and Key in Nineteenth-Century Four-Shape Tunebooks: Theory and Practice" *American Music* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 42 – 64.

have given analyses of the part-writing procedures exhibited by these composers. In addition to these musicological sources, traditional Sacred Harp practices in the South and their kinship with Primitive Baptist religious services have been explored by ethnomusicologists and folklorists such as Gavin Campbell,⁴⁶ James Goff,⁴⁷ Mai Hogan Kelton,⁴⁸ Terry Miller,⁴⁹ William Montell,⁵⁰ Kay Norton,⁵¹ David Stanley,⁵² Brett Sutton,⁵³ and Jeff Todd Titon.⁵⁴ Although these sources are not used by local singers, they contain valuable information about the history of shape-note practices in the colonial period, the nineteenth century in the South, and on contemporary shape-note singers in the South.

⁴⁵ William Tallmadge, "Folk Organum: A Study of Origins" *American Music* 2, no. 3 (1984), 59 – 73.

⁴⁶ Gavin James Campbell, "'Old Can Be Used Instead of New:' Shape-Note Singing and the Crisis of Modernity in the New South, 1820 – 1920" *The Journal of American Folklore* 110, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 169 – 188.

⁴⁷ James Goff, *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002).

⁴⁸ Mai Hogan Kelton, "Living Teacher-Composers of the Sacred Harp" *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* (Winter 1985), 137 – 143.

⁴⁹ Terry Miller, "Voices From the Past: The Singing and the Preaching at Otter Creek Church" *Journal of American Folklore* (July – September 1975), 266 – 282.

⁵⁰ William Lynwood Montell, *Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky, 1900 – 1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

⁵¹ Kay Norton, *Baptist Offering, Southern Midwife: Jesse Mercer's Cluster of Spiritual Songs (1810)* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park, 2002).

⁵² David Stanley, "The Gospel-Singing Convention in South Georgia" *Journal of American Folklore* (January – March 1982), 1 – 32.

⁵³ Brett Sutton, "Shape-Note Tune Books and Primitive Hymns" *Ethnomusicology* 26, no. 1 (January 1982), 11 – 26.

⁵⁴ Jeff Todd Titon, "'God'll Just Bless You All Over the Place:' Hymnody in a Blue Ridge Mountain Independent Baptist Church" *Appalachian Journal* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1987), 348 – 358; *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988); "'The Real Thing:' Tourism, Authenticity, and Pilgrimage Among the Old Regular Baptists at the 1997 Smithsonian Folklife Festival" *Worlds of Music* 41, no. 3 (1999), 115 – 139; "A Song From the Holy Spirit" *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 2 (May 1980), 223 – 231; "Stance, Role, and Identity in Fieldwork Among Folk Baptists and Pentecostals" *American Music* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1985), 16 – 24.

The accounts of Sacred Harp activities used by local performers, as well as the academic sources provided by ethnomusicologists, musicologists and folklorists, not only aid in the characterization of Sacred Harp as a folkloric practice by their attitudes, but they are sources of information about its history and the repertoire. Local performers, such as Joan and Lorenzo, educate themselves about Sacred Harp's past by reading these sources. Although the attitude taken by the authors may help to influence those taken by performers, the major goal of these sources is to educate about the actual history of Sacred Harp.

The style of music written by those who would later be known as shape-note composers had its roots in psalm-singing of the seventeenth century. Since most members of the congregation could not read musical notation and were thus unfamiliar with the melodies, the practice of "lining out" evolved, wherein a chorister would sing two lines of the psalm at a time and the rest of the congregation would then follow.⁵⁵ As the practice continued the tempo slowed and rhythms changed, leading to disorderly singing when the congregation could not maintain ensemble with each other. "Lining out" was transplanted to the colonies with its corresponding repertoire, as exemplified in the publication of the *Bay Psalm Book*, the first full-length book published in the British colonies.⁵⁶

By the 1720s, colonial ministers began to complain about the poor quality of singing in church, and a subsequent movement developed in order to have congregations

⁵⁵ Osterhout, 127.

⁵⁶ Irving Lowens, "The Bay Psalm Book in 17th-Century New England" *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1955), 22.

learn to read music so that the process of “lining out” would not be necessary. The Regular Singing Movement was begun by ministers centered at Harvard such as Thomas Symmes.⁵⁷ They deliberately engineered a shift from the heterophony that resulted from the practice of “lining out” to more organized polyphony, for which knowledge of note-reading was necessary.⁵⁸ Two other ministers from Harvard, John Tufts and Thomas Walter, published a sight-singing manual in 1721, intended for use in congregations throughout the colonies.⁵⁹ The Regular Singing Movement was spread by itinerant preachers to the rural churches surrounding Boston.⁶⁰

Although preachers were responsible for inspiring congregations to learn to read music in order to sing in an orderly fashion, they themselves did not teach sight-singing and note-reading. Such work was left to singing-school masters, who also became the first composers in the colonies. Singing-school masters frequently had other lines of work, such as blacksmithing, and would travel from town to town, taking up collections to hold their classes. Although singing schools were intended to aid in participation in worship services, they were rarely held in churches; instead, the master would rent out a public space such as a tavern.⁶¹ In addition to the sight-singing manuals by Tufts and Walter, singing-school masters often composed hymns and compiled their own tunebooks,⁶² such as those by Timothy Swan and William Billings. Billings was a

⁵⁷ Cobb, 58.

⁵⁸ Tallmadge, 60.

⁵⁹ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 6.

⁶⁰ Osterhout, 128 – 130.

⁶¹ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 8.

⁶² Irving Lowens, “The Origins of the American Fuging Tune,” 48.

blacksmith and singing-school master and composed the *New England Psalm Singer*, the first original tunebook in the colonies.⁶³ Because Billings' tunebook and those that followed it became so widely popular, he ushered in what Bealle has termed the "Golden Age" of American composition.⁶⁴ In the current edition of the *Sacred Harp*, 15 of Billings' compositions are used.

Timothy Swan, another well-known composer of the last half of the eighteenth century, was a merchant by trade who embarked upon his own secondary career as a teacher after receiving a limited formal education in music from a singing-school master in Groton, Massachusetts.⁶⁵ Four of Swan's compositions are in the current edition of the *Sacred Harp*; three of them are among the top ten most frequently performed pieces in the Chesapeake Bay area, along with one by Billings. Billings and Swan, as well as many other composers from the colonial period to the present, abandoned the seventeenth-century practice of using the psalms as texts. Instead, they turned to the lyrics of English writers, particularly those of Isaac Watts. According to Jackson, in the revision of the *Sacred Harp* used in the 1920s, thirteen set of lyrics belonged to Watts,⁶⁶ and by the 1970s, Cobb attributed sixty to him.⁶⁷ In the current edition of the *Sacred Harp*, a total of 145 songs have lyrics penned by Watts. Cobb identifies two reasons why Watts' lyrics have remained popular with present-day composers: "First, the democratic Watts wrote to the level of the common man, and second, his hymns emphasize dramatic images

⁶³ While it was used extensively in the colonies, the *Bay Psalm Book* was an import from England.

⁶⁴ Bealle, 19.

⁶⁵ Murray, 433 – 434.

⁶⁶ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 154.

⁶⁷ Cobb, 22.

which would appeal to a people whose inclination in music and theology was always for a suffusion of emotive power.”⁶⁸ Lyrics are cited by several local performers as a primary impetus for choosing tunes in performance, and Watts’ simplicity appeals to them because of the power of his visual images. For this reason, Watts remains a favorite lyricist for present-day shape-note composers.⁶⁹

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Regular Singing Movement spread throughout the colonies through the efforts of itinerant preachers and singing-school masters using both sight-singing manuals by John Tufts and Thomas Walter and locally-composed tunebooks. However, singing-school masters continued to search for easier ways to impart their materials, and by the early nineteenth century a unique educational device developed in the form of shape-note notation. In the eighteenth century, singing-school masters taught the rudiments of scales using a solfège system comprised of four syllables: *fa*, *sol*, *la*, and *mi*.⁷⁰ To make it simpler to coordinate the syllables with their corresponding notes, William Little and William Smith represented each syllable with a differently shaped note-head: *fa* was given a side-facing right triangle, *sol* was given an oval (the same shape used in conventional Western notation), *la* was a rectangle, and *mi* was a diamond.⁷¹

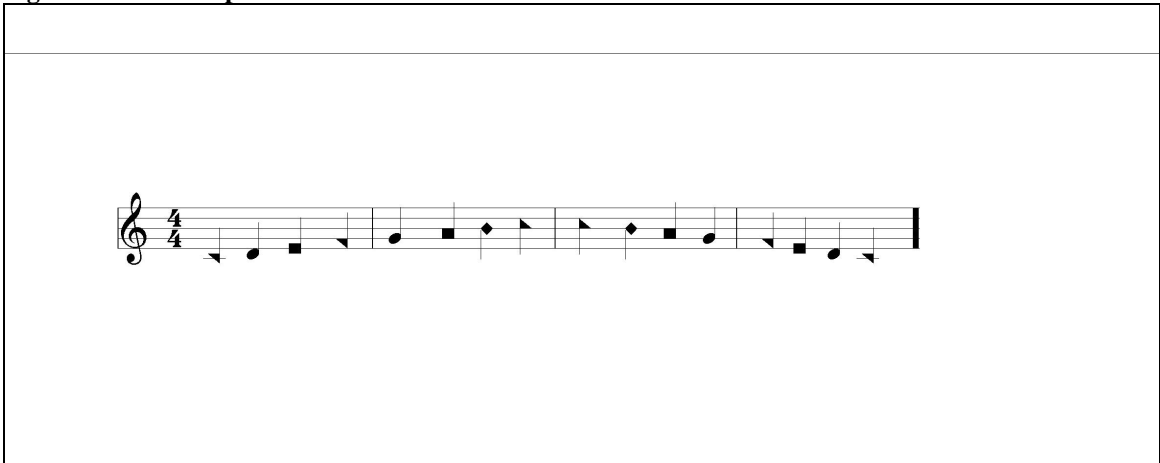
⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ For instance, Raymond Hamrick wrote “Lloyd,” one of the most frequently performed songs in the Mid-Atlantic region, in 1980 using Watts’ lyrics dating from 1719. Hugh McGraw, *The Sacred Harp* (Bremen, GA: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1991), 503.

⁷⁰ These syllables developed from Thomas Morley’s *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musick*, published in London in 1597, which was in itself derived from the Guidonian hexachords. Morley used the syllables *ut*, *re*, *mi*, *fa*, *sol*, and *la* [Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven: A Study of Folk and Early American Materials in Three Old Harp Books* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970), 5.

⁷¹ Taddie, 45.

Figure 1: Four-shape Notation



According to William Taddie, this notation did away with the necessity of teaching key signatures.⁷² Since the patterns of intervals in major and minor scales remain constant, the key signature becomes irrelevant when learning the tune.⁷³ In my interview with Joan, I described to her my difficulties in sight-reading shape-note tunes. She then informed me of the process by which she and other local performers internalize shape-note notation:

The great thing about Sacred Harp is that it's a tradition for people who can't sing, or that can't read music. It's very easy to pick up. I had much more trouble trying to pick up the piano.

How is it good for people who can't read music? Is it because of the shapes? OK, so you just sort of cheat and use the shapes.

Well, it's not cheating; that's what they're [intended] for. For people who don't know how to read music, it's wonderful. I sat down one day and said I'm going to learn how to do this. It took me two or three hours, but you have to turn off the part of your brain that actually reads music

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Andrew Law developed a similar four-shape notation system in 1803, shortly after Little and Smith's *The Easy Instructor* was published in 1802. Law reversed Little and Smith's shapes, giving *fa* a rectangle and *la* a triangle. Smith and Little's system is the one currently used in the *Sacred Harp* [Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 11 -14.

and just think about the intervals, because that's what [the shapes] are. If you just know the shapes you can pick out a tune.

When you're reading Sacred Harp you read it as a totally separate thing from normal music?

I try. I expect at this point it's like reinforcing. But, no, I actually read the shapes.

For me it's like an exercise in sight reading, which I was never very good at. But maybe that would work better, just looking at the shapes part of it.

You should think about trying to approach it on its own terms and not convert it from something else. Like I said, it really does work, because there's a woman that you may have heard about in the Washington group because she sang with them for a long time. She can't read music, and she can pick up any song in that book, or even new shape-note stuff and sing it. It's just amazing.⁷⁴

For Joan, shape-notes are an integral part of learning to sing Sacred Harp properly and, moreover, are a significant departure from her approaches to other forms of written music, such as her piano playing. Joan is capable of reading standard round-note notation, but she approaches the notation in the *Sacred Harp* as completely separate. The importance of four-shape notation in local performance has been further borne out by my own observations. Occasionally, singers will bring tunes in standard round-note notation to sing, and, by and large, the majority of the members of the group cannot perform it because it is not in the notational system to which they are accustomed.

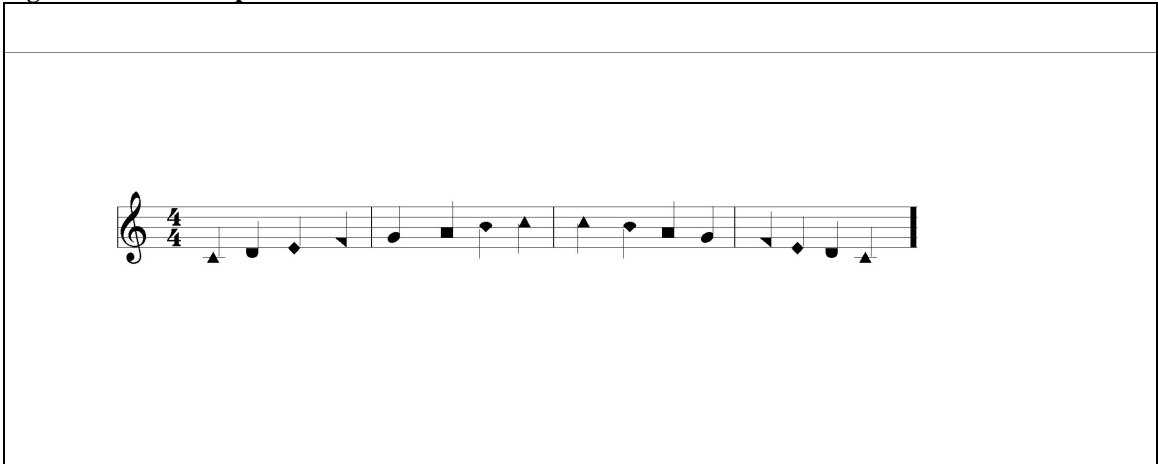
Besides the four-shape system, other shape-note systems developed. Later in the nineteenth century a system using seven shapes was invented by Jesse Aiken for the *Christian Minstrel* in 1846.⁷⁵ Aiken's seven-shape system covered the standard solfège syllables: *do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, and si*. A version of Aiken's system was used in the

⁷⁴ Personal communication, 11 March 2004.

⁷⁵ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 320 – 322.

Christian Harmony,⁷⁶ the second most widely used tunebook in the Chesapeake Bay area after the *Sacred Harp*. In the *Christian Harmony*, *fa*, *sol*, *la*, and *miall* kept the shapes associated with them in the four-shape system, but *do* was an upward-facing equilateral triangle, *re* was a hanging half-circle, and *si* was a downward-facing keystone.

Figure 2: Seven-shape Notation



While the *Christian Harmony* is used in two of the local groups, from my observations local singers are much less familiar with seven-shape notation than they are with four-shape notation and have a tendency to struggle greatly through all but the most familiar of tunes.

Shortly after four-shape notation was commonly used in tunebooks, the genre of music propagated by singing-school masters began to fall out of favor in the Boston area. The Better Music Movement, spearheaded by Lowell Mason and his brother, Timothy, pushed to have American church music align more closely with European standards.⁷⁷ Although he began as a businessman in Savannah, Georgia, Mason arranged to have a

⁷⁶ William Walker, *Christian Harmony* (Centreville: Alabama Christian Harmony Singing Association, Inc., 2002).

⁷⁷ Cobb, 62.

collection of church music published through the Boston Handel and Haydn Society.⁷⁸

Based on this and other ties with the church community in Boston, Mason gave a speech at the Hanover Street Church in Boston in 1826, where he summed up his aesthetics of church music.

1. Church music must be simple, chaste, correct, and free of ostentation.
2. The text must be handled with as much care as the music; each must embrace the other.
3. Congregational singing must be promoted.
4. Capable choirs and judiciously used instruments, particularly the organ, are indispensable aid to services.
5. A solid music education for all children is the only means of genuine reform in church music.
6. Musicianship per se is subordinate to facilitating worship.⁷⁹

Although Mason's fifth point correlates closely with the aim of shape-note composers, his advocacy of the use of instruments in worship services contrasts with the singing school's use of *a cappella* vocal compositions.

Through Mason's influence in Boston, shape-note singing was pushed farther west and south, and Cincinnati and Virginia's Shenandoah Valley became the new centers of publishing.⁸⁰ However, Mason was not able to make a complete break with shape-note notation. Along with his brother, Timothy Mason, he published the *Eclectic Harmony* in Cincinnati in 1834. Because shape-note notation was so popular in that region, Mason's publishers insisted on using it.⁸¹ However, rather than emulating the robust style of colonial singing-school composers, the Masons borrowed tunes from

⁷⁸ Pemberton, 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 23.

⁸¹ Menzel, 30.

Gluck, Purcell, Tallis, Handel, Haydn, Martin Luther, Nageli, and Pleyel.⁸² There are five tunes composed by Mason in the current edition of the *Sacred Harp*, although none of them are frequently performed in the Chesapeake Bay area. One local singer deliberately avoids choosing Mason's compositions because of his role in the decreased performance of shape-note repertoire in the early nineteenth century.

Shape-note performance was thus pushed west and south, eventually virtually disappearing except in rural communities.⁸³ Many of the tunebooks originating in the middle of the nineteenth century were compiled by Southerners. The oldest Southern tunebook, the *Southern Harmony*, was written by William Walker of Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1835.⁸⁴ Walker was the brother-in-law of B. F. White, the compiler of the *Sacred Harp*, and the two allegedly worked on the *Southern Harmony* together, although it was published solely under Walker's name.⁸⁵ Like many of its predecessors, the *Southern Harmony* contained only a small number of new compositions. Instead, Walker collected his favorite tunes by both colonial and other Southern composers, such as B. F. White. Later, in 1866 Walker compiled the *Christian Harmony* in seven-note notation, which "he hoped would take the place of the then thirty-year-old *Southern Harmony*."⁸⁶

William Walker's brother-in-law, B. F. White, compiled the most widely used tunebook in the Chesapeake Bay area, the *Sacred Harp*, in 1844. White had very little

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Jackson, "Some Factors in the Diffusion of American Religious Folksongs," *The Journal of American Folklore* 65, no. 258 (October – December 1952), 365.

⁸⁴ Cobb, 74.

⁸⁵ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 75.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 332.

formal education: he attended seasonal schools for a total of about nine months,⁸⁷ and was largely self-taught in musical practices. According to Joe S. James:

B. F. White took up the science of music without a preceptor, and while it was hard to get hold of sufficient treatises on the subject, he started out with a determination to master the science. It is said of him that he would sit for hours at a time and look at the different freaks of nature, and note the regularity and harmony with which it did all its work, and would watch and listen to birds, and learned as much or more from these observations than he did from other men's works.⁸⁸

White co-compiled the *Sacred Harp* with one of his pupils, E. J. King.⁸⁹ In the Chesapeake Bay area, King receives very little recognition for his role in the history of *Sacred Harp*, possibly because he died a few weeks after the *Sacred Harp's* initial publication.⁹⁰ It is not entirely surprising that the *Sacred Harp* has remained the most widely used tunebook, since it was specifically designed to appeal to a large number of people. According to Cobb,

From the first, the *Sacred Harp* was conceived and nourished in a community situation. According to James, between B. F. White's home and the street, "there was a beautiful grove of oak, hickory, and other large trees, and in the yard was an old-fashioned well of pure water." Great crowds of people would gather there and "in this grove, veranda and hose sing the songs long before they were published in book form."⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 71 – 72.

⁸⁹ Steel, 129.

⁹⁰ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 90.

⁹¹ Cobb, 72.

Furthermore, White published all of his compositions in a local newspaper before adding them to the *Sacred Harp*, in order to let others submit their opinion of each piece.⁹² The tunes in the *Sacred Harp* thus represent the musical taste of singers in White's time.

After its initial publication in 1844, the *Sacred Harp* underwent several revisions. Many of them followed White's precedent of suiting the contents of the tunebook to popular tastes; the revisions reflect changing performance practices and taste in repertoire.⁹³ The first three revisions were completed by White himself, in 1850, 1859, and 1869, and thus retain the strongest link with the tunebook's original edition.⁹⁴ However, Cobb states that by the 1869 edition, the fugal tune, a popular colonial form, was more prominent than in previous editions.⁹⁵ The next edition of the *Sacred Harp* was completed after B. F. White's death in 1884 by his sons J. L. White and B. F. White, Jr. It represented a sizeable break with previous editions because it included newer tune forms such as gospel-hymns and camp-meeting songs, it assigned a fourth part to many of the tunes that previously had three, and it was published in seven-shape notation.⁹⁶ Later editions reverted back to the earlier four-shape notation because of a lack of acceptance for the seven-shape versions.

In the early twentieth century, two divergent versions of the *Sacred Harp* emerged, one edited by W.M. Cooper and the other by J.S. James and members of the Denson family. Cooper made his first edition of the *Sacred Harp* in 1902, followed by

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Bealle, 223.

⁹⁴ Cobb, 85.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 87 – 88.

later ones in 1907, 1909, 1927, 1950, and 1960, respectively. Although Cooper did not make substantial changes to the previous versions of the tunebooks, he added a fourth part to all the three-part tunes and transposed many of them to a lower key. The Cooper revision became popular in newer singing communities in the West.⁹⁷ Joan described her experiences with the Cooper revision while attending meetings and conventions outside the Chesapeake Bay area:

There's the Cooper book. The Cooper book is sort of an alternate version of Sacred Harp. They have different arrangements. It's a little bit jazzier. One of the things that's really weird is there's a song called Liberty that's in both books. If you go to a southern sing, the altos sing the Cooper book alto for Liberty, but you sing everything else that's in the regular. It's very weird. There are Cooper book sings. I've never been anywhere where they sang out of both books. You could have a Cooper book sing or you could have a Sacred Harp sing.⁹⁸

Currently there are no Cooper sings in the Chesapeake Bay area.

In response to the Cooper revision, singers in Georgia and Alabama formed their own revision of the *Sacred Harp*, edited by a committee headed by Joe S. James and published in 1911; it was called the *Original Sacred Harp* to distinguish it from the Cooper revision.⁹⁹ Although the James revision expanded the number of songs and assigned four parts to all tunes, much of the 1869 White revision was transferred into it.¹⁰⁰ Its introduction also was in part a response to the inclusion of gospel and camp-meeting songs used in many seven-shape tunebooks, expressly rejecting their melodies

⁹⁷ Ibid., 89 – 91.

⁹⁸ Personal communication, 11 March 2004.

⁹⁹ Cobb, 94 - 95.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 96.

derived from secular sources.¹⁰¹ Around the same time, yet another revision of the *Sacred Harp* emerged in 1909. J. L. White, the son of B. F. White, copied much of the earlier revisions, but tacked on a section of new songs at the end and narrowed the range of the treble and bass parts.¹⁰² However, this revision did not gain popularity and was quickly followed by another in 1911 which adhered more closely to B. F. White's 1870 version.¹⁰³

The James and White revisions were later overhauled by members of the Denson family,¹⁰⁴ who organized the Sacred Harp Publishing Company in the 1930s. The first of the Denson revisions was completed in 1936 and updated the 1911 James revision. Later revisions were produced in 1960 and 1967.¹⁰⁵ The next revision, made in 1971, added to the new folkloric context of Sacred Harp by adding explanatory footnotes for every song, such as information about the composers or singers who frequently chose the song.¹⁰⁶ Although the majority of the content remained the same in all the revisions, new songs by then-contemporary composers were added in every revision. By the time the most recent edition of the *Sacred Harp* was published in 1991, the use of the tunebook had expanded to the north and west, so the new edition included the new works of a few composers who encountered Sacred Harp in a more folkloric context, such as "Heavenly Union" by Neely Bruce. This process helped to solidify the inclusion of folkloric performers into

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 97.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 107 – 110.

¹⁰⁴ A branch of the Denson family lives in the Washington, DC area and occasionally attends local sings.

¹⁰⁵ Cobb, 110 – 114.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 117.

the larger community of Sacred Harp singers. In order to make room for the new songs, Hugh McGraw, the chairman of the Sacred Harp Publishing Company, extensively polled singers to find which singers were frequently sung and which were not. He then eliminated the least popular ones so as not to offend singers.¹⁰⁷

By the present time, the practices surrounding shape-note music in the South have developed a system of interconnections including local activities and regional conventions. During the first half of the nineteenth century, singing schools were the single source of music education in some areas of the South.¹⁰⁸ Singing school masters in the twentieth century provided knowledge both about the history of shape-note music as well as about the rudiments of sight-singing and note-reading.¹⁰⁹ These singing schools eventually became a series of local groups that met regularly, usually once a month. However, with the introduction of the *Sacred Harp* a larger network emerged, combining many groups together in regional conventions. The oldest convention, the Southern Musical Convention, was founded by B. F. White in 1845 in Georgia.¹¹⁰ Another large event, the Chattahoochee Convention, began in Georgia in 1852. Jackson identifies its sphere of influence as slightly west of the Southern Musical Convention.¹¹¹ These conventions were used to unite large numbers of singers, as well as to advertise new revisions to the *Sacred Harp*, following B. F. White's precedent of group consensus

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., x – xiv.

¹⁰⁸ Steel, 125.

¹⁰⁹ Kelton, 140.

¹¹⁰ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 100.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 100 – 101.

before publication.¹¹² In addition, the conventions helped regulate the quality of singing among participants.¹¹³ Today, there are many conventions in the South as well as the North, which are announced through a directory published by the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association, which also includes the home addresses of singers throughout the United States.

Sacred Harp singing activities in the North started around the 1940s through the literary activities of Jackson and Carmer, and the recordings of Alan Lomax.¹¹⁴ Local singing groups started through the auspices of folklore groups throughout the country, with a particularly strong showing in Chicago and New England. However, these groups did not closely follow the practices of their Southern predecessors; for instance, they did not sing the solfège syllables before the words of the tune and did not have the customary potluck meal in the middle of a meeting. Hugh McGraw began to forge links between the North and the South by conducting singing schools. Eventually, Northern singers started to travel down to large Southern conventions, and the Southerners reciprocated by traveling to attend the earliest conventions sponsored by folkloric groups, including Washington DC's Potomac River Convention.¹¹⁵ Present Sacred Harp activities in the Chesapeake Bay area are an ever-expanding modification of the traditional social network established during the nineteenth century.

Local performers in the Chesapeake Bay area use written sources such as Jackson, Cobb, and Carmer's accounts of traditional singing practices to learn about Sacred Harp

¹¹² Cobb, 130 – 132.

¹¹³ Ibid., 132.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 105.

¹¹⁵ Bealle, 190 – 210.

performance. However, the earliest of these accounts deliberately creates a distance between traditional, rural performers and urban folkloric performers, although that was rectified in later sources such as those written by John Bealle and Buell Cobb. However, through the establishment of a community using modifications of the traditional social structure, as exemplified through small local meetings and conventions, performers in the Chesapeake Bay area have created an extension of the Sacred Harp community, which both utilizes and modifies the practices of traditional performers

Chapter III: The Bounds of the Community in the Chesapeake Bay Area

My first experiences with participation in Sacred Harp were in the fall of 2003 with two separate groups in Arlington, Virginia, and Baltimore, Maryland. One of my initial questions in encountering Sacred Harp was, first, to discover whether or not a community of Sacred Harp performers existed, and, second, how the community was held together. Based on my initial exposure, it seemed to me that the community in the Chesapeake Bay area consisted of several local groups that met at relatively wide-spaced intervals. However, I later discovered a network of interconnections that bound a larger, regional community together and connected it with an even more massive national community. These first two encounters with Sacred Harp not only give my initial impressions of the community but also provide some of my motivations for participating in Sacred Harp.

SEPTEMBER 28, 2003 ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

Today was my first experience at fieldwork. I was very nervous, not only because I had never done fieldwork before, but because the group did not know I was coming. I emailed the group's coordinator earlier in the week but never got an answer. Last night I called her house, but her housekeeper said that she was on vacation and would not be back until late Sunday night. I left a message with him and wondered what I should do. I could not get prior permission to attend the group, but the Folklore Society of Greater Washington¹¹⁶ website said that anyone was welcome to come. It gave an address for the church, so I decided to just show up and observe.

I arrived at the church about 15 minutes late and was nervous about walking in after everything had started, but I risked it. After entering the church, the sanctuary was directly in front of me. There were about four or five people standing in there, but they were not singing. They said that they were the Sacred Harp singers, but there were so few of them that they had not started. I said that I had never sung Sacred Harp before and they asked me about my vocal range. I am a soprano (I quickly learned it was called a treble) and was given a hymnal and told where to sit. I did not feel comfortable announcing my intention to do research right away, nor did I feel comfortable asking to just observe since there were so few people, so I just joined in. This was a little more than I had expected doing and I was very nervous because I am not a very good or experienced singer and I was going to be sight-singing, which has always made me feel very self-conscious.¹¹⁷

The room was filled with free-standing chairs instead of pews and it looked like it could seat about 300 people. There was an altar at the far end, a pipe organ, and a balcony over the entrance doors. The room was poorly lit from black side sconces and a chandelier in a vaulted ceiling. On one of the sides of the hall was a window that opened into a kitchen area. The singers had cleared out a space about 10 or 15 feet into the sanctuary and had moved the chairs in that area into a square with two rows on each side and four chairs in a row. Each voice range was allocated to a separate side of the square. I sat on the treble side and another woman sat next to me.

¹¹⁶ The Folklore Society of Greater Washington (FSGW) sponsors the Sacred Harp sing in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

¹¹⁷ I received a master's degree in Bassoon Performance from the Peabody Conservatory, but I have never even been a member of a choir. The full range of my vocal experience comes from sight-singing classes and religious services.

The group started to sing and they explained to me that they sang the song first with solfège syllables before singing the words. I had never opened a Sacred Harp hymnal before and was relieved to find that it was set up like many other ones I had seen. Individual hymns are called according to their page numbers. A significant difference between this and my other hymn-singing experiences is that Sacred Harp singing is entirely a cappella. In the hymnals I have seen, there are two vocal staves (male and female) and two piano staves. The words to the hymn are printed between the two vocal staves and are aligned directly under each other. In this hymnal each verse is printed between a different vocal part, so that the first verse is below the treble line, the second verse is below the alto line, and so forth. I had no trouble following the words for the first verse, but because I did not know the tune, I found it very difficult to read the notes and look at the words to the other verses as well. I also had never sung using solfège before and could not follow the system used with shape-notes in The Sacred Harp – I just sang “la la las” to everything. The singing was much more difficult than I had thought.

OCTOBER 12, 2003 BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Today was my first sing with the Baltimore shape-note singing group. It was much less intimidating and more informative than my experience with the Arlington group. I contacted Joan, the coordinator of the group, ahead of time by email and she did not seem to mind that I wished to observe them for an academic project and gave me directions to the site of the event. The sing happened at a group member’s home in Columbia, Maryland. I was a little nervous, despite having made previous contact, because it is more difficult to justify barging into a strange house than into a church. When I pulled into the driveway there were about five or six cars parked there and I

could hear singing coming from the house. I knocked on the front door and introduced myself to the woman who opened it. Fortunately, she was the group's coordinator and had been expecting me. The sing happened in the living room of the person's house. I sat on the couch next to another woman. Since I did not have a hymnal, she let me share one with her. There were about eight or ten singers sitting around a coffee table. They introduced themselves to me and I introduced myself to them (I did not, however, automatically state my purpose) and we began to sing.

The group seemed much more comfortable than the Arlington group. I got the impression that the group members were all friends because they teased each other and seemed to be familiar with each other's lives. Plus, they made jokes about singing. The Arlington group seemed like strangers to each other, but this group seemed more like the kind of community I expected. I sat in the alto section, because I hoped the range would be less strenuous than the treble part I sang in the Arlington group. Eventually there were two other women singing my part. The group sang much more enthusiastically than the Arlington group. I found myself belting out hymns at an incredibly loud volume. Even though the group was much smaller and we were in a private space, I felt much more comfortable than in the Arlington group.

The group took a break around 5 pm, but everyone stayed in the square and just talked. I was more comfortable with this arrangement because I did not have to wander around and try to butt into other people's conversation to try to introduce myself to people. The group reconvened and sang for another hour until six pm. By this time I had a terrible headache from craning my head to read someone else's hymnbook and I told the group's coordinator that I was going to leave. She insisted that I stay for dinner and

I did not want to be rude, particularly in my first acquaintance with the group, so I stayed. I had not thought to bring a dish for the potluck, but she said that was fine and there was always plenty of food for everyone. I went through the line at the buffet table to get some food and began to talk to one of the other singers from the treble section. She said that she was a librarian of music at the Library of Congress. I explained that I was a student in ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland and I was interested in observing the group for one of my classes. She made a remark about how they were all just my guinea pigs, but another singer standing nearby said that since I was joining in, it was all right. I asked her how she had gotten involved in Sacred Harp singing, and she said that she had heard it on the radio and liked the way that it sounded. Around this time she wandered off to say something to someone else and I moved from the dining room to the back porch.

I saw the group's coordinator out there and went over to ask some questions about Sacred Harp singing in general and its performance in this area in particular. I asked if the group was affiliated in any way with the Arlington group because I was trying to figure out if a larger shape-note community had grown out of individual local groups, and she replied that she and another woman had started the Baltimore group several years ago. Prior to that, she had been a member of the Arlington group. I wonder if the Arlington group is a focal point for all the Sacred Harp groups in the area. How are all these groups related? Then I asked her about the group's affiliation with folklore societies. She said that the group was not affiliated with the Folklore Society of Greater Washington,¹¹⁸ but had been a part of the Baltimore Folk Music Society.¹¹⁹ They

had lost their membership in the Society because they were not wheelchair accessible.

At this point I felt that I had bothered the coordinator enough and I asked if she would be willing to answer any further questions. She said of course and that I could just email her again. Then I took my dirty dishes into the kitchen and put them on the counter.

I had planned on leaving after dinner, but it seemed rude to partake of their hospitality and then leave, so I stayed for the second half of the sing. The group actually ended at seven instead of eight. As I left a woman asked me if I was planning on coming back even though I lived much closer to the Arlington group. I said yes, then I said goodbye to everyone and got into my car and drove off.

Despite my obvious nervousness about engaging in fieldwork for the first time, I entered my first experience with fieldwork trying to find out the bounds of the local Sacred Harp community. At first glance, Sacred Harp singing groups seemed rather disjointed; each group met only once a month and had between ten and 20 members. However, even at my first attendance, a participant described what seemed to be a tightly knit community of close friends.

¹¹⁸ The Folklore Society of Great Washington (FSGW) sponsors the local Sacred Harp group in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, as well as gospel sings, storytelling, and a multitude of dance groups, including clogging, English country and square dancing, and Cajun and zydeco. According to their website, "The main purpose of the Society is to further the understanding, investigation, appreciation, and performance of the traditional folk music and folklore of the American people." [www.fsgw.org accessed 15 February 2005]

¹¹⁹ The Baltimore Folk Music Society (BFMS) statement of purpose is very similar to that of FSGW: "The Baltimore Folk Music Society was founded in 1975 as a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to teaching, preserving, and promoting the music, dance, and traditions of the American people." (www.bfms.org accessed 15 February 2005) When I began my fieldwork, the Baltimore Sacred Harp group was not officially sponsored by the BFMS. Because the sings occurred in the homes of members rather than in a fixed location like the FSGW-sponsored event, the organization could not guarantee wheelchair accessibility. In September, 2004, sings began to be held at a regular, fixed location at a Friends meetinghouse in North Baltimore, and, because the venue was wheelchair-accessible, the group regained its status as a BFMS-sponsored activity, which made it eligible for special funding from the organization.

Through the course of my fieldwork as I became involved more deeply with Chesapeake Bay area singers, I discovered that the community is formed on three separate tiers. The first consists of the small local meetings, such as the ones I encountered early in my fieldwork. However, these groups are connected to each other in the second tier, which is composed of larger inter-regional all-day sings and conventions, which pepper the annual calendar. The ties formed through these regional conventions are further strengthened by a relatively small number of devotees that travel to multiple small local meetings, thus cementing the relationship between the first and the second tier. The third tier is composed of the most active Sacred Harp performers, who travel great distances to attend large conventions in other regions, thus forming a national community of Sacred Harp singers. The first and second tiers, which are composed of local and regional activities, can be illustrated through an examination both of the network of local meetings and of the calendar of larger all-day sings and conventions.

Sings and conventions serve as key ways that Sacred Harp singers interact with each other. According to John Bealle, traditional Sacred Harp singers in the South frequently visit each others' sings reciprocally to establish relationships. When conventions and sings started to be held by folkloric groups outside the South, such as the ones in New England and, later, the Chesapeake Bay area, Southern singers extended their web of visitation to include them. Moreover, many folkloric singers travel to other events throughout the Northeast.¹²⁰ According to my observations, most of the singers in the Chesapeake Bay area encountered Sacred Harp through folkloric activities, although a few have migrated from its old center in the South. While many local Sacred Harp

¹²⁰ Bealle, 192 – 197.

singers are recruited from amongst the ranks of folk music enthusiasts,¹²¹ participation in Sacred Harp does not necessarily correlate with or lead to participation in folk societies. Sacred Harp elicits great devotion from its most active members; the most dedicated in the Chesapeake Bay area have no qualms about regularly traveling great distances to participate in regional activities, so nearly every weekend and several weekdays can be occupied by Sacred Harp performance. However, many devotees only attend performances within a two or three hour radius of Washington, DC. Newcomers to Sacred Harp frequently get schedules of sings on the yearly list on www.fasola.org,¹²² from locally distributed fliers, or from published lists of annual events,¹²³ but many established singers are members of local email groups that send out notifications of sings and other events in the area. A sing in a particular location that is published on the website occurs once a month, usually on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.¹²⁴

Sacred Harp singers participate in several different kinds of events, including regular local singings on a monthly, biweekly, or weekly basis,¹²⁵ annual all-day sings,

¹²¹ Personal communication, 11 March 2005.

¹²² The Fasola website was established by the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association, and is an important way new converts learn about Sacred Harp. It contains introductory explanations of both the tunes and the social practices of Sacred Harp, a select number of online recordings, information on how to buy the *Sacred Harp*, the minutes of all-day singings and conventions, and contact information for groups throughout the United States as well as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. [www.fasola.org Accessed 1 April 2005]

¹²³ For example, the *Sacred Harp Singings: 2004 & 2005* is distributed by the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association in Anniston, Alabama, which gives a list of annual singings throughout the country, lists regular local singings, and contains the names and addresses of singers throughout the nation and abroad.

¹²⁴ These sings are usually described according to the closest Sunday; for instance, “the Saturday before the first Sunday of the month.”

¹²⁵ The three weekly sings that occur in the Chesapeake Bay area, in Frostburg and Baltimore in Maryland and in Charlottesville in Virginia, are not published on the Fasola website. However, they are advertised on local message boards devoted to Sacred Harp and are announced at large singing events.

and conventions. Of these three types of activities, local regular sings are the smallest and most frequent, occurring in the evenings or on weekends and lasting between two and four hours each, with a potluck meal or snack in the middle. Usually only one group forms in a particular locale and sings once or twice a month, but sometimes a smaller group from the monthly group meets once a week. Local regular singings vary in size between four and fifty people, although most in the Chesapeake Bay area gather about twenty regulars and several newcomers. Several of the most dedicated singers attend monthly sings in their own area and then drive up to several hours to attend more distant regular sings.

During weekly, biweekly, or monthly meetings, the same general structure prevails. The group is arranged in an inward-facing hollow square, with each vocal part occupying a side. Typically, tenors and altos face each other, while trebles are to the right of the tenors and bases are to the left. In larger meetings, there may be multiple rows on each side of the square; the most experienced singers are encouraged to occupy the front row. Newcomers are encouraged to sing the tenor line, which is usually the main melody. Singers then will take turns leading a particular tune: beginning in the tenor section, a singer will rise to stand in the middle of the hollow square facing the tenors. He or she will then announce the page number of the particular tune. That singer will then cue the performers using a simple up-and-down gesture of the right hand. The group will first sing the tune using the four-shape solfège syllables, and then they will sing however many verses are specified by the leader. Once the tune is finished, the leader will sit back down and the person next to him will rise to lead the next tune. While newcomers frequently abstain from leading the group, they are encouraged to stand in the

middle of the hollow square to hear how the four parts blend together. At the halfway point of the meeting, the group will take a break for a potluck meal, which, in the case of a monthly sing, will last an hour. The group will then commence singing again until the end of the meeting. Several local groups have a particular tune which is invariably led as the closing song; however, this is not a standard practice.

In the Chesapeake Bay area, seven regular local singing groups exist, sponsoring approximately twelve events per month. The events are interspersed throughout the week and month so that a local singer could conceivably attend all of them without any conflicts. The oldest group currently performing in the area began in Washington, DC in the early 1970s. Until a few years ago, they performed in a church in the downtown area, and then moved to an Episcopalian church in Arlington, Virginia. Like the Sacred Harp group in Chicago, originally they did not use solfège syllables or follow the traditional format of a Sacred Harp sing in the South. Instead, they just sang the verses of the hymn. In the 1980s, a member of the group attended a sing in the South and instigated the use of the four solfège syllables. The Washington, DC group is sponsored by the Folklore Society of Greater Washington (FSGW) and participates in various FSGW folk festivals throughout the year, such as the Mini-Fest¹²⁶ in February and the Washington Folk Festival¹²⁷ in June.¹²⁸ Several founders of other local sings began performing with the

¹²⁶ According to the FSGW website, “The FSGW Mini-Fest is a family-friendly extravaganza of music, dance, stories, workshops, and crafts. Held around the first weekend in February, the Mini-Fest provides all comers with a wonderful opportunity to beat the winter blues, visit with friends and neighbors, and be part of some of the finest music that the Washington area has to offer!” (www.fsgw.org accessed 16 February 2005). Sacred Harp performers do short a short demonstration. The 2005 event took place at a high school in Takoma Park, Maryland and was intended both for Folklore Society members and nonmembers.

¹²⁷ The FSGW website advertises the Festival thusly: “The festival features music, dance, storytelling, and crafts from artists in the Washington, DC area. With performances representing cultures from around the world as well as around the country, it is your chance to find out what is going on in the folk communities

group in Washington, DC, and then started other groups in more convenient locations for them. Although the size of the Washington, DC sing has declined in recent years,¹²⁹ it still attracts a larger number of new converts than other local groups. The Washington, DC group meets in Arlington, Virginia on the fourth Sunday of every month except December and usually attracts between ten and thirty singers. They also sponsor a local convention in the spring and a special daytime event on New Year's Day.

Two groups meet in Baltimore, Maryland on a regular basis. The first meets on the second Sunday of every month. Although an earlier group existed in Baltimore, it eventually died out and a new group began in the mid 1990s. The only remnants of the original Baltimore group are a set of tunebooks donated by it to the Baltimore Folk Music Society. They are frequently used by newcomers who have not yet acquired their own copies of the *Sacred Harp*. Until the fall of 2004, the group met in singers' homes in the greater Baltimore area, but has since found a permanent location at a Quaker meetinghouse in North Baltimore. Although at the beginning of my fieldwork in the fall of 2003 the majority of the singers lived in or around Baltimore, since the spring of 2004 the group has regularly attracted visitors from Washington, DC and the area around West Chester, Pennsylvania.

The second group in Baltimore consists of a few regular members of the monthly Baltimore group and several of their close friends. Rachel, a dedicated singer in Baltimore, graduated from college in the spring of 2004 and acquired a larger apartment

of the area." The 2004 Festival extended over an entire weekend and was held at a large venue in Glen Echo Park, Maryland.

¹²⁸ According to a member of the Baltimore Sacred Harp group, such festivals provide a crucial way to recruit new members.

¹²⁹ Fieldnote, 12 October 2003.

in the downtown area. As a result, she decided to hold a sing every Thursday night from 7 pm to around 10 pm, accompanied by a light potluck snack. The group has a regular turnout of six to nine people, so it operates somewhat differently from larger sings. In order to fill out all four parts, many of the singers routinely switch back and forth between sections. Since it results in less familiarity with parts, the group usually does not begin a song by rehearsing all four parts together with solfège; instead, each part is taken by itself and sung by everyone. The group members, many of whom who became my primary informants, are on average younger than most participants in the area, and many have been involved with shape-note singing for a year or less. They are also more likely to bring in photocopies from other tunebooks and even some material outside the shape-note repertoire. The singers in this smaller group have become some of the most dedicated participants in the region, and routinely travel to most regional events.¹³⁰

While my fieldwork was not primarily concerned with them, several other local groups contribute to the overall Sacred Harp community. Each contains members that frequently travel to multiple local meetings, so their influence is felt throughout the Chesapeake Bay area. The local regular group that attracts the largest number of commuters is organized by a family in Berryville, Virginia, a small town about 70 miles northwest of Washington, DC near the Virginia – West Virginia state line. Like the advent of the Baltimore group, the Berryville group was organized by past participants in the Washington, DC group who wanted to have an event closer to home.¹³¹ Although the

¹³⁰ Singers from other local groups have begun to comment on the “Baltimore clique,” also affectionately known as the “Baltimorons,” because of the members’ penchant for travel.

¹³¹ Fieldnote, 12 October 2003.

group is not particularly close to metropolitan areas in Virginia, Maryland, or West Virginia, it is within driving distance from Sacred Harp groups in Washington, DC, Baltimore, and Richmond; the daughter of the group's organizers attends the University of Virginia in Charlottesville,¹³² so a small group usually also travels from there. The monthly sing in Berryville occurs on the first Saturday of the month and usually attracts a crowd of at least forty people. Sings are normally held at local churches, granges, and even a small bakery. In addition to the monthly sing, the organizing family sponsors a singing at their home on the third Tuesday of the month.

Another group which includes a pocket of commuters recently began near West Chester, Pennsylvania. In 2003, Katie, an active singer from Albany, New York moved to the area. Although she began to sing with a group in Reading, she founded the Brandywine group in the spring of 2004 at a Friends Meetinghouse near her home on the first and third Monday evenings of the month.¹³³ Since the core group of the Brandywine sing is new to Sacred Harp, its organizer asked for volunteers from other locations to help facilitate the learning process. Consequently, singers from other Pennsylvania groups as well as the one in Baltimore join the group nearly every meeting. Reciprocally, several of the singers from the Brandywine group attend the local meetings of other groups.

Two other groups exist in Richmond, Virginia, and Charlottesville, Virginia, as well as a small group in Frostburg, Maryland. Although members of the groups occasionally travel to sings in Washington, DC and Berryville, the two sings do not figure largely into this study. The group in Richmond meets every third Saturday

¹³² Fieldnote, 13 November 2005.

¹³³ Fieldnote, 9 May 2004.

afternoon except in November.¹³⁴ The group in Charlottesville was founded by a music professor at the University of Virginia.¹³⁵ It meets twice a month: the second Saturday morning and the fourth Wednesday evening.¹³⁶ I have not attended any regular singings at either Richmond or Charlottesville, although I have frequently met members of both groups at regular sings in Washington, DC and Berryville, and at all-day sings and conventions. The following table is a description of a sample month of local Sacred Harp meetings in the Chesapeake Bay area.

Table 1: Monthly Calendar of Local Singings

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 1		West Chester			Baltimore		Berryville
Week 2	Baltimore				Baltimore		Charlottesville
Week 3		West Chester	Berryville	Charlottesville	Baltimore		Richmond
Week 4	Arlington				Baltimore		
Week 5							Arlington

The Sacred Harp community in the Chesapeake Bay area admittedly extends over large distances. Some singers are noted for their willingness to travel large distances to attend local Sacred Harp groups. The following table provides a list of distances to Sacred Harp singings relative to the University of Maryland, College Park.

Table 2: Distance to Local Singings

Arlington, VA	12.5 miles
Alexandria, VA (Fifth Saturday)	27 miles
Baltimore, MD (Weekly)	35 miles
Baltimore, MD (Monthly)	42 miles
Berryville, VA	73 miles
West Chester, PA	119 miles
Richmond, VA	106.5 miles
Charlottesville, VA	127 miles

¹³⁴ "Regular Local Singings" www.fasola.org [accessed 16 February 2005]

¹³⁵ Fieldnote, 2 September 2004.

¹³⁶ "Regular Local Singings" www.fasola.org [accessed 16 February 2005]

While regular singings occur on a regular basis throughout the year, each all-day sing and convention occurs only once annually. These events are sponsored by local regular groups who arrange for a larger venue, food, advertising, and hospitality. In the Chesapeake Bay area, nearly every local group sponsors at least one regular annual event. The differentiation between all-day sings and conventions is made on the basis of length. All-day sings take place over a single day and conventions last at least two days, perhaps more. All-day singings usually last less than eight hours. Every all-day sing I have attended begins at 10 am, although singers from more distant areas may arrive anytime. Once singers arrive, they are asked to register for the event by filling out a card with their name, address, telephone number, and email address. The session begins with a prayer, and then singing commences. A committee formed from members of the organizing local group (and sometimes prominent members of nearby groups) chooses the order of leaders for songs. Just before noon, the group stops singing and announcements of local sings and conventions are made, and then the group convenes for a potluck lunch. After the meal is finished, the singers regather for the memorial lesson¹³⁷ in which the chaplain of the convention reads a list of singers who have died in the preceding year and the group sings a hymn in their honor, performed without solfège. Then the chaplain reads a list of singers who could not attend the convention because of illness and the group sings another hymn in their honor. After this the regular singing commences until the end of the day at 3:30. Usually a few members meet at a local singer's house for a social afterwards.

¹³⁷ The term "lesson" is derived from colonial singing school practices. Every time a singer leads a tune, he or she is giving a "lesson" to the "class" of the members of the group.

Conventions are usually comprised of at least two all-day singings, plus many contain a “New Traditions” event on the evening before the first sing. All-day sings and conventions normally are confined to the literature of the *Sacred Harp*, excluding other tunebooks, whether old or new. “New Traditions” sings give an opportunity for singers to bring in materials outside the *Sacred Harp* in the form of photocopies to share with local singers.

My first time attending a convention was at the Potomac River Convention in April, 2004. It provided my first chance to observe the regional connections between the different local groups as a large number of participants from the area gathered together. It also afforded a chance to meet several of the people who later became my primary informants, such as Gladyse.

APRIL 3, 2004 FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA

This weekend I attended my first Sacred Harp convention. I had wanted to get to the Convention earlier than 10 am because there was an introductory lesson for beginners at 9:45 that I wanted to observe, but of course I left my apartment too late for it at 9:15. When I finally arrived at the church (the one George Washington attended) the singing had already begun so I skipped registering and just sat down.

The alto section was closest to the entrance, and I took a seat next to Joan. We were not in the sanctuary, but were in the church basement next to the kitchen. There were about a hundred people in the room. The flier for the convention said “hundreds of voices,” so the crowd was less than I expected. I saw a few familiar faces.

The convention was organized a little differently from a local sing. Instead of going around the room with everyone choosing a hymn, people filled out a card while

registering for the event and stated on it whether they wanted to lead or not. I am still very uncomfortable about leading, so I was glad that I had not registered yet. Between every song, a person from the Arlington group called out the next leader along with their place of origin – for instance, he would have said about me, “Next is Brigita Sebald, from Hyattsville, Maryland.” Some people came from very far away. There was an elderly lady from North Carolina, a few people from New Jersey and Pennsylvania, one or two ladies from Portland, Oregon, and someone from Tokyo. Around 10:30, we took a break. I picked up a glass of water and some cookies and then wandered over to talk to my friends.

At lunch I grabbed some food and sat back down in the singing square. I had tried to wait for my friends, but people began to look at me funny so I had to sit down. I am not sure where they went, but I was stuck eating by myself. Later, two women sat next to me. One I recognized from the Arlington sing. We got on the subject of the Northwest because I said that I lived in Portland, and she told me about her brief stay there in the early 1980s (apparently she could not handle the winter weather). I asked her why she started doing Sacred Harp, and she said it was because of the vibrations created by the harmonies. She appeared to have some sort of training in music, so we gossiped for a while about some of the singers. She gave me her opinion on several people’s voices. I tried not to say anything negative because I did not want anyone to overhear me. When I got up to throw out my plate, a man from the Arlington sing came up to me and welcomed me to the convention and asked whether I had brought anyone with me. I explained that someone was supposed to meet me on Sunday, but I was alone today. He said that they were very glad to just have me.

The sing began again kind of informally. A few people gathered together and called out a hymn to sing. Eventually most of the others heard them and joined the sing. At around 2 pm the group took another break. Joan had moved to the front row of the altos, but Gladys sat in front of me. We started talking about ethnomusicology and she said she was actually interested in studying ethnomusicology. Apparently she had studied anthropology in college and had done her fieldwork while studying abroad in England. Her advisor was an ethnomusicologist and let her follow around a troupe of Morris dancers for a year. I described the University of Maryland's program to her and told her about my classes. I also asked if I could interview her for my project and she said yes. She explained that she had to do oral histories while she was in library school and that she never knew how to do them properly. She said that she would try to talk a lot during the interview so that I would not be stuck having to come up with more and more questions.

Eventually, the group started to sing again. Several things happened during the last part. First, the pastor of the church dropped by and led a prayer. This was the first time I had seen any kind of overtly religious activity during a sing. He also gave out information about the church's choir, in case anyone wanted to join. Later, while we were singing, a mother and a young child got up together to lead. I had read in Buell Cobb's book about how children were frequently instructed in this manner, but I had never seen it. The child, a pretty blond girl, laughed and laughed and could not get out the name of the song. A man in the front of the tenors said "which hymn, Happy Land, Happy Christian?" and everyone laughed. People seemed very relaxed at the sing, and it

was nice to have a large number of people in each section. I could hear the alto part very well, and so I think picked up the parts better.

Conventions are an important way singers meet each other. According to my own experience, as well as the testimony of my informants, conventions are also an important way singers can quickly improve their singing abilities and expand their knowledge of tunes through contact with a relatively large number of other singers. According to Katie, the organizer of the Brandywine group in Pennsylvania, all-day sings and conventions are carefully arranged throughout the year so that the maximum number of singers from the region can attend them.¹³⁸ Since the most devoted singers are willing to travel hundreds of miles for a convention, only one major event should be held every month; otherwise, the travelers become burned out.¹³⁹ Nearly every regular local group in the Chesapeake Bay area hosts an annual all-day sing or convention. These events draw much larger crowds than regular monthly sings and typically include singers from other regions. They serve as a primary way singers expand their circle of acquaintances both with singers from their region and with singers from other parts of the country. In January, many singers in Maryland go to the Keystone Convention, arranged by the local regular group in Philadelphia.¹⁴⁰ Because it occurs in winter, attendance at the convention varies widely depending on weather.¹⁴¹ March contains the Western

¹³⁸ Fieldnote, 16 September 2004.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Shelbie Sheppard, ed, *Sacred Harp Singings 2004 & 2005* (Anniston, AL: Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association, 2004), 50.

¹⁴¹ For instance, the convention on 22 – 23 January 2005 was widely interrupted by a snowstorm its first day. Fieldnote, 27 January 2005.

Massachusetts Convention.¹⁴² The Potomac River Convention, begun by the Washington, DC group in 1989¹⁴³ and the centerpiece of the year for local singers, occurs early in April in Fairfax County, Virginia.¹⁴⁴ The Garden State Convention occurs in May in New Jersey, and the Northern Shenandoah Singing in Berryville, Virginia, founded in 1993, and the Exeter Singing in Berks County, Pennsylvania take place in June. While several all-day singings and conventions are in New England in July and August, the next two local all-day sings occur in September in Reading, Pennsylvania, and Charlottesville, Virginia. The Maidencreek All-Day Sing, sponsored by the Berks County Sacred Harp singers and the Brandywine singers in Pennsylvania attracts many singers from New York State, as well as a few Southern singers. The Rivanna River All-Day Singing in Charlottesville, although newer and much smaller than most conventions, attracted a few singers from North Carolina, as well as regular convention-goers from Maryland and Virginia. The New England Convention in Vermont happens in October,¹⁴⁵ and the James River Convention in Richmond occurs in November. Most singers attend at least one of these conventions, and the most devoted attend all of them. More importantly, singers from the South also make pilgrimages to the Chesapeake Bay area and the Northeast for these conventions, and they become the primary way that Sacred Harp and its practices are disseminated from its traditional context to its folkloric one.

¹⁴² Several prominent singers in the mid-Atlantic are former members of a Sacred Harp group at Smith College in Northampton and journey to Western Massachusetts on a regular basis.

¹⁴³ Personal Communication, 11 March 2004.

¹⁴⁴ The Potomac River Convention is the oldest and largest Sacred Harp convention in the Mid-Atlantic region. It typically attracts well over a hundred singers from the United States and abroad. The 2005 Convention includes a singing school and concert by Tim Eriksen, the music director for *Cold Mountain*, a movie which prominently featured Sacred Harp singing. Fieldnote, 27 January 2005.

¹⁴⁵ It is usually attended by local singers originally from Vermont and Massachusetts, as well as those that make a point of attending every large convention.

In the Chesapeake Bay area, a network of local meetings and all-day sings and conventions bind the community of Sacred Harp performers together. The regional community is formed solely through the participants' interest in Sacred Harp performance, so group experiences are the main way singers meet each other. While at first the community seems rather disjointed because most Sacred Harp groups meet at large distances from each other, in reality three mechanisms draw the groups together to form a regional and even an extended national community. First, there are a small number of local singers who travel great distances to attend local meetings in other communities, strengthening the ties between local groups. Second, regional conventions draw many (although not all) local singers in the region together, where they can have face-to-face contact with each other, thus creating a regional community. Lastly, a few of the most dedicated singers travel to conventions in other regions, cementing ties between disparate parts of the United States and forming a national community. Although the community is further aided by publications such as the *Sacred Harp Singings* and the Fasola website, these means are used by singers to further direct face-to-face contact with each other. For Sacred Harp singers, community is formed through personal interaction, which is one of its qualities most valued by participants. Personal interaction happens within the three tiers of the community: on a local level singers meet each other at monthly meetings, on a regional level singers meet through regional conventions and by traveling to each others' local meetings, and on an intra-regional, or national, level singers meet by attending large conventions. All three levels together combine to form the network of the Sacred Harp community.

Chapter IV: Formation of a Body of Musical Practices

In my discussions with many Sacred Harp singers in the Chesapeake Bay area, many identified the sound of the music itself as the primary impetus for their participation. They encountered Sacred Harp either through recordings or through live performance, and their curiosity about the music drew them to seek out performance groups. While many articulated only in general terms the particular aspects of the music that attracted them, Lorenzo gave a detailed description of his particular aesthetics in performance.

What exactly do you like about Sacred Harp? What attracted you to it?

Ranier Maria Rilke wrote a piece in which he said a couple of times that every angel is terrifying. And I've always liked that phrase because typically when people think of the quality of being angelic they think of something very pretty and these gorgeous perfect figures of shining light and they have long hair and wings, and that's fine, but I can't believe that anything that truly angelic would be that easy to encounter. You know, in the Old Testament it talks about Elijah seeing the seraphim appearing to him in the temple and they have six wings and two arms and eyes going all sorts of different ways and these are grotesque and terrifying, and yet they come from the realm of the spirit. They are heavenly, and that's so vast and so incomprehensible that it, to me, doesn't lend itself to being pretty or easy to take. And so, when I hear Sacred Harp, it's the same sort of quality. It's angelic in the way that the seraphim that Elijah saw are angelic. Awesome, and tremendous, and powerful and uncontainable and not part of the way we normally think the world works. And so it's that spiritual dimension in the music that really appeals to me.

So it's definitely a spiritual experience. Do you choose songs for their texts?

Very rarely. There are times that I do, but mostly it's for the music and it's not just because of the melody. I mean,

there are songs where they are structured so brilliantly I mean, the composers have structured them so brilliantly. They really knew what they were doing to have the altos sound just a particular way right before the tenors come in. You know, and that sort of juxtaposition, the interplay, and it's fun. It's how engineers must feel when they see a well-designed bridge. They're like, you know, that person really knew what they were doing when they created that. And so part of it is just the sheer fun of experiencing the excitement that a composer might have felt when they said, oh, wow, this would sound really good together. And of course, I believe, all that is spiritual as well.

Why are certain songs your favorites?

They're joyful. Not just the text, but the tune, the structure, and they're complicated, but not in a pretentious way.

In other words, they're fun to sing.

They're fun to sing, not just from a technical standpoint, but it's a combination of technique and just sheer musical beauty. This part of "Showers of Blessings"¹⁴⁶ is just amazing because it sounds just like moving parts of a great machine. Everything just clicks in perfect place (points to a specific part of the tune).

So maybe the fugal tune part of it.

Well, it's not just the fuge. It's specific elements within the fuge. I like the very joyful, stately [ones], you know, they lift you up. There are times when I sing "Rainbow,"¹⁴⁷ when I lead "Rainbow," when my feet are three inches off the ground, because the way that the harmonies are structured in "Rainbow" and the fugal sounds like water splashing, it sounds like ocean waves crashing. The tunes in the book come from a variety of different musical sources. The ones that I like have a tendency to be more classically influenced, like "Showers of Blessings"¹⁴⁸ and "Gospel Trumpet."¹⁴⁹ They sound like Handel or Haydn. They come from the same period, they have the same basic structure, there's a lot of baroque in them and I love the baroque. It's my favorite type of music. It's just incredible stuff. I can listen to Bach's Chaconne from the Partita in D minor over and over. I'm a huge Bach fan, he's my

¹⁴⁶ McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 528.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 344.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 528.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 99.

favorite composer. Anyway, the ones that I like tend to be more classical and the ones that I don't like tend to be more romantic and more associated with main-line Protestant hymnody. It's just sort of bland and vanilla and I don't care for it.

So is part of the attraction of Sacred Harp the fact that it has four parts?

Yes, I love four part harmony because there are elements that are similar to other choral singing that I've done in the past. It's much more fun because there's not as much technique involved, it's a little more visceral, a little more right from the gut. It's not that I like it better than classical singing, but in classical singing you go back over a measure over and over and over and over and inevitably the choir director throws something and screams, "Somebody's not getting the D right."

So part of it is the lack of rehearsal.

Yes, because there's elitism to that. And that's fine. You need professionalism and you need perfection when you're striving for perfection, but there should be music open to people who aren't because I am very wary of elitism, as much as I participate in it in various aspects of my life. I just love the fact that there's this music that is immensely complicated and rich and textured and rewarding that's accessible to the next person that walks in the door. They give it a little time and patience and they're going to hook into this great, rich tradition. They don't need to have perfect pitch and this bell-like clarity to their voice. One of the things that really bothers me in Sacred Harp is when you get people who are trained musicians, not that the fact that they are trained musicians, but that they use it in inappropriate ways. I'm talking about people who get very schoolmarmish and start talking about diminished whatevers and raised whatevers. They're using an elitist language to elevate themselves from amid the community and make other people feel bad for their lack of knowledge and I just have no tolerance for that.¹⁵⁰

For Lorenzo, Sacred Harp performance is a spiritual expression, which is contained in a large part in its sound. Although Lorenzo identifies a particularly strong religious association in Sacred Harp performance, many other performers, such as

¹⁵⁰ Personal communication, 13 February 2005.

Rachel, see it as a secular practice. However, all agree that the musical sound and form provide a powerful motivation for engaging in regular performance. The experience is heightened by the open and accepting quality of groups that welcome any level of experience, whether great or small. R. Raymond Allen identifies musical performance as the strongest adhesive that binds the communities centered on folk-song performance, such as Sacred Harp outside of the South:

Not only does it provide listening and dancing entertainment, but the music also serves as the nucleus for a social community of individuals who share similar values in music and lifestyle....While studies in ethnomusicology offer numerous examples of music functioning to integrate and societies, there are few instances where the music itself is responsible for initiating and holding together a community.¹⁵¹

Allen also states that the first instance of attraction to revival music is a subject that has been largely ignored in scholarly writing.¹⁵² This chapter will examine the ways in which musical performance serves as a bond to unite an extended community of singers in the Chesapeake Bay area. Each local group, however, has a slightly different repertoire, depending on the size and skill level of its singers. The groups share their repertoire through several mechanisms, including conventions, which bring singers from many local groups together, and recordings. All of the groups contribute to a cumulative repertoire encompassing two thirds of the text of the *Sacred Harp*, as well as selections from a number of other shape-note tunebooks.

¹⁵¹ R. Raymond Allen, "Old-Time Music and the Urban Folk Revival," *New York Folklore* 7 (1981), 73 – 74.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 66.

While many different shape-note texts are potentially available to local Sacred Harp groups, their stylistic qualities and forms were codified in the second half of the eighteenth century. Their roots, however, date back to the practice of Psalm singing in the seventeenth century, which was carried to the colonies with the publication of the Bay Psalm Book.¹⁵³ The style of singing the psalms, called the Usual or Old Way of singing, used a technique called “lining out:”

Typically, the psalm would be read in prose, a tune would be chosen and announced, and someone would chant the psalm, one or two lines at a time. Then the congregation, sometimes aided by a chorister, would join in singing those lines. The next line or two would then be chanted, and so on.... As the tempo slowed to a crawl, the distinctive rhythms.... were replaced by standardized patterns. Without a supporting rhythmic beat, there was little to hold a congregation together. Individuals changing pitch at different times naturally created the dissonance that was so often a matter for complaint among eighteenth-century musical reformers.¹⁵⁴

By the 1720s, ministers centered at Harvard began to protest these disorderly practices and advocated teaching members of the congregation to sing “by note,” not “by rote,”¹⁵⁵ thus making “lining out” unnecessary. The message of these ministers was spread throughout the colonies by itinerant preachers, and singing schools were conducted outside religious services to educate members of the congregation. These singing-school masters became the first colonial composers, loosely modeling their compositions after the polyphonic style that was fashionable in Europe at the time.

¹⁵³ Lowens, “The Bay Psalm Book in 17th-Century New England,” 22.

¹⁵⁴ Osterhout, 127.

¹⁵⁵ Cobb, 58.

Although the Singing School Movement advocated abandoning the practices associated with lining out, it nevertheless borrowed many characteristics from the earlier style. In the Usual Way of singing, the texts of the psalms were given a particular poetic meter, which then corresponded to a limited number of tunes. Lyricists such as Isaac Watts later kept poetic meters. Even though the compositions by colonial composers had a separate tune, the poetic meters remained, so in effect many of the settings were interchangeable. Poetic meters were identified by the type of foot¹⁵⁶ as well as by the number of syllables per line. The meters included in the current edition of the *Sacred Harp* include:¹⁵⁷

Common Meter (CM):¹⁵⁸ iambic 8,6,8,6¹⁵⁹
Common Meter Double (CMD): iambic 8,6,8,6,8,6,8,6¹⁶⁰
Long Meter (LM): iambic 8,8,8,8¹⁶¹
Long Meter Double (LMD): iambic 8,8,8,8,8,8,8,8¹⁶²
Short Meter (SM): iambic 6,6,8,6¹⁶³
Short Meter Double (SMD): iambic 6,6,8,6,6,6,8,6¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁶ A foot is a pattern of accented (symbol /) and unaccented (symbol -) syllables. The ones found in the *Sacred Harp* are the iamb (-/), the trochee (/ -), the anapest (--/), and the dactyl (/--). John Garts, rev. "Rudiments of Music," *The Sacred Harp* (Bremen, GA: The Sacred Harp Publishing Company, Inc., 1991).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Poetic meters are written alongside the titles of tunes using the abbreviations in parentheses.

¹⁵⁹ The numbers refer to the number of syllables per line. A popular tune in the Chesapeake Bay area in common meter is "Poland" by Timothy Swan. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 86.

¹⁶⁰ A popular hymn in common meter double is "Jordan (First)" by William Billings. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 66.

¹⁶¹ "Russia" by Daniel Read is a popular tune in Long Meter. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 107.

¹⁶² While not necessarily frequently sung, "Confidence" by J. R. Turner is an example of a tune in Long Meter Double. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 270.

¹⁶³ "Novakoski," by the contemporary composer Dan Brittain, is an example of Short Meter. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 481.

¹⁶⁴ While not frequently sung in the Chesapeake Bay area, "Rockport" by Jim Carnes is an example of Short Meter Double. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 372.

Common Particular Meter (CPM): iambic 8,8,6,8,8,6¹⁶⁵
 Long Particular Meter (LPM): iambic 8,8,8,8,8,8¹⁶⁶
 Meter Hallelujah (HM): iambic 6,6,6,6,8,8¹⁶⁷
 Meter 12s, MT, or 12,12,12,12: anapestic 12,12,12,12¹⁶⁸
 Meter 8s and 7s: trochaic 8,7,8,7¹⁶⁹
 Meter 11s: anapestic 11,11,11,11¹⁷⁰
 Meter 7s: trochaic 7,7,7,7¹⁷¹

These poetic meters were not only used by colonial composers, but were used by composers whose works appeared in subsequent editions of the *Sacred Harp* throughout the nineteenth century and until the present.

The harmonies in the polyphonic texture favored by colonial composers were also heavily influenced by the practice of lining out. William Tallmadge states that when congregations of the seventeenth century lined out a psalm, several singers frequently would sing variations on the same melody at the interval of a fourth or fifth, thus forming a kind of folk organum.¹⁷² While colonial composers simultaneously used separate melodic, creating polyphony instead of parallel voices, their resulting harmonies

¹⁶⁵ Common Particular Meter is used in only one tune in the *Sacred Harp*, “Few Happy Matches” by B. F. White and E. J. King. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 96.

¹⁶⁶ Long Particular Meter is also only used in one tune, “New Lebanon” by P. Sherman. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 202.

¹⁶⁷ An example of Meter Hallelujah is E. P. Breedlove’s “Happy Land.” McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 354.

¹⁶⁸ While none of the most frequently sung tunes in the Chesapeake Bay area are in Meter 12s, an example is “Millennium” by William Walker. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 130.

¹⁶⁹ “Restoration (First),” one of the most frequently performed hymns in the Chesapeake Bay area, is in 8s, 7s. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 480.

¹⁷⁰ “The Rock That Is Higher Than I” by William Walker is an example of a tune in 11s. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 496.

¹⁷¹ “Natick” by the contemporary composer Glen Wright is a commonly sung tune in 7s. McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 497.

¹⁷² Folk organum can be contrasted with strict organum because it does not necessarily retain the same interval throughout the piece, but can briefly move to others.

mimicked the sound of organum by using fourths and fifths more prominently than the thirds and sixths featured in European styles of the time.¹⁷³ The resulting open-sounding quartal harmony¹⁷⁴ is frequently cited by contemporary local singers as a major source of aesthetic attraction in Sacred Harp singing.¹⁷⁵

The repertoire of a particular group is formed from the individual choices made by the members of the group. Many choose their favorite songs repeatedly. Songs

¹⁷³ Tallmadge, 49 – 57. Tallmadge analyzed the recordings made by Elder Walter Evans at the Little River Primitive Baptist church in Sparta, North Carolina: “The example is typical folk organum. Thirds and sixths are treated here as ornamentations of the consonant fifths and fourths. Octaves do not appear, but their appearance would have been appropriate to the style. The influence of tertian harmony is not as strong on this example..... Perhaps the reason for this is that Elder Evans is reflecting the quartal harmonic structure found in some shape-note, singing-school books.” Tallmadge, “Folk Organum: A Study of Origins,” 52 – 53.

¹⁷⁴ Dorothy Horn calls the harmonies in the three-part tunes in the original edition of the *Sacred Harp* quartal because they are based upon dyads built from various forms of the pentatonic scale used in folk hymns, which first appeared in the multiple voices of folk organum and lead to three-part harmony built on fourths rather than four-part harmony built on thirds. Moreover, the part-writing procedures shown by Sacred Harp composers treat thirds and sixths as dissonances and fourths and fifths as consonances, reversing their functions from those in tertian harmony: “Part-writing procedures seems to be the following: 1) each part must make a good melody and one that is easy to sing; 2) conjunct motion is more common than disjunct; 3) vertical consonances are the unison, octave, fourth, and fifth; 4) thirds and sixths are treated very much as dissonances are treated in conventional tertian harmony, i.e., they tend to be ‘prepared’ and ‘resolved;’ 5) nonharmonic tones are quite common and are used very much as they are in other styles. The passing and neighboring tone are by far the most common, but the anticipation, appoggiatura, escape tone, and suspension occur with reasonable frequency” (Horn 1958, 570). Horn then goes on to describe the specific ways in which thirds and sixths are treated and resolve into fourths, fifths, octaves, and unisons: “The procedures governing their approach may be summarized as follows: 1) a third or sixth may be used if one member is held as a common tone from the preceding chord; 2) less frequently a third or a sixth may be ‘prepared by substitution,’ that is, one tone of the interval will be in the preceding chord but in a different voice; 3) the third or the sixth may be approached in contrary motion in the two parts involved; 4) one member of the third or sixth may appear in a part if two parts are moving in contrary motion, particularly if one of these voices doubles one of the interval members; 5) thirds and sixths sometimes appear as passing tones in parallel motion, particularly if one member is a pen-tone. In this last case, the first interval, which will also be a third or sixth, will be prepared” (Horn 1958, 571). Because hymns built on pentatonic scales used fourths, rather than fifths, as their harmonic basis, thirds were treated in much the same way that fourths are treated in conventional tertian harmony. Tallmadge also identified similar tendencies in folk organum. Dorothy Horn, “Quartal Harmony in the Pentatonic Folk Hymns of the Sacred Harps,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, 71, no. 282 (October – December 1958), 564 – 581.

¹⁷⁵ For instance, Joan, the coordinator of the Baltimore monthly group, said when asked about her original attraction to Sacred Harp, “I was just absolutely taken by the sound. I just loved it. I like the harmonies a lot. They’re very raw and they tend to be very open. I like the minor key stuff better because I like the harmonies there.” While Joan did not specifically articulate an attraction to quartal harmony, she did mention the unique quality of the harmonies in shape-note singing as the genesis of her interest.

become favorites for a variety of reasons, although many cite the music as a determining factor more often than the text. For instance, Lorenzo chose his favorite song on the basis of its relative complexity and its ability to musically depict the text. Gladyse, another active participant in many local groups, mentioned the applicability of the lyrics to the events in her life as a component of her favorite songs, as well as the efficacy of the tune:

I know a lot of people are sick of it, but, honestly, I could sing "Africa"¹⁷⁶ every week and I'd never get sick of it because it means something different to me every time I sing it and it almost always has some kind of meaning. I don't know what that meaning is, but it's one where the words are really meaningful to me.

Do you pick songs for the words or for the tunes?

Some of both. Maybe a little more often for the tune than for the words, but there are ones that I like, something like "David's Lamentation,"¹⁷⁷ that, without the words would just be like a nice little tune, but the words are what make it powerful, or, "Granville,"¹⁷⁸ "Remember lord our mortal state..." It's one that we sang right around the anniversary of September 11 in 2002. Sometime around there was when it really clicked for me and then I found it to be a really powerful song.¹⁷⁹

Although both are important factors in choosing a song, many singers identify a combination of both music and lyrics as a factor in choosing their favorite parts of the repertoire. This in turn plays a decisive role in which tunes are sung at local events.

Many of the tunes in the *Sacred Harp* have structures that were derived from the earliest colonial composers, such as the fusing tune, the anthem, and the hymn tune. The

¹⁷⁶ McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 178.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 268.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 547.

¹⁷⁹ Personal communication, 10 February 2005.

amount they are sung depends on both their popularity with singers as well as their relative difficulty both in singing and in leading. A common structure used by colonial composers came from psalm-singing practice. The fugging¹⁸⁰ tune was a development of the fugging psalm tune, a form used in eighteenth-century England.¹⁸¹ According to Irving Lowens,

The typical American fugging tune usually begins with a homophonic section in the course of which a definite cadence is reached, frequently but not always on the tonic of the key. A fresh start is then made, in which each individual voice makes its entrance in succession, the order varying according to the inclination of the composer. In this second section – which was customarily referred to as the “fuge” – some form of imitation, in most cases quite free, was utilized for a measure or two. Normally, the fuge was then repeated, thus making the whole a small, rather tightly organized ABB form.¹⁸²

The most commonly sung fugging tune in the Mid-Atlantic region is “Rainbow”¹⁸³ by Timothy Swan, revised in 1988 by Phil Tabor.¹⁸⁴ “Rainbow” is in Common Meter, with lyrics by Isaac Watts. Unlike many fugging tunes in the *Sacred Harp*, it has two verses. The opening *tutti* section consists of a single six-measure long phrase, cadencing on the tonic chord. This is followed by four measures of staggered entrances beginning in the treble and ending in the bass, in which each part begins with the same two-measure fragment separated by a space of a measure. Each voice in the fugging section is present

¹⁸⁰ The spelling *fuge* is used to separate this form from the European fugue, which uses an entirely separate and unrelated form.

¹⁸¹ Lowens, “The Origins of the American Fugging Tune,” 43 - 44.

¹⁸² Ibid., 46.

¹⁸³ McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 344.

¹⁸⁴ “Rainbow” was cited by Lorenzo as one of his most favorite songs because of its complexity. Personal communication, 13 February 2005.

for six and a half measures before dropping out, eventually leaving the bass alone on the tonic. Then a *tutti* section of five and a half measures occurs at the end of the piece, cadencing on a tonic chord without the third.

In the current edition of the *Sacred Harp*, approximately 30% of the tunes are fugal tunes, a third of which were written between 1700 and 1805.¹⁸⁵ They make up about the same amount of the local Sacred Harp repertoire, according to the lists of tunes performed during my fieldwork with local singers at Arlington, Baltimore monthly and weekly singings, and local conventions. The following table describes the total number of tunes contained in the repertoire of each particular meeting in the sings I attended. It does not include the number of individual instances each tune was sung.¹⁸⁶ The tallies for the Chesapeake Bay area, Arlington, Baltimore Monthly, and Baltimore Weekly meetings were collected in the course of my fieldwork. The tally for conventions was tabulated from the *Sacred Harp Singings: 2004 & 2005*, which lists, among other things, the tunes chosen at each all-day sing and convention throughout the country.¹⁸⁷ The

¹⁸⁵ According to Cobb, the fugal tune was less commonly used in B. F. White's original edition of the *Sacred Harp*, but in the 1859 and 1869 editions, "the fugal tune appeared to be taking on the prestige it had enjoyed in New England at the end of the eighteenth century" (Cobb, 87).

¹⁸⁶ Several local singers, including myself, mark in the tunebook each time they sing a particular tune. According to Wendy, she does this as a learning device: when choosing which tune to lead at a meeting or convention, she can easily see which tunes are most familiar to her. The practice of marking which tunes are chosen is also derived from *Sacred Harp Singings*, which lists every tune called at conventions and all-day singings throughout the country.

¹⁸⁷ Shelbie Sheppard, ed., *Sacred Harp Singings: 2004 & 2005* (Anniston, AL: Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association, 2005). The conventions and all-day singings included in this figure are the Keystone Convention of January 24 and 25, 2004 in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania; the Potomac River Convention of April 3 and 4, 2004 in Washington, DC; the Shenandoah Valley All-day Singing of June 5, 2004 in Berryville, Virginia; the Exeter All-day Singing of June 19, 2004 in Exeter, Pennsylvania; the Maiden Creek All-day Singing of September 4, 2004 in Leesport, Pennsylvania; the Rivanna River All-day Singing of September 11, 2004 in Charlottesville, Virginia; and the James River Convention of November 13 and 14, 2004 in Richmond, Virginia. These are all the conventions and all-day singings in the Chesapeake Bay area.

groups are organized in descending order according to the amount of people who typically attend the meeting.

Table 3: Fuging Tunes in Repertoire

	Number of fuging tunes	Total number of repertoire	Percentage of fuging tunes in repertoire
Entire contents of the <i>Sacred Harp</i>	164	554	29.6
Chesapeake Bay area ¹⁸⁸	85	306	27.7
Conventions ¹⁸⁹	94	292	32.2
Arlington ¹⁹⁰	27	87	31
Baltimore Monthly ¹⁹¹	35	140	25
Baltimore Weekly ¹⁹²	26	116	22.4

The popularity of fuging tunes corresponds to the size of the group. Fuging tunes are the most popular at conventions, while they are the least popular at the Baltimore weekly sing. The Baltimore weekly sing usually attracts only about eight singers, while most conventions have between 50 and 200. The fuging section of a fuging tune requires that each vocal part make a separate entrance, which can be quite difficult and intimidating when there are only a few singers in a part. Consequently, singers are more likely to request fuging tunes in a larger group.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ This number represents the number of different fuging tunes from the *Sacred Harp* that were sung at 35 local events, including performances at Arlington, the Baltimore weekly and monthly sings, Berryville, and four local all-day sings and conventions. It is not the number of instances each was sung, but cumulative extent of the repertoire.

¹⁸⁹ This number represents the extent of the repertoire sung at all conventions in the Chesapeake Bay region as published in the *Sacred Harp Singing Directory, 2004*. It includes the Keystone Convention, the Potomac River Convention, the Shenandoah Valley All-Day Sing, the Exeter All-Day Sing, the Maiden Creek All-Day Sing, the Rivanna River All-Day Sing, and the James River Convention.

¹⁹⁰ This number represents the extent of the repertoire of fuging tunes sung at five different singings in Arlington, Virginia between March and November, 2004.

¹⁹¹ This number represents the extent of the repertoire from seven monthly singings in Baltimore between March, 2004 and January, 2005.

¹⁹² This refers to the extent of the repertoire of fuging tunes performed at thirteen performances of the Baltimore weekly group between August, 2004 and February, 2005.

¹⁹³ According to Rachel, "More complicated songs such as fugues or anthems are sometimes slightly (and sometimes grossly) more complicated to *lead* than a plain tune. So, for the leader, having the support of

The gap between how often fusing tunes are requested grows even wider when examining the most frequently sung tunes performed by a particular group, as opposed to their cumulative repertoire. Each group has a limited number of songs that are requested at over half of their total number of performances. Among this slice of their repertoire, the differences between the number of fusing tunes performed becomes even more disparate. The following table is an examination of tunes that were chosen during at least half of the particular group's meetings I attended. These tunes are the most popular for a particular group. Certain groups have a large number that are repeated frequently, while others do not dwell on the same material.

Table 4: Fusing Tunes in Top Half of Repertoire

	Number of fusing tunes	Total number of repertoire	Percentage of fusing tunes in repertoire
Entire contents of the <i>Sacred Harp</i>	164	554	29.6
Chesapeake Bay area	7	32	21.9
Conventions	62	27	43.5
Arlington	10	36	27.8
Baltimore Monthly	4	25	16
Baltimore Weekly	3	9	33.3

In the case of the popular tunes, fusing tunes are sung far more often at conventions than they appear in the text of the *Sacred Harp*. However, they are much less popular at the Baltimore monthly sings than at any other local group, including the Baltimore weekly sings. This could be due to the small amount of tunes that the Baltimore group sings more than half the time.

A closely related form commonly used by colonial composers was the anthem, of which William Billings said, "I think any piece of divine music that is not divided into

a larger class is invaluable. If you screw up and lead in the altos when you're supposed to lead in the tenors, hopefully the class can still carry the song, whereas, in a small group, we might all just stop singing and decide it's time to stuff our faces with hummus and colcannon." Personal communication, 30 March 2005.

meter (excepting canons and chanting pieces) may with propriety be called an anthem.”¹⁹⁴ Lowens states that many of the same compositional techniques are shared between fuges and anthems, but they have different forms.¹⁹⁵ McKenzie and Ralph Daniels identify several characteristic features of anthems which distinguish them from fuges: “1) Through-composed plan, 2) freer treatment of text, 3) greater variety of texture, and 4) materials requiring training and rehearsal.”¹⁹⁶ Anthems also frequently use dotted rhythms and long, conjunct melodic lines.¹⁹⁷ Among tunes generally classified as anthems are several subtypes. A set piece has a poetic text designed for a specific occasion while an ode has a nonscriptural text on a specific subject.¹⁹⁸

There are only a few anthems in the current revision of the *Sacred Harp*, of which the most frequently sung is “The Rose of Sharon,” written by William Billings in 1778.¹⁹⁹ Billings’ style in the tune differs markedly from his fusing tunes because he gives entire phrases to a single vocal line, alternating monophonic, homophonic, and staggered imitative polyphonic sections. The piece has five sections, each with a different metrical signature and tempo. The first section is in 2/4 and begins with four measures of only the treble part, followed by a four-measure interlude with all four voices. This is followed by six measures of the bass and six of the tenor, then an alternation of two and four-voice textures. The second section is in 6/4 and begins with four measures of the bass followed

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in McKenzie, “Anthems of the Sacred Harp Tunesmiths,” 249.

¹⁹⁵ Lowens, 46.

¹⁹⁶ Daniel quoted in McKenzie, “Anthems of the Sacred Harp Tunesmiths,” 249.

¹⁹⁷ Daniel, 51 – 52.

¹⁹⁸ McKenzie, “Anthems of the Sacred Harp Tunesmiths,” 250 – 251.

¹⁹⁹ McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 254.

by four measures with all four voices. The third section is in 2/4 and is characterized by individual voices answering each other in two-measure fragments, ending with a phrase with all four voices. The fourth section is in 6/8 and follows the same general outline as the third section, with voices answering each other. The fifth section is again in 2/4. The final section is in 6/4 and uses all four voices for all but the first few measures.

Anthems make up only about 3% of the total amount of tunes in the *Sacred Harp*. They are similarly very infrequently performed in the various groups in the Chesapeake Bay region.

Table 5: Anthems in Repertoire

	Number of anthems	Total number in repertoire	Percentage of anthems in repertoire
Entire contents of the <i>Sacred Harp</i>	17	554	3.1
Chesapeake Bay area	8	306	2.6
Conventions	8	292	2.7
Arlington	1	87	1.1
Baltimore Monthly	2	140	1.4
Baltimore Weekly	1	116	.9

Anthems are not frequently sung for the same reason that fusing tunes are sometimes avoided. They are relatively difficult to perform for a number of reasons. First, they usually have several time signature changes, making them complicated for singers to both lead and perform. Second, anthems frequently have exposed lines rather than dense four-part writing, which can leave singers feeling self-conscious and exposed when only a few singers are present. Third, anthems are typically performed with “the words only,” instead of briefly going through the tune with solfège syllables. Consequently, singers are not given a chance to learn their parts, and if they are not previously acquainted with the anthem then it becomes very difficult to perform. Furthermore, some singers such as Wendy believe that anthems should only be performed on special occasions, such as the

performance of “Easter Anthem” at a church service in Virginia in March, 2005. She also attended a convention in Massachusetts where singers were instructed to keep their selections brief, which effectively kept anthems from being chosen.²⁰⁰ Although anthems are performed very infrequently by all local groups, they have a stronger presence in larger groups and are all but absent from smaller ones because they are quite difficult to perform when only a few singers are present.

In her study *Sing To Me of Heaven*, Dorothy Horn identifies the hymn tune as a third compositional form used by colonial composers.

Hymn tunes are usually in one of the standard meters (Long, Common, or Short), and have four phrases, frequently with a modulation to the dominant in the middle. Each is designed to be used with a variety of rhymed texts in the same meter. These texts are frequently metrical versions of the psalms.²⁰¹

Many of the melodies used by colonial composers were borrowed from folk songs. These melodies were arranged by tunebook compilers, who then affixed their name as the composer. Folk hymns in the *Sacred Harp* are characterized by their use of gapped and modal scales, particularly in the Phrygian and Dorian modes.²⁰² Horn sets up a few more common characteristics of a folk hymn besides gapped and modal scales, including: (1) shape,²⁰³ (2) form ABB’A (or its equivalent in a six phrase tune), (3) typical measure

²⁰⁰ Personal communication, 30 March 2005.

²⁰¹ Dorothy Horn, *Sing to Me of Heaven: A Study of Folk and Early American Materials in Three Old Harp Books* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970), 4.

²⁰² Taddie, 51. According to Taddie, the particular mode of the tune can be derived from the tenor line, which is considered to be the main melody.

²⁰³ By *shape*, Horn refers to the typical structure of a melody as a series of arches. Horn, 26.

patterns for the metric signature,²⁰⁴ (4) mixed meter or rebarring, (5) centonization,²⁰⁵ and (6) refrain.

The most frequently sung hymn in the greater Chesapeake Bay region according to my fieldwork, “Idumea,” is an example of a hymn tune.²⁰⁶ It was arranged by Ananias Davisson of the nearby Shenandoah Valley in Virginia in 1816, with lyrics by Charles Wesley.²⁰⁷ It is in Short Meter, with four verses of four phrases each. The melody has been constructed in the Aeolian mode. The tenor line is missing the second and sixth degrees, qualifying it as a gapped scale, but the second degree is filled out by the treble part, while the alto part uses the sixth degree as a passing tone. The melody is written in a series of four arches in the form ABB’A.²⁰⁸

Hymn tunes have a strong presence both in the *Sacred Harp* and in local repertoires; however, most do not have texts from the psalms but use texts by lyricists such as Isaac Watts. Hymn tunes in the *Sacred Harp* are normally quite short, taking up only half a printed page, and are quite popular in part because they have four-part writing throughout, rather than the exposed entrances in futing tunes and anthems, which present

²⁰⁴ Horn identifies several metrical characteristics of a folk tune, including beginning on an upbeat in quadruple simple or duple compound meters and mixed meters (which may be misbarred). Horn, 23 – 26.

²⁰⁵ Horn defines centonization as the process of composing new melodies from pre-existing ones (Horn, 49).

²⁰⁶ Jackson described “Idumea” as a folk hymn on the basis of its melody; however, Horn does not agree because the song does not have at least three of her characteristics of folk hymns.

²⁰⁷ Hugh McGraw, ed., *The Sacred Harp* (Bremen, GA: The Sacred Harp Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), 47.

²⁰⁸ For Lorenzo, “Idumea” is a favorite because he associates it strongly with Wendy, a singer with which he frequently performs: “It’s individual people who make songs that are associated with a particular group. There are particular songs that I totally associate forevermore with individuals....[such as] Wendy with ‘Idumea.’ There’s a part where the alto splits, and she always takes the high part.....She has a really strong voice, and it actually brings tears to my eyes when I hear her voice doing the high part.” Personal communication, 13 February 2005.

a difficulty for less experienced singers and for those performing in smaller groups.

Hymn tunes make up about 20% of the total amount of tunes in the *Sacred Harp*, with slightly less than 20% of those written between 1700 and 1805. However, hymn tunes make up much more than that amount of the local repertoire.

Table 6: Hymn Tunes in Repertoire

	Number of hymn tunes	Total number in repertoire	Percentage of hymn tunes in repertoire
Entire contents of the <i>Sacred Harp</i>	122	554	22
Chesapeake Bay area	79	306	25.8
Conventions	54	292	18.5
Arlington	21	87	24.1
Baltimore monthly	40	140	28.6
Baltimore weekly	38	116	32.8

While fudging tunes and anthems are performed less frequently in smaller groups than in larger groups because of their relative difficulty, hymn tune performance is the opposite. They are least frequently requested in conventions, where there is the largest amount of singers, and most frequently requested in smaller groups, such as the Baltimore weekly performance. The trend is even more marked among the hymns that are called during at least half of a group's performances.

Table 7: Hymn Tunes in Top Half of Repertoire

	Number of hymn tunes	Total number in repertoire	Percentage of hymn tunes in repertoire
Chesapeake Bay area	11	32	34.3
Conventions	11	62	17.7
Arlington	9	36	25
Baltimore Monthly	10	25	40
Baltimore Weekly	5	9	55.6

The frequency of hymn tune selection in small groups represents an aesthetic choice as well as one based on ease in performance. According to Wendy, hymn tunes have “a

lovely sparse quality” when performed in smaller groups, compared with that of fugal tunes and anthems.²⁰⁹

Besides the typical colonial forms, all of which have been used in shape-note composition until the present, composers frequently drew upon other musical sources for inspiration. A common source for melodies was Scotch-Irish fiddle tunes.²¹⁰ These were normally set in either 6/4 or 6/8 and had are locally performed with a rather sprightly tempo.²¹¹ The most commonly performed fiddle tune in the Chesapeake Bay region is “Essay,”²¹² composed by A.C. Clark in 1840. It is in 6/8 and is entirely *tutti*. The entire tune is characterized by a quarter and eighth note rhythmic figure. It has two sections, the first of which can be broken into four lines with a melodic repetition. The second section has a similar melodic sequence to the first but is slightly modified to fit the change into the dominant in the first half. The melody in the second half is identical to that of the first section.

Art music has similarly been borrowed as inspiration for tunes in the *Sacred Harp*, most notably by Lowell Mason and the other participants in the Better Music Movement.²¹³ This borrowing typically involved using the tune of a well-known European piece of sacred or secular origin and changing the form and setting to an

²⁰⁹ Personal communication, 30 March 2005.

²¹⁰ Secular dance tunes were ordinarily forbidden for use in religious music Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 164).

²¹¹ Some local singers choose which songs to lead according to their forms. One woman in Virginia prefers to use only fiddle tunes.

²¹² McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 157.

²¹³ According to Christina Mennel, in his own tunebook, *The Eclectic Harmony*, Lowell Mason and his brother Timothy borrowed tunes from Gluck, Purcell, Tallis, Handel, Haydn, Martin Luther, Nagelli, and Pleyel (30).

approximation of those used in the *Sacred Harp*. Lorenzo identified tunes influenced by art music as a source of his most favorite ones. While not frequently sung in the Chesapeake Bay region, an example of such a song is “Pleyel’s Hymn (First),”²¹⁴ with lyrics written by Helen Maria Williams in 1790.²¹⁵ The tune has two sections, each with four phrases, making it an extension of the hymn tune form. It is unusual among tunes in the *Sacred Harp* because of its use of grace notes and alternation between duplets and triplets. However, “Pleyel’s Hymn (First)” clearly conforms to the structure typically found among tunes in the *Sacred Harp*.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, camp-meeting songs became a new influence on shape-note music.²¹⁶ They were both learned and performed by congregations at large charismatic outdoor gatherings; consequently, the tunes were designed to be much simpler than hymns and fusing tunes and frequently had choruses after every stanza.²¹⁷ Many songs also had interchangeable choruses, where the same refrain would be tacked onto different verses.²¹⁸ An example of this is “Restoration (First),”²¹⁹ one of the most frequently performed songs in the Chesapeake Bay area.²²⁰

²¹⁴ McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 143.

²¹⁵ Ignaz Joseph Pleyel (1757 – 1831), the credited composer of “Pleyel’s Hymn (First),” was a pupil of Franz Joseph Haydn who, in addition to composing, founded a publishing house and piano firm in Paris. Rita Benton, “Ignaz Joseph Pleyel,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed [19 April 2005]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

²¹⁶ Buell Cobb identifies camp-meetings as a possible source for the social structure of Sacred Harp networks: “In their inception the camp meetings may well have created the pattern for the ‘singin’s’ in which thousands in later years would throng to sing from the Sacred Harp book. As well as religious meetings, the revivals were great social gatherings – primarily nondenominational – and in this respect they prefigured the Sacred Harp gatherings.” Cobb, 79.

²¹⁷ Cobb, 80.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 312.

Like many other tunes with refrains, it was composed in the mid-nineteenth century. It has two sections, each with two phrases, and two verses. However, after every verse, a *da capo* leads to the beginning and both sections are repeated with the lyrics to the chorus. Songs that have choruses or refrains are a common occurrence in the current edition of the *Sacred Harp*, making up about 12% of its total repertoire. Over 75% of the tunes with refrains were written between 1835 and 1869. Like hymn tunes, ones with a refrain also appear to be more popular in smaller groups than in larger groups.

Table 8: Tunes with Refrains in Repertoire

	Number of tunes with refrains	Total number in repertoire	Percentage of tunes with refrains in repertoire
Entire contents of the <i>Sacred Harp</i>	67	554	12.1
Chesapeake Bay area	40	306	13.1
Conventions	37	292	12.7
Arlington	12	87	13.8
Baltimore monthly	23	140	16.4
Baltimore weekly	23	116	19.8

While camp-meetings songs appear more frequently in any local repertoire than they do in the *Sacred Harp*, they are particularly popular in smaller local groups, such as the weekly performance in Baltimore, perhaps because the frequent repetition of their form makes them easier to perform.²²¹

²²⁰ Among the repertoire performed in the Chesapeake Bay area during the singings I attended, “Restoration (First)” is the ninth most frequently performed song, with a total of 13 performances between January 2004 and February 2005.

²²¹ When asked why songs with refrains were popular in smaller groups, Lorenzo replied: “The only thing I can think of as far as songs with choruses and refrains is that they’re familiar and fun to sing. Even if we didn’t necessarily grow up singing religious songs in that style, many secular songs that we learned as kids (‘This Old Man,’ ‘Old MacDonald,’ ‘Tom Dooley,’ etc) have simple choruses and refrains that everyone can join in on, so everyone is able to easily participate even if they don’t know the verses. Plus, most of America’s popular music – especially rock, which draws as much from the European ballad tradition as it does from blues – involves catchy, melodic choruses. So it’s a structure that we’re pretty accustomed to, whereas we tend not to be so used to songs that are composed along more classical lines, like anthems are.” Personal communication, 31 March 2005.

After camp-meeting songs became a fixture in the *Sacred Harp*, the general construction of shape-note music underwent a significant change. In the Cooper and Denson revisions from around the beginning of the twentieth century, a fourth vocal part was added to many of the older tunes.²²² While some colonial composers, such as William Billings, always used four-part writing, many of the original versions of tunes from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had only three parts: tenor (which usually carried the dominant melody and is sung by both men and women), treble (or the counter-melody, which is song mostly by women but can include a few men), and bass.²²³ McKenzie theorizes that the move from three-part to four-part harmony may be due in part to a desire to modernize the singing style as well as for the sake of creativity.²²⁴ Regardless of its intention, adding a fourth part had a substantial effect on the harmonic character of many tunes in the *Sacred Harp*. Previously, the settings of tunes from the

²²² McKenzie, “The Alto Parts in the ‘True Dispersed Harmony’ of ‘The Sacred Harp’ Revisions” *The Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1989), 153.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 153 – 155.

²²⁴ At the beginning of his article, McKenzie poses his central question about alto parts in the *Sacred Harp*: “The nature of the three-voice tunes in the many Southern shape-note tune books from the nineteenth century – specifically as determined by such contrapuntal-harmonic traits as frequent parallel fifths, octaves, and unisons; open fifths and other incomplete chords; unprepared and unresolved dissonances; and indiscriminantly appearing, non-cadencing second-inversion triads – raises several questions with regard to four-voice revisions. Why was it felt desirable to add a fourth part to these tunes which were known so well and had been sung for so long in their three-part arrangement?” (McKenzie 1989, 155). Many of the traits listed by MacKenzie are essentially the same or similar to the ones mentioned by Horn and Tallmadge as a result of the development of quartal harmony from folk organum. McKenzie cites Cobb in saying that the alto part moved the harmonic quality from quartal to tertian (158, from Cobb, 37). At the end of his article, MacKenzie answers his question from the beginning: “Finally, to return to another of the questions raised at the beginning of this report: what was the motivation for adding alto parts to the Sacred Harp in the twentieth century? If it were for the purpose of modernization, one would have to conclude that the composers held rather hazy notions about modern hymn style. It seems much more likely that the impulse to compose alto parts for these three-part tunes that were so well known and loved is the same impulse that motivated early church poets and composers to produce antiphons to go with the established psalm verses, to trope and gloss the sacred texts, and to invent melodic lines to go with the well known and loved chant in early organum. Indeed, these twentieth-century composers of alto melodies are continuing the ancient Christian tradition of responding creatively to an existing musical canon” (171). Wallace McKenzie, “The Alto Parts in the ‘True Dispersed Harmony’ of ‘The Sacred Harp’ Revisions,” *The Musical Quarterly*, 73, no. 2 (1989), 153 – 171.

Sacred Harp were characterized by quartal, open harmony, and frequent voice-crosses between the top two voices.²²⁵ The new alto parts were usually given the thirds of chords, which changed the harmonies from quartal to triadic and drastically altered its character.²²⁶ The alto part has been retained in all but a few tunes in the current revision of the *Sacred Harp*. In the Chesapeake Bay region, altos sometimes outnumber singers of other parts by as much as two to one, making the harmony decidedly triadic. To combat this, many experienced altos have begun to sing other parts, most frequently the treble, although Gladys moved from the alto to an occasional role in the bass section.

Many singers in the Chesapeake Bay region have remarked upon the number of tunes which are sung repeatedly at meeting after meeting in the same group.²²⁷

Table 9: Tunes Sung During at Least Half of Events

	Total number in repertoire	Repertoire sung during at least half of performances	Percentage of repertoire sung during at least half of performances
Chesapeake Bay area	306	32	10.5
Conventions	292	62	21.2
Arlington	87	36	41.4
Baltimore monthly	140	25	17.9
Baltimore weekly	116	9	7.8

To combat the small size of local repertoire, some members actively seek out new tunes to perform in their respective groups. They do this through several means, most frequently through convention attendance and the acquisition of recordings featuring

²²⁵ McKenzie identifies this as a possible meaning behind the phrase “True Dispersed Harmony,” which is the subtitle for the *Sacred Harp* (McKenzie, “The Alto Parts in the ‘True Dispersed Harmony’ of ‘The Sacred Harp’ Revisions,”

²²⁶ McKenzie, 158.

²²⁷ For instance, Joan remarked that she sometimes deliberately chooses unfamiliar songs at the Baltimore monthly meeting to combat stagnation. When asked how she chooses the tunes she wishes to lead, she replied: “For Baltimore sings, I try to find things that sometimes we haven’t sung before because I think it’s good to mix in new songs because we’re in a rut most of the time. When I go to conventions I usually just lead things I really like.” Joan shows a concern for repertoire formation and deliberately manipulates its size by introducing unfamiliar tunes in the Baltimore monthly meeting. Personal communication, 11 March 2004.

shape-note performances. Although singers at conventions perform over 20% of the same tunes at least half of the time, they serve to introduce singers to new material because of the large amount of repertoire that is performed at a single session. Joan, for instance, advocated conventions as an excellent way for new singers to familiarize themselves with Sacred Harp repertoire.

The best thing you can do is to go to a convention. It'll get it [the vocal parts] in your ear, so that you know what it sounds like. When I go to a convention, I always mark songs that I really like in my book, so that I would go back and remember them.²²⁸ What I do now is if it's something I haven't heard for a while but I think it's something good for us to sing, I make a list of things that I think we ought to try sometime. I've got to a place where I've actually sung most of the songs. I haven't sung them all. Whenever I go to conventions I usually pick up a song or two that I've never sung before. At a convention, you'll sing sixty or seventy songs a day, so you could get through a lot. It's very frustrating at first cause you can't keep up, you know, but after you've done it a little bit it really helps. The best thing I ever did was after I'd been doing this for maybe about two years, I went to a southern convention, and it was wonderful. I mean, it sounded different, and we sang all these songs we didn't normally sing up here. But the best thing you can do is go to conventions.²²⁹

Conventions also serve as a way to expand repertoire because many local singers attend ones outside the Chesapeake Bay region, which may have an entirely different repertoire than that chosen by local performers. Singers are given a chance to form connections with an intra-regional network of singers as well as to learn less frequently performed tunes.

²²⁸ In addition to the singers that mark each time they sing a particular tune in their books, many others make a list on the inside of the front and back covers of their favorite tunes and use that as a resource in choosing which ones to lead at meetings and conventions.

²²⁹ Personal communication, 11 March 2004.

A comparison between local repertoires and those of local all-day sings and conventions reveals the extent of the educational link in learning songs. In *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, George Pullen Jackson listed the eighty most popular tunes in nineteenth century shape-note tunebooks.²³⁰ It can be surmised that these tunes were frequently published by tunebook compilers because they were popular among nineteenth century singers. In the spirit of Jackson's work, a comparison of 84 of the most frequently performed tunes in several of the local groups in the Chesapeake Bay region reveals the impact of local conventions on the repertoire of local groups.²³¹ From those 84, the tunes sung at least half the time were compared to the most frequently sung tunes in local groups. Since the most frequently sung tune at conventions, "Christian Warfare,"²³² was sung five times, a hymn would have to be sung at least three times at a convention to be included in the top half, for a total of 35 tunes. A relatively small number of these songs correlate to the most popular tunes in local groups, or, indeed, in the cumulative repertoire of groups in the Chesapeake area.

Table 10: Most Frequently Performed Tunes (MFPT) at Conventions in Repertoire

	MFPT at conventions	MFPT of local groups
Chesapeake Bay area	26	
Arlington	19	
Baltimore monthly	17	
Baltimore weekly	14	

Less than a third of the most frequently performed tunes at conventions are performed at local Sacred Harp group meetings. This can mean two things: first, that either performers from other communities outside the Chesapeake Bay area frequently

²³⁰ Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, 133 – 150.

²³¹ Eighty-four tunes were chosen instead of eighty because it corresponds to tunes that are sung at least a seventh of the time in all of the local groups and conventions I attended.

²³² McGraw, *The Sacred Harp*, 179.

perform songs at conventions with which local singers are unfamiliar, thus making conventions an excellent way for singers to learn new material, or, second, that tunes from conventions are not performed frequently at local meetings and thus convention repertoire has not been integrated into local practice. However, it may be a combination of both, and singers such as Joan have clearly been influenced in their personal favorite tunes by exposure to new material at conventions.

Another way that singers become exposed to new material is through recordings of shape-note music, whether homemade or professionally recorded. In “New Directions in Sacred Harp singing,” Doris Dyen briefly explored the way that the repertoire used by traditional Sacred Harp singers is distorted through the use of recordings:

When these singers participate in outside events or listen to outsiders’ recordings of the music, it cannot help but have an effect on their own singing styles and repertory, since the interests, singing style and background of the outsiders are not like the singers’ own. College-student enthusiasts request songs that the singers might not traditionally sing at home.²³³

However, the deliberate use of recordings to learn new repertoire has been largely unexplored by previous scholars of Sacred Harp. Singers use both published and homemade recordings to learn how to sing Sacred Harp and to further their knowledge of the repertoire. Gladys, for instance, used tapes she made of Sacred Harp performances to learn the tunes when she was introduced to Sacred Harp while studying anthropology at Oxford University during her junior year of college.

I started [singing Sacred Harp] when I was in England. I went to an event called the Witney Harmony Singing

²³³ Doris Dyen, “New Directions in Sacred Harp Singing,” in *Folk Music and Modern Sound*, ed. William Ferris and Mary L. Hart (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 75.

Weekend and they had something like American hymnody or something on the schedule and I said I wonder what that is. I'll find out. I went and they had all these Sacred Harp [singers] and they taught us how to do it and I thought it was really cool. I actually skipped something else I was planning to go to the next day so I could go and do this workshop again. (laughs) That was put on by like four people from Northampton Harmony from Western Massachusetts. And so I came away from that with some tapes that I made and a copy of the Sacred Harp.

You brought recording equipment?

I always have my little tape recorder and I tape workshops and I have these horrible copies and I wonder, what's that they're singing? So I did that kind of singing in my room along with the tapes while I was in England.²³⁴

After returning to the United States, Gladys began singing regularly with the Norumbega Harmony,²³⁵ a well-known shape-note group, in Boston while pursuing a graduate degree in Library Science. She has sung with groups in the Chesapeake Bay area for four and a half years.

Besides helping to introduce singers to Sacred Harp singing, recordings also help introduce singers to new shape-note tunes. Lorenzo has a large collection of shape-note recordings which he uses as sources for new tunes to perform in local groups.

Everyone keeps bringing in songs from a lot of different hymnbooks. How did you get into doing that?

Sometimes you hear songs on recordings that you're like, ooh, cool, I want to sing that. There's some stuff from seven-shape books I really like and so I went out and found the hymnbooks and made copies [to bring in].²³⁶

²³⁴ Personal communication, 10 February 2005.

²³⁵ According to Gladys, "The Norumbega Harmony run an open sing in Boston once a month. [They perform] Sacred Harp and some other kinds of early music things, but the open sing is just a regular shape-note sing." They group has also compiled a tunebook, *Norumbega Harmony*, which is occasionally used by local singers as an alternative source of shape-note music. Personal communication, 10 February 2005.

²³⁶ Customarily, when singers want to perform a tune not in the *Sacred Harp*, they bring photocopies to share with the other singers, because many may not own the book from which the tune comes.

So it got started out of collecting recordings?

Exactly. It got started out of collecting recordings. I consider myself a deeply spiritual person but I don't want to necessarily sing spiritual texts all the time. It's kind of fun to sing a drinking song or whatever that has shape-note notation. Part of it is just a desire to branch out beyond the red book (the Sacred Harp).

Did you start collecting records before you started [singing]?

Yeah, I started, but my collection of Sacred Harp recordings really increased after I started doing it. I'll put it this way, before I started singing Sacred Harp, I didn't see any particular reason to have fifteen different versions of the song "Murillo's Lesson," but now I'm like, ooh, I wonder how this group sounds doing [it]. I ended up acquiring a lot of recordings just to see how different groups sounded.²³⁷

Besides using recordings in his initial exposure to Sacred Harp, Lorenzo uses recordings both to expand his knowledge of shape-note repertoire and to acquire some of the performance practices used in other groups outside the Chesapeake Bay region.²³⁸

An example of the effect that recordings have had on building new repertoire can be culled from a series of recordings compiled by a local propagator of Sacred Harp. An interesting way that recordings are used among local singers has been started by Katie, the founder of the Brandywine Sacred Harp in Pennsylvania. Because most of the singers are complete newcomers, starting in the spring and summer of 2004 Katie made several compilation recordings of Sacred Harp performances, which she called "Let's

²³⁷ Personal communication, 13 February 2005.

²³⁸ The process of using recordings to learn repertoire has also been aided by the Fasola website. It has a section devoted to recordings of shape-note repertoire, including electronic music files of every song in the *Sacred Harp*, as well as in other tunebooks such as the Cooper book, *Southern Harmony*, *Missouri Harmony*, *The Christian's Harp*, *Christian Harmony*, *New Harp of Columbia*, and *Harmonia Sacra*. It also has a listing of shape-note recordings and an index of the tunes on various shape-note recordings. A singer from the Washington, DC group has also compiled a fairly comprehensive list of old and recent recordings, which are distributed at regional meetings and conventions. *Sacred Harp and Shape Note Singing* (accessed 19 April 2005) <<http://www.fasola.org>>.

Learn These”²³⁹ and gave them to all the members of the group, with the express wish that they also use them for proselytizing among their friends and colleagues. Katie also invited members of other local groups in northern Maryland and Pennsylvania to join the Brandywine group in order to help the new singers. She then distributed copies to those singers, who made copies for others. Thus, a number of singers in the Baltimore area possess copies of at least one recording from the series.

Katie’s recordings have a close relationship to the most frequently performed tunes in the Chesapeake Bay area for several reasons. First, Katie deliberately chose songs with which she thought singers should be familiar because they were often chosen at other local meetings and at conventions. Second, the total amount of repertoire on “Let’s Learn These” (LLT) series is substantial. Each recording has approximately 25 tracks, and, because there are five recordings, over a hundred songs appear in the series.²⁴⁰ Considering that the cumulative repertoire of the Chesapeake Bay area is about 300 tunes, Katie has recorded a third of the repertoire. However, the earlier recordings in her series more closely reflected the 84 most frequently performed tunes in the repertoire of local groups.

²³⁹ As of March, 2005, Katie has distributed five recordings in her “Let’s Learn These” series. A sixth recording was distributed on 18 April 2005, but has not been included in this study. Personal communication, 17 April 2005.

²⁴⁰ Each CD in the LLT series also contains recordings of groups singing scales in four-shape solfège as well as a few tracks of other American folk music.

Table 11: "Let's Learn These" Recordings in Repertoire

	# on LLT1 in MFPT	# on LLT2 in MFPT	# on LLT 3 in MFPT	# on LLT 4 in MFPT	# on LLT 5 in MFPT	Total
Chesapeake Bay area	18	13	12	13	3	59
Conventions	15	11	11	10	4	51
Arlington	15	8	11	4	4	42
Baltimore	13	12	13	11	4	53
monthly						
Baltimore weekly	14	11	13	4	5	47

While the amount of difference is not substantial, local singers perform tunes featured on Let's Learn These 1 more often than the ones on the other CDs. This is probably because Katie chose to put them on the first one because she believed they were among the most frequently performed.

Recordings and conventions are a key way that Sacred Harp performers are both introduced to Sacred Harp as a social practice as well as learn new repertoire. They are a tool for spreading shape-note singing to new converts. Many singers, like Lorenzo, Gladys, and Joan, are first attracted to Sacred Harp because of its harmonic qualities, while they become fixtures in the community because of its open and egalitarian social structure. The compositions contained within the *Sacred Harp* are vital to the formation of the local community of singers because groups are formed solely by its performance. The tunes chosen by local performers reflect their individual aesthetics and, thus, are a reflection of both the qualities that originally drew them to Sacred Harp and of their changing tastes as their repertoire expands. Conventions and recordings are both important ways that singers expand their knowledge of tunes in the *Sacred Harp* and in other tunebooks. However, a vital difference exists between the use of recordings and exposure in conventions. Recordings are static objects; even though they may be created

and circulated by contact in the community, their existence does not depend upon the participation of the listener, even though some singers learn new tunes by singing along with them. Conventions, on the other hand, depend upon the participation of the listener; he or she is being exposed both to the musical sound of Sacred Harp and to its social practices at the same time. Thus, while recordings may have a substantial impact on formation of new repertoire, conventions serve two purposes at the same time.

Unlike many other kinds of communities, Sacred Harp singers in the Chesapeake Bay area are bound together first through musical performance and then through the acceptance of each member expressed by this musical community. Thus, understanding the local repertoires of Sacred Harp groups is vital to the comprehension of the community as a whole. All of the gatherings are structured around musical performance and their repertoire is shaped through the ties formed between individual members. In his interview, Lorenzo said that he chose many of his favorite songs because they reminded him of other singers. Many others choose the songs they contribute to the repertoire through similar means. Recordings, such as those made by Katie, are a reflection of local tastes in song performance, shaped by individual memories and personal associations. Musical performance and repertoire is the foundation of the local Sacred Harp community.

Chapter V: Folk Revivalism and the Construction of Community

Sacred Harp singing in its folkloric context has often depended upon folk music societies for support. However, folkloric performers became more closely aligned with traditional practices because the convention system established in the South in the nineteenth century easily expanded to allow for Northern conventions, which encouraged face-to-face contact between traditional singers and folkloric ones, strengthening the national community as well as imparting traditional performance practices to newer groups. Folkloric singers, particularly those in New England and Chicago, traveled to the South to experience Sacred Harp in a more traditional context; Southern singers then reciprocated and traveled to the newer conventions.²⁴¹ However, the network also helped in the creation of a community of Sacred Harp singers on local and regional levels outside Sacred Harp's traditional context. Joan, the coordinator of the Baltimore area monthly sing, described the process by which the oldest Sacred Harp groups currently singing in the Chesapeake Bay area were fostered by local folk music societies, such as the Folklore Society of Greater Washington and the Baltimore Folk Music Society.

I'm interested in your involvement with the Folklore Society, because I know that you've been involved with it for a really long time.

At the time I was working in Washington and I had a friend who was on the board at FSGW²⁴² and that was how I ended up doing volunteer stuff. I met some of the singers in Washington, but I was living in Baltimore, and they said there's this woman we know who lives in Baltimore who's trying to start a sing, and they put us in touch. She's no longer here. She was trying to start a sing and so I got

²⁴¹ Bealle, 194 – 195.

²⁴² The Folklore Society of Greater Washington.

involved with that. She was much more involved with BFMS than I was, because she was also a dancer.

BFMS is the Baltimore Folk Music Society. OK.

BFMS is a much more dance-focused group, they do sponsor occasional house concerts and, I don't know if they're sponsoring any sings right now. But in any case, they're a much more dance-focused group. And so, my friend got herself elected to the board because she was a dance person, but she also wanted to make sure that singing was represented. When she got tired of it, after a couple of years, she talked me into running because she was anxious to have a singer. So I was on the BFMS board for a year, which was an interesting experience except nobody cared that much about singing, so I got very tired of it. When she started the group we were a BFMS-sponsored event for a while, and then BFMS ran into some issues about handicapped accessibility of dances. They promulgated a policy that all BFMS events had to be in handicapped accessible venues. So, since we meet in people's houses, that, didn't seem like that was a workable thing for us. So we ceased being a BFMS-sponsored event. And so, what we are now, we're in their newsletters and stuff, but only as a member-sponsored event. They have a category of things that members sponsor, and they let us put stuff in the column. That happened probably six or seven years ago. We switched.

Has it changed anything about the way the group is run?

No, it makes absolutely no difference. It's just better for them.

I'm trying to figure how members get involved in it, and I didn't [know] if there was this recruitment link between the folklore societies and ---

Oh, there definitely is. When the folklore societies have fairs or festivals - have you ever been to any of the—

No, I just actually joined the folklore society in November.

Well, FSGW used to, and I think they still do, have a big event in usually the beginning of June, two days, and they bring lots of people. It's one of their main ways of recruiting new people, of getting new people interested, and they run workshops, and they have dance workshops and stuff. It's a lot of fun. But, anyway, they always run a Sacred Harp workshop. Sometimes FSGW has a January/February event, which they call the Mini-Fest. It's in Takoma Park. But, it seems to be erratic whether it's happening or not. I don't think they did one this year, but I

know they did one last year. But, anyway, there was a Sacred Harp workshop at that. I try usually to go, so they'll have some experienced singers. The BFMS also has that kind of event sometimes. But anyway, when there's a festival, we run a workshop at it, our group does. And occasionally we'll pick up a person or two. And it is in fact one of the main ways that we have recruited new people. One of the things that small groups like us worry about a lot is how do you recruit new people, and we haven't found a really good solution in my opinion to that once we lost the BFMS thing.

Do you know how the folklore societies pick the kinds of activities they do?

They have people who are willing to do them.

So it's just really informal then?

Yeah, it gets formalized. For Baltimore, for example, they used to have a dance chair. If you looked at their structure, they used to have a dance committee chair and a music committee chair. And after a while there were so many people dancing that they split the dance chair, so then there was an English dance chair and an American chair. And that was, I mean, it's like any sort of small group. It was very traumatic. They were debating about that when I was on the board, which is the only reason I paid any attention at all. Now they seem to have split once more, because now there is a zydeco dance chair. So, what happens is, either it's all in one thing and then people have fights because there's not enough zydeco dancing and then people pay too much attention to Squares and Contras, and then after a while if there's a nucleus of people who care, they make a big fuss and then they get to be their own chair. It's been in my experience [that] most volunteer organizations, at least the music ones, are like that. If you can get enough people who are willing to do something, you can do kind of anything you want. It has to be self-supporting, it has to make money or not cost anything.²⁴³

Sacred Harp in the Chesapeake Bay area exists less like a community of traditional Sacred Harp singers and more as a revival cradled by folklore organizations. This chapter will explore the way singers become integrated into their communities

²⁴³ Personal communication 11 March 2004.

through movement on local, regional, and national levels. Folkloric participants have different motivations and goals than traditional ones. According to Tamara Livingstone,

I define music revivals as any social movement with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition which is believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past.²⁴⁴

Furthermore, music revivals are distinguished by their focus on music performance as the primary building block in community formation and by their wide, fluid boundaries.

Revivalist communities are non-territorial; their membership may span local and national boundaries, and they often bring together people whose paths might never have crossed outside of the revival. Although revivals tend to originate in a specific locale, they quickly spread outward, crossing state and national boundaries.²⁴⁵

Because Sacred Harp in the Chesapeake Bay area exists in a community formed primarily through its performance, and is clearly related to folklore societies such as the Folklore Society of Greater Washington and the Baltimore Folk Music Society, who have the express purpose of “further[ing] the understanding, investigation, appreciation, and performance of the traditional folk music and folklore of the American people,”²⁴⁶ it can be considered a prime example of folksong revival, and, thus, should be examined through the lens of revivalist discourse, both in how communities are formed and maintained, and in how revivalist performances enrich the lives of its performers.

²⁴⁴ Tamara Livingston, “Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (Winter, 1999), 68.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 72 – 73.

²⁴⁶ This is the mission statement of the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, which is available at www.fsgw.org [Accessed 1 April 2005]. The Baltimore Folk Music Society has a similar purpose statement: “The Baltimore Folk Music Society was founded in 1975 as a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to teaching preserving, and promoting the music, dance and traditions of the American people.” *Baltimore Folk Music Society* (accessed 1 April 2005) <www.bfms.org/whoweare.html>

However, Sacred Harp also enjoys a close tie to traditional performance practices because of the integrating role played by the convention system.

In his study of old-time music revivals, R. Raymond Allen examined the motivations driving its performers. After initial exposure to traditional old-time music performers, revivalists frequently had an intense aesthetic reaction to the musical sound, which they then tried to recreate it in their own performances:

Initial contact with old-time music elicited a strong, emotional response from informants in this study. They felt an immediate, reflexive attraction towards the music because it appealed to their aesthetic sense. Once this initial excitement of hearing the music wore off, they continued their active involvement with it because it served important personal and social functions in their lives.²⁴⁷

Many Sacred Harp singers in the Chesapeake Bay area say that they had the same engrossing attraction to Sacred Harp's sound and were immediately drawn to perform it because of its resounding, open harmonies. However, these singers maintained their active commitment to local meetings because they enjoyed fellowship with other local performers. For instance, Gladys originally became involved with Sacred Harp through a music workshop in England. However, she had grown up attending folk music and dance events with her mother in California. Sacred Harp performance is one of her primary social outlets because she enjoyed the friendliness of other singers in Boston and in Baltimore:

By the time I left Boston I was pretty well sucked into [Sacred Harp]. (Laughs) It was really nice and I like the energy of it and all the different harmonies and it's a nice group of people. I grew up going to folk music and Contra Dances and things and it was the same kind of people who

²⁴⁷ Allen, 73.

talk to you and are friendly, and not an intimidating atmosphere.

What is the connection between this and Contra Dancing?²⁴⁸

*(Laughs) I can only make a total wild guess. I was doing Contra Dancing before because my mom was doing [it] because a lot of her folk music friends were doing [it]. In California a lot of people were doing both. I'm not sure why. Some of her friends also played music for the dances. Is it because it's old stuff and that's the attraction, or – I don't know if we did it because it was old. It was sort of like it was fun. And it was sort of a way of getting together with people that wasn't intimidating. Both of them, Contra Dancing and Sacred Harp, to me are both things [that] you're going to somebody's house or a place, not to a bar or someplace where you have to pay admission to get in. You're just going and you're meeting with people who are usually pretty decent people.*²⁴⁹

According to Gladys, the motivation behind folkloric performance, both of Sacred Harp and of folk music in general, lies in the kind of people that participate in its performance. Sacred Harp music is merely a means to create a community of likeminded people in a relatively warm, inviting atmosphere.

Although he experienced a strong spiritual attraction to the harmonies and structure of the tunes in the *Sacred Harp*, Lorenzo identified the community of Sacred Harp performers as the source of his constant attendance at singing events:

I think that you have to be open-minded and have a lot of patience with yourself and others in this music and the nice thing about it is that it builds community. It forces good feelings, forgiveness, compassion. OK, that person over there has a voice like a dull saw going through hard wood. So what? Is that what's important? Who are we

²⁴⁸ Many local folklore societies heavily emphasize Contra Dancing, more so than Sacred Harp. A number of local singers, particularly those that have entered groups through folk societies, also participate in Contra Dancing.

²⁴⁹ Personal communication, 10 February 2005.

*performing in front of? Are we going to be performing for the Pope and we need to make sure that that person gets a better voice? No. Go sing. If you gave me a different combination of people than the ones that we sing with on Thursday nights then I wouldn't come every week. I can't speak for anyone else, but for me this is what I do musically. I'm not a folk music society member who does Contra Dancing.*²⁵⁰

Lorenzo does not consider himself to be a folkloric performer and a member of the larger community formed through folklore societies, but, even so, for him a large amount of Sacred Harp's attraction lies in its community.

Voluntary organizations, such as the one formed through Sacred Harp performance, are not grounded in a community in its traditional sense. Rather, they are formed by what Robert Anderson calls "rational-legal premises,"²⁵¹ which provide a link between the individual and the community in cities in modern societies. Victor Turner explains that certain voluntary associations form "star groups," or the few chosen individuals with whom an individual is most likely to experience a strong, personal bond of community:

I would like to suggest here that wherever individuals have multiple memberships in groups or associations, one group, perhaps two or three, becomes the focus of a special concentration of psychic energy.... Relationships in such a "star" group or "marked" group are of a generally higher level of intensity than those into by membership of other groups...When a clear-cut cleavage between working time and leisure time developed in industrial societies,

²⁵⁰ Personal communication, 13 February 2005.

²⁵¹ Robert Anderson, "Voluntary Associations in History" *American Anthropologist*, 73, no. 1 (February 1971), 216.

possibilities multiplied of forming groups in the leisure domain on the basis of shared interests and predilections.²⁵²

Sacred Harp performers such as Gladyse and Lorenzo have made Sacred Harp one of their star groups because of the amount of time and energy they devote to its performance.²⁵³ Other local performers have varying amounts of involvement with the local community, either large or small.

Several scholars have identified many different roles enacted by members of revivalist traditions, which are usually characterized by the levels of involvement of performers. For instance, Tamara Livingston draws attention to the key role that “core revivalists” play within local communities: “Core revivalists, whether ‘insiders’ to the tradition or ‘outsiders,’ tend to feel such a strong connection with the revival tradition that they take it upon themselves to ‘rescue’ it from extinction and to pass it on to others.”²⁵⁴ In the case of Sacred Harp, many of those that can be considered core revivalists exist in two varieties: those that instigate new meetings and those that take it upon themselves to travel and become participants in many local groups. Instigators of new meetings, such as Joan with the monthly meeting in Baltimore, Rachel with the weekly meeting in Baltimore, and Katie with the Brandywine meeting, provide new venues for Sacred Harp performance, helping to attract new singers. Since Sacred Harp as a community is formed around performance, it is necessary to have active singing groups to preserve it; the founders of new groups are vital to the maintenance of Sacred

²⁵² Victor Turner, “Social Dramas in Brazilian Umbanda: The Dialectics of Meaning” in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), 44 – 45.

²⁵³ Both Lorenzo and Gladyse, as well as several other local performers, have mentioned how Sacred Harp has “invaded every aspect of their lives.”

²⁵⁴ Livingston, 70.

Harp. Likewise, singers that travel great distances to multiple sings are another necessary part of revival practices. In my analysis of the Chesapeake Bay area community, I suggest that Sacred Harp participation exists in three tiers: individual groups, regional activities such as relatively small all-day sings and conventions, and national activities, such as the larger conventions. While conventions and all-day sings provide a link for many singers to meet others from the same region, the ties are not particularly strong because of the relative infrequency of such events.²⁵⁵ Singers who travel to many local meetings strengthen regional ties by moving from group to group, becoming acquainted with a large number of local singers, and encouraging more active participation in intra-regional events. The three tiers of community help foster the movement from lesser to greater involvement in Sacred Harp in the Chesapeake Bay area.

Besides core revivalists, there are many others who participate in Sacred Harp performance in the Chesapeake Bay area, although not necessarily with the same amount of energy and level of devotion. Neil Rosenberg, borrowing several labels from Mark Slobin, defined three separate groups who participate in music revivals: old masters, tourists, and immigrants.²⁵⁶ In the larger Sacred Harp community, old masters are the traditional performers, who spread their knowledge to others in part through the convention system. The role of tourist applies to the majority of Sacred Harp performers in the Chesapeake Bay area: “Tourists are best viewed as musicians in transition. They are apprentices who are being taught by the revivalists and the old masters to become

²⁵⁵ It is mainly singers who travel large distances to local meetings that are also willing to travel large distances for conventions. Many of the participants in local meetings attend perhaps one or two regional activities per year.

²⁵⁶ Neil Rosenberg, “Starvation, Serendipity, and the Ambivalence of Bluegrass Revivalism,” in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 196.

specialists.”²⁵⁷ Lastly, immigrants are “people [that] had taken on the local lifestyle, gotten close to the ‘old masters,’ and served as mediators of the tradition, standing between them and the tourists.”²⁵⁸ Core revivalists in the Chesapeake Bay area can be loosely described as immigrants because they help foster the Chesapeake Bay area community. Some local participants have a more casual bond with Sacred Harp performance; they do not devote several days a week to participation in it. I. Sheldon Posen implies that such a level of participation in folk revivals is held as suspect because of its supposed lack of commitment:

With varying degrees of sincerity and innocence, people became tourists – or pilgrims – traveling in someone else’s culture. They made choices from a menu they saw offered them by the rest of North America and the world, of music to play, food to cook, clothing to wear. The feeling was, the more “authentic” the item or emulation they found, the more valid their experience of it and the transformation it produced.²⁵⁹

To some degree touristic motivations were expressed by performers such as Lorenzo when he first encountered Sacred Harp.

*In the course of all this singing I was doing in college, I heard a lot of different styles of choral music and I was really interested in how different cultures produced choral music so I got way into African music, you know, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and that sort of stuff. And the Bulgarian women’s chorus and along the way I heard Sacred Harp music. I think it was the Lomax recording.*²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ I. Sheldon Posen, “On Folk Festivals and Kitchens: Questions of Authenticity in the Folksong Revival,” in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 127 – 128.

²⁶⁰ Alan Lomax made a series of recordings of Sacred Harp conventions in Alabama in the 1950s, which have been released on a CD and are cited by several participants as a source of repertoire.

Because it had that old sound I figured well this is just sort of an archival remnant.

That no one does anymore.

Yeah, that nobody does anymore. It's sort of a dead musical tradition. I thought it sounded really cool and I thought it sounded like the Polynesian choruses that my father liked a lot. The first time I remember really sort of wondering if Sacred Harp was something that people still did after hearing that was at a dance performance. [The university I attended] has a really good modern dance company and my now wife, then girlfriend and I used to go to a lot of these dance performances. There's one dance, choreographed by one of the dancers there that was set to a Sacred Harp piece. I can't remember which song, but it was about six dancers performing at once and the stage was completely dark and the dancers wore these gauzy white shift things and it was really sort of otherworldly. And the thing that really made it was that the choreographer, who was also dancing, had a huge candle in sort of a hurricane lamp glass, and held it throughout the performance so that was really like the source of light. You saw a dancer holding the candle and I was sitting on the ground in the very front row and at the end of the performance she picked me randomly and gave me the candle. I had no idea what to do with it, so when the music stopped I blew it out. And people thought that I was a plant in the audience. That acted as a sort of adhesive for hearing Sacred Harp. You know, I really remember that experience. And I really got into Sacred Harp because I started getting into old-time mountain music you from Appalachian Mountains –

How'd you start to get interested in it?

My wife. She liked bluegrass, I hated bluegrass, she waged the war of attrition on me, and so I gave in and allowed myself to hear you know these great harmonies. At the time I was getting politicized, and so I got into Pete Seeger, and I wanted to hear their inspiration. You know, cause they were just sort of standing in for other, better musicians. And so that's how I came to like Frank Prophet. These [are] folk musicians in the true sense of the word. And Hazel Dickens and I really like that hard raw uncompromising sound. One of the things that I love about that type of music, like Sacred Harp, it's sublime, it's not beautiful, it's not pretty. The beauty comes from, at least for me, the spiritual inspiration and the sort of transcendent quality of the music, rather than from artifice,

you know, from creating a pretty harmony. And it's the same way with mountain music, and so, I learned to mountain music and that led me to [a group] founded by Tim Eriksen, and on their website Tim Eriksen wrote, look, you like the Sacred Harp stuff, find a group.²⁶¹ There're groups all over the place. I went, there are? That's how I came to [the Sacred Harp group in Baltimore].²⁶²

Before focusing primarily on Sacred Harp performance, Lorenzo engaged in what Mark Slobin described as a process of “shopping around” for different musical genres.²⁶³

However, once Lorenzo discovered Sacred Harp as both a musical and a social practice, he formed a strong connection with it and identified it as his primary source of folkloric activity.

Lorenzo's description of his entrance into Sacred Harp illustrates the process by which performers move from the role of a tourist to that of an immigrant. Originally, Lorenzo moved from participation in many different musical genres, but once he found one that fulfilled him both as a source of musical expression and as a social activity, he exhibited a large amount of dedication to furthering the local community of Sacred Harp performers. Lorenzo has become an active proponent of Sacred Harp, frequently traveling to many local meetings as well as all-day sings and conventions.

The earliest currently active Sacred Harp groups in the Chesapeake Bay area were fostered in local folklore societies, thus forming a strong link to folkloric activities and firmly grounding local Sacred Harp groups in the frame of revivalism. Even performers such as Lorenzo, who do not identify themselves as part of the local folklore community,

²⁶¹ Tim Eriksen (Accessed 19 April 2005), <www.timeriksen.net>.

²⁶² Personal communication, 13 February 2005.

²⁶³ Mark Slobin, “The Neo-Klezmer Movement and Euro-American Musical Revivalism,” *Journal of American Folklore* 97, no. 383 (January – March 1984), 98.

fit the roles of tourist, immigrant, and old master ascribed to revivalists by Rosenberg, I. Posen Sheldon, and Mark Slobin. Furthermore, the network of Sacred Harp activities Sacred Harp performers facilitates the transition from one role to another. Tourists may only listen to recordings or attend small local meetings, while immigrants travel to local conventions, and core revivalists develop their own performing groups or attend local groups and conventions in far-flung locations. Local performers for a large part do not reach the status of old masters, as described by Neil Rosenberg, because they are not as a whole a part of Sacred Harp's traditional practice. Sacred Harp performance in the Chesapeake Bay area exists in a new context, and, thus, is a new tradition modeled after more religiously motivated Sacred Harp practices. However, both the old and the new tradition overlap through the convention system, which both allows "old masters" to spread traditional practices and lets "immigrants" more closely emulate the "old masters." All three roles, as shown in the three tiers of Sacred Harp performance in the Chesapeake Bay area, combine to form a local, regional, and national community.

Chapter VI: Performance as a Historical Archive

In the fall of 2004 at the end of a meeting with the weekly group in Baltimore, I began to discuss my impending thesis with the other participants. I mentioned to them that it seemed to me that, besides the sound of the music and the importance of community, part of the motivation for local singers lay in the oldness of shape-note singing and in a desire to preserve it. Because I was working at an archive, I said that Sacred Harp in its folkloric context was an archive consisting of performances. Although the other singers did not disagree with my central point, one person in particular, Bob, questioned my particular terminology and provided insights the following Thursday about the interaction between static representations and interactive performances.

So when we were talking last week I started talking about Sacred Harp as kind of a performing archive, and you seemed to not like that idea, and I was wondering why.

Oh, I don't dislike the idea. It hit me as you were talking that I believe there's a distinction between archiving an artistic performance in order to preserve the performance and preserving the actual art form. An art form has to be practiced, which means that its product is going to change. If something's alive, it grows, it changes. When you record a shape-note sing you are recording it and it will help people know what shape note singing sounds like, what it's supposed to sound like, but to me that's very different from a group of people who are regularly and consciously practicing that art and developing their own approach to it. So the change is in the doing of it.

Yeah, it was the term archive that I wondered about. We were talking about preserving arts, and in my mind I make a distinction between preserving a performance and preserving an art.

So what is the distinction?

A performance is a static thing. It's something that you can report on a CD in the case of music, and once it's recorded there it's not going to change. And if no one ever does it again, it will still be there. And that's good, that's

*valuable. But an art to me is something that's alive and almost by definition it's something that people do. If people aren't doing it, it's really not much of an art. Shape-note singing historically is a community effort, and it's about a community, and already I've discovered that different shape-note singing groups, even within the same city, are going to have different styles, different approaches, and you can almost see the beginnings, potentially, of different schools, different approaches, different styles...I've been involved off and on in various types of martial arts for quite a while. That too is a community where you learn to do something according to an overall outline, an overall structure, but then you develop your own approach. If you start teaching, that approach can be a recognizable style. Martial arts in the United States in particular has come to mix more and more and more, so you don't have distinct schools the way you did perhaps thirty years ago. But again it's a way of keeping the art alive. It changes, and you do have a community of people, and they do exchange various ideas and approaches. They get together occasionally and show each other their style. Sometimes different ideas come together and one will win, one will lose, sometimes they both survive, sometimes they merge. And that's just another way, another type of art, and another way that a community practices it in order to keep it alive. And I think that's what happens with shape-note singing, which I said by its nature is a community. I have yet to hear of any shape note group that doesn't involve people bringing food. Even if they don't meet in someone's home it's a very social occasion.*²⁶⁴

Bob made a crucial distinction between Sacred Harp as a musical practice and Sacred Harp as a social practice. For him, part of the appeal of Sacred Harp is that it is a historical tradition, but, like Lorenzo and Gladys, ultimately the value of Sacred Harp lies in its community. Particularly because of its juxtaposition with folklore societies, Sacred Harp is an effort of preservation, but not just of the tunes contained in the *Sacred Harp*. The social practices surrounding their performance are both what is being

²⁶⁴ Personal communication, 21 October 2004.

preserved and the vehicle by which Sacred Harp is transformed into an entirely new social practice, with its own traditions separate from those of its traditional counterpart. In order to understand the ways Sacred Harp performance has been transformed by singers in the Chesapeake Bay area, it is crucial to understand the relationship existing between current singers and both their historical and current traditional counterparts.

According to Bob and other Sacred Harp performers, Sacred Harp is maintained and preserved through active performance, not through static representations such as recordings. Although recordings play a crucial role in local performance practices, they serve as a way to expand repertoire and attract new converts, not as a vehicle for preservation. For local performers, Sacred Harp can only be preserved through active performance because much of its value for them lies in its social practices, which center on the re-creation of music. However, the tunebooks used by performers, such as the *Sacred Harp*, are ever-revised remnants from bygone historical eras. Sacred Harp performance is an interaction between these historical texts and current performers. Pauline Greenhill quotes Eleanor Long in describing four ways in which revivalists interact with traditional texts. The perserverator makes very few alterations to texts and performance practices: “.... This individual is actually motivated by a great respect for the integrity of a traditional text, and insists that it be faithfully reproduced.”²⁶⁵ The confabulator changes the performance in minor ways to make it better. The rationalizer uses other criteria to decide upon changes to the text: “A principal independent of the rationalizer’s feelings for the artistic quality of the song, such as a concept of morality in

²⁶⁵ Pauline Greenhill, “‘The Folk Process’ in the Revival: ‘Barrett’s Privateers’ and ‘Baratt’s Privateers’” in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 155.

the widest sense, figures in his or her decision to make a song part of an active performed repertoire, or to make changes in it.”²⁶⁶ Finally, the integrator not only uses the traditional texts but builds new texts or practices upon them.²⁶⁷

Folkloric Sacred Harp singers conceptualize their re-creations in a sphere somewhere close to that of the integrator. Local Sacred Harp singers have become integrators in the general scheme of Sacred Harp through many means. First, their compositions have been included in the latest revision of *The Sacred Harp*. Thus, folkloric performers have been canonized alongside their historic counterparts. Second, conventions and all-day singings outside the South are considered to be extensions of older ones. Conventions and all-day singings in the Chesapeake Bay area have been legitimized through the attendance of traditional singers, strengthening the integration of Chesapeake Bay area performers into the national community. Furthermore, they are included in the *Sacred Harp Singing Directory* alongside Southern conventions, thus making these new practices on the same level. However, Sacred Harp performance has been transformed in its folkloric context largely because of its different intentions, which Joan identified as, in her opinion, an important area of interest for possible scholars of Sacred Harp:

There's these two streams in Sacred Harp music now. One of them is the kind of Northern, folk-based [performance], really likes the music, really likes the democratic nature of it, the participatory singing groups of people. There's that piece and then there's the Southern piece which is extraordinarily traditional and very grounded in the Baptist church, and one of the things I think is really interesting, if I was doing what you're doing, is the issue

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

*for Sacred Harp if you talk to some of the Southern guys, is it survived all this time by holding on to a very rigid structure, well, a very traditional and very unchanging approach to the music and not a lot of new songs, I mean, there are new songs but not a vast number of new songs. It's a very stable thing and it allowed it to survive all this time, which is wonderful. And what they're concerned about is as you start allowing changes, you know, more new music, or different ways of thinking about leading, there's all kinds of changes that one could imagine, is that in some way going to dilute the tradition to the point that it won't be able to survive anymore. And there's an inherent tension there.*²⁶⁸

Sacred Harp singers in the North are being authentic to the tradition in the sense that their activities are closely modeled after Southern ones, yet their motivations are different. As Livingston suggests, singers wish to preserve Sacred Harp by being authentic, yet in the process its activities are altered.

Diana Taylor draws a distinction between archive and repertoire. Both she and Bob agree that an archive contains static, unchanging objects.

“Archival” memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change...What changes over time is the value, relevance, or meaning of the archive, how the items it contains get interpreted, even embodied.²⁶⁹

Sacred Harp performers in the Chesapeake Bay area have an archive which they utilize for knowledge, both through the texts containing the historical social practices of Sacred Harp and in the body of recordings that many use and create as a resource in learning new literature.

²⁶⁸ Personal communication, 11 March 2004.

²⁶⁹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

However, a repertoire marks a different way of encapsulating knowledge. It is done through performance, which is more easily contested than the static objects in a repertoire. Because a repertoire is acted out, it is constantly changing:

The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by “being there,” being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same...Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it. But that does not mean that performance – as ritualized, formalized, or reiterative behavior – disappears. Performances also replicate themselves through their structures and codes....Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next.²⁷⁰

Embodied knowledge, that which is passed on through the repertoire, is acted out through what Taylor calls a scenario, which is a unit comparable to that of a text in an archive. First, the scenario has a physical location, which Taylor labels a scene.²⁷¹ Second, scenarios contain actors, who at the same time act as themselves and as the character they portray. According to Taylor, there is very often a tension between the presence of the actor and the role of the character.²⁷² Third, scenarios have a set frame, which can be contested in performance:

Scenarios, by encapsulating both the setup and the action/behaviors, are formulaic structures that predispose certain outcomes and yet allow for reversal, parody, and change. The frame is basically fixed and, as such, repeatable and transferable. Scenarios may consciously reference each other by the way they frame the situation

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 20 – 21.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 29.

²⁷² Ibid.

and quote words and gestures. They may often appear stereotypical, with situations and characters frozen within them.²⁷³

Fourth, scenarios usually transmit knowledge using a variety of techniques, which can use materials from the archive as well as a variety of enactive procedures.²⁷⁴ Fifth, a scenario “forces us to situate ourselves in relationship to it, as participants, spectators, or witnesses, we need to ‘be there,’ part of the act of transfer. Thus, the scenario precludes a certain kind of distancing.”²⁷⁵ Last, scenarios do not merely copy previous ones, but are based upon past precedence.²⁷⁶

While Sacred Harp singers in the Chesapeake Bay area use materials from the archive, such as books and recordings, they participate in the tradition through a repertoire of musical activities. Indeed, the musical performances are the sole basis of the formation of the community, which are given importance to its members because of the people that constitute the community. As Bob suggests, the knowledge that is being transmitted through the repertoire has more to do with these social activities than with musical artifacts. Although my informants implied that the historical preservation element of Sacred Harp performance was secondary to its social aspects, Bob clearly states that the present community of singers is based upon a historical one. Thus, singers must engage with a conception of history when they participate in the Sacred Harp community. In essence, the past is viewed as occurring simultaneously with the present and, thus, the construction of the past is heavily colored by present motivations and

²⁷³ Ibid., 31.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 32.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

activities. However, the context must by necessity create subtle changes in the tradition itself, as described by one of my informants.

According to Johannes Fabian, history was not always shaped by a linear construction of time.²⁷⁷ In the medieval period, a radically different conception of existed through units marked by significant chronological events. “Time was thought, but more often celebrated, as a sequence of specific events that befall a chosen people. Much has been said about the linear character of that conception, as opposed to pagan, cyclical views of Time as an *eternal retour*.”²⁷⁸ Fabian called this Messianic time, which is conceived spatially; chronological events exist in relationship to the person marking them. To the observer, time stretches with events appearing as objects on the horizon. Events in time that are farther away appear to be equidistant to closer events, depending upon the immediacy of their connection to the viewer.²⁷⁹ According to Fabian, the conception of time changed with scientific progress and the secularization of knowledge.²⁸⁰ Evolution became a key idea in popular discourse and thus time was conceived in a strict chronology: equal temporal units mark the passage of time, so its observation is no longer unique to its observer. Events that occurred long ago have a much greater separation from the observer than events occurring recently.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ In *Time and the Other*, Fabian is describing the way ethnographic texts portray current cultures as existing in an earlier age. However, his theories are applicable when confronting history as well. For instance, in *Music and Renaissance Magic: Towards a Historiography of Others*, Gary Tomlinson describes how constructions of history are both shaped by current conceptions and distanced from present readers [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993].

²⁷⁸ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 2.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 – 4.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

Fabian's notion of Messianic time as marked by events that are imagined spatially has great significance in understanding the imagined link between the historical Sacred Harp community and the contemporary one in the Chesapeake Bay area. According to Benedict Anderson, many communities are too large for each member to know one another through direct observation. Since the members of the group do not have direct physical knowledge of each other, the outer bounds of the community are shaped in the minds of its members.²⁸² However, the community must have something that links its members together in their imagination. Anderson said that such a link could be provided thorough printed media, or, more specifically, newspapers. In his discussion of the origin of nationhood in Latin America, Anderson said that many ports received the same or similar newspapers every day. The people living in these ports did not necessarily have much direct contact with each other, but newspapers formed a link for an intra-port community because everyone read the newspapers at approximately the same point in their morning routine. The link that bound the community together was formed not only by information, but also through a shared activity. People living at one port could imagine that the lives of the people at another port were similar based on daily routines.²⁸³ The simultaneity of the activity created a bond between the different parts of the community.

Anderson's description of the formation of community through activity aligns closely with a collection of Taylor's scenarios. Each instance of newspaper reading has a

²⁸¹ Ibid., 11.

²⁸² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

²⁸³ Ibid., 63.

particular time and place with a specific person. However, these people are not merely automatons. Each utilizes newspaper reading in a different way. However, the shared activity of newspaper reading helps create a community.

Similarly, scenarios describe individual performances of Sacred Harp in the Chesapeake Bay area that both reenact and transform historical ones. The process of building community described by Anderson also occurs in the community of Sacred Harp singers, except that members of the community extend not only through contemporary performance, but also through history. Sacred Harp singing involves a shared activity, namely, that of performing the tunes in the *Sacred Harp* through scenarios. The activity, whether historical or contemporary, has the same general outline, shaped by the guidelines of the hymnbook itself as well as by the precedents established in colonial singing-schools. All meetings, regardless of size, have the same general format, corresponding to Taylor's idea of the scene.²⁸⁴ The actors are the singers themselves. The frame is the set of procedures that guide a meeting, i.e., singing led by alternating leaders, a potluck meal, and another session of singing. The knowledge transmitted through the scenario of Sacred Harp performance consists of the unit of songs that are performed. This is based upon historical precedent, since the texts come from a historical document, but the actual repertoire of individual local groups is not necessarily the same as historical ones and thus also represents a transformation. The activity of Sacred Harp performance forms a powerful link between the disparate sections of the Sacred Harp community because each group utilizes the same scene and frame. The link between traditional and folkloric singers is strengthened by attendance at conventions, as

²⁸⁴ In the case of Sacred Harp in the Chesapeake Bay area, the scene, or the physical location, consists of the hollow square format used to arrange the singers of each part.

facilitated by Hugh McGraw, but a link with the past is formed as well. Just as the newspaper reader in Anderson's description of nationalism in Latin America imagined people at other ports in their own image because of an imagined shared daily routine, Sacred Harp singers imagine singers of the past in their own image based on shared singing activities.

The conception of a shared community between past and present is further strengthened by Fabian's description of Messianic time. If time is seen as being spatialized, then events in the distant past can seem to be as close as events in the recent past. Thus, a historical community that existed one or two hundred years ago is only as conceptually distant as their modern counterparts following traditional practices. Both are removed from singers in the Chesapeake Bay area, but, where contemporary traditional singers are seen as being only slightly temporally separated from local singers, singers from the past are seen as being only as far removed as the modern Southern singers.

By conceiving historical singers as part of their community, contemporary Northern singers are also shaping their conceptions of the history of Sacred Harp itself. According to Mario Valdés, time in literary history is conceived of as simultaneity of the past, present, and future.

The continuity of meaningfulness for human action is more than a supposition which must stand behind the event, it is also the inner current of history and of the human experience of time itself. Human time is not a mere serial consecution; it is organized into past, present, and future, and this consciousness of time is only possible because human agents as performers and the observers are in time.²⁸⁵

History is not made up of mere facts in an ordered timeline; instead, it is given meaning by its observers and, in the process, history is made to be “human” through supposed links between the people observing history and the people populating history. According to Linda Hutcheon, such narratives of history give legitimacy and continuity to contemporary traditions.²⁸⁶ Performance gives an especially powerful tool for humanizing historical events.

While historical meaning is prefigured in the actions of historical agents, the agents themselves cannot foresee it, because human actions have consequences that extend beyond the purview of those who perform them....Human actions have intentions both conscious and unconscious, and that may be frustrated by contingent factors that are both knowable and unknowable. It is for this reason that narrative is necessary for the representation of “what actually happened” in a given domain of historical occurrence. A scientific historiography of the sort envisioned by the annalists, which deals in large-scale physical and social, anonymous forces, is not so much wrong as simply limited to telling only a part of the story of human beings at grips with the individual and collective destinies. It produces the historiographical equivalent of dehumanized drama that is all scene and no actors, or a novel that is all theme but lacking in characters.²⁸⁷

Historical characters are necessary in order to understand the human forces that shape events in history. However, it is necessary to reimagine history instead of using the dialogue of people in history because contemporary observers know what happened after the historical event. Because contemporary observers cannot put themselves into the

²⁸⁵ Mario Valdés, “Rethinking the History of Literary History” in *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.

²⁸⁶ Linda Hutcheon, “Rethinking the National Model,” in *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

²⁸⁷ Valdés, 78.

minds of the historical characters, they must use their own lives and experiences as models for conceiving the past. Performance provides an especially powerful tool for reimagining the past because the shared scene and frame of the scenario creates an imagined link between past and present performers.

In *The Radical in Performance*, Baz Kershaw provides a way to examine the mechanisms by which the past is recreated through performance. He introduces the concept of doubled memory:

I want to suggest that all performance depends on the *doubling of memory*, on memory *in* and *of* performance, for its character of uniqueness. Or to put this differently, exactly *how* performance plays with the doubled past is what gives it its particular nostalgic resonance, or sense of veracity, or ironic distance or radical edge in the present. Exactly how the past is doubled through performance therefore determines the kinds of access performance has to 'history'.²⁸⁸

Kershaw explains that history derives its veracity in performance from how well people from the past are reimagined by current performers. Erving Goffman's ideas of frames, which are somewhat different from that of Taylor, can be useful in analyzing this process. Frames shape the meaning of activities both for the performer and for the observer.²⁸⁹ The primary frame depends on the original interpretation of an activity.²⁹⁰ Social frameworks are seen as being controlled by human agency, while natural frameworks are

²⁸⁸ Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999), 174.

²⁸⁹ Victor Turner offers a similar definition of frames: "By 'frame' I refer to that often invisible boundary...around activity which defines participants, their roles, the 'sense' or 'meaning' ascribed to those things included within the boundary, and the elements within the environment of the activity....which are declared to be 'outside' and irrelevant to it." *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), 54.

²⁹⁰ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 21.

directed by forces outside human control.²⁹¹ More than one level of framing can operate simultaneously - activities can be “keyed” into a different frame. The keyings are seen as being separated from regular experience and are thus given different meanings.²⁹²

Goffman describes basic keys such as make-believe, daydreaming, dramatic scriptings, contests, ceremonials, technical readings, and psychotherapy.²⁹³ The activities in these keyings may be the same as those presented in the primary framework, but their meaning changes. For instance, two dogs may bite and tussle with each other, but in the primary framework such actions are considered to be fighting, while in a keying such actions are play. The meaning of the actions can be interpreted either as aggression or as playfulness depending upon the frame.²⁹⁴

Kershaw’s doubled memory can be explained as a kind of simultaneous primary framework and keying. According to Kershaw, in a historical reenactment (or reimagining) the actor is in effect two things at once: his or her self and the historical figure. As himself or herself, the actor retains all his or her original memories. However, while playing a historical character, the actor must create the memory of events surrounding that historical character. The first is “memory *of* performance” while the second is “memory *in* performance.”²⁹⁵ The actor, as himself or herself, exists in a primary framework, but when the actor is playing a character, his or actions have a

²⁹¹ Ibid., 22 – 24.

²⁹² Ibid., 45 – 46.

²⁹³ Ibid., 48 – 73.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 40 – 46.

²⁹⁵ Kershaw, 174.

different level of meaning and thus exist as a key. Moreover, the primary framework and key exist in the actor's mind. He or she creates the situation in which actions take on different levels of meaning. Memory itself is both a primary framework and a key.

Turner labels the process *flow* and considers it to be quite reflexive for the performer:

Flow is made possible by a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field, by means of framing, bracketing, and usually a set of rules. In flow, there is a loss of ego, the "self" that normally acts as broker between ego and alter becomes irrelevant....Reflexivity must be an arrest of the flow process, a throwing of it back against itself; framing procedures make this possible. The rejected ego is suddenly remanifested. In reflexivity one is at once one's subject and direct object, not only in a cognitive way, but also existentially. Or one might say, ransacking the terminology of depth-psychology, that the deepest reflexivity is to confront one's conscious with one's unconscious self.²⁹⁶

In Turner's formulation, the ego correlates with the primary framework, or the memory of performance, while the unconscious self is similar to the keying, or the memory in performance.

Local Sacred Harp performers also share this kind of doubled memory; however, their performances have a significant difference. While Sacred Harp singers interact with a historical tradition, they are not creating specific historical characters. The performers Kershaw describes transform themselves into historical personages by taking on the memories supposedly associated with these characters, but Sacred Harp singers must take on the memories associated with a generic past of Sacred Harp. The relationship between the primary framework and the key are further complicated because the lines between the two are not distinctly drawn. Singers are always themselves; they do not imagine that they take on the attributes of another character. Thus, they do not entirely leave the

²⁹⁶ Turner, 54 – 55.

primary key as Kershaw envisions it. However, the singers see their performances as part of a historical tradition, and so the singing is delineated from normal, everyday experience. The singers partially enter a keyed framework, but they never entirely leave the primary framework.

Kershaw describes the space between the primary framework and the key as a kind of liminal space occupied by the performers.

So the paradox of doubled memory indicates another type of liminal-liminoid zone, a threshold between past and present through which audience and performers together might explore the potential for radical freedom in the future.²⁹⁷

Kershaw draws upon Victor Turner's analyses of ritual to create his idea of liminal and liminoid in performance. According to Turner, a liminal space is opened up during the performance of rituals.

Rituals *separated* specified members of a group from everyday life, *placed them in a limbo* that was not any place they were in before and not yet any place they would be in, then *returned* them, changed in some way, to mundane life.²⁹⁸

The concept of liminality clearly functions in Kershaw's description of historical reenactments. The performer occupies two different personhoods at the same time: that of himself or herself and that of the character. Thus, the actor is in limbo between two different states and categories of memory and the audience is in a state of liminality as well because they are experiencing doubled memory along with the performer. In Sacred Harp performance in the Chesapeake Bay area, singers are both taking on historical roles

²⁹⁷ Kershaw, 167.

²⁹⁸ Victor Turner, "Images and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, Carnival, Film, and Spectacle in Cultural Performance," in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 25.

through their performance of historical repertoire and they are themselves as well.

Singers such as Lorenzo described the transformational qualities of performance with his description of the spiritual qualities of Sacred Harp:

The spirituality that I draw from Sacred Harp, it's of the same quality as the spirituality that I listen and connect with when I listen or sing a piece by Beethoven. It doesn't necessarily have to do with the text –

More with the music itself.

More with the experience of connecting with a tradition, with the harmonies, with the sense of community, with the way that it sounds.²⁹⁹

Similarly, Joan described loosely described the process of liminality that happens for her when attending conventions:

One of the reasons I really like Sacred Harp is I find it intensely cathartic to sing in a convention. I mean, singing here is fun but it's not like that. You do nothing but sing really fast for six hours, it like wipes the rest of your brain. And that's like really, if you have a really intense life, you know, that's a really good thing to have happen to you.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Personal communication, 13 February 2005. Tim Eriksen, a Sacred Harp performer that Lorenzo identified as an influence in seeking out local performers, described a similar process in an interview posted on his website: "I've always felt this kind of presence of all of the things that went into the making of a moment, and I won't say I have the sense of all of them, but I've always had the sense that there were things, so that walking down the street, I get these little flashes of 'man, this street has been here for however long, and all these people in any given moment in time, there's all these things going on, this house, there's people that lived in here in the 1920s and things were so different then, these floors were here then, there were guys in here sanding the floors' and I've for some reason or another felt those kind of thoughts in anything that I've done, and in music I feel that way too. When you listen to Britney Spears on the radio for example, it's in some ways very contemporary and all that, but they're playing instruments that have these very ancient histories, guitars and drums and things, and she's doing these little vocal things, all of these elements, all the elements of our life have precedent and history, and so when I come to a song that is more explicitly historical, maybe there's more of that than there is in some other songs, but I feel that way too when I sing rock songs that I've made up, either because of associations I have with them, I don't think it's just a wistfulness or a romanticism, but I feel in all the music that I do some kind of presence of the past, almost everything that we know is the past in any given moment, and so I think that even when I do newer songs, maybe some of that kind of feeling is there." Tim Eriksen, "Messing with Music: Tim Eriksen, Minneapolis Musician," (Accessed 19 April 2005), <<http://www.timeriksen.net/interview.html>>.

³⁰⁰ Personal communication, 11 March 2004.

In the liminal community formed at a convention, Joan was temporarily transported from her everyday life, existed in an in-between state during the course of singing, and then returned to her life refreshed. Lorenzo also described a similar process when he identified one of the sources of his active participation in Sacred Harp in the fact that, although traveling to many different local meetings takes a great deal of his time, the act of singing was rejuvenating. For him, part of the rejuvenation process lay in connecting with the tradition of Sacred Harp enacted at local meetings.

Through performance, Northern Sacred Harp singers interact with history. They do this by imagining themselves as part of a shared community both with past Sacred Harp singers and with their modern southern counterparts. Moreover, through reenactment, the singers conceive a link between past and present through shared characteristics. The history of Sacred Harp serves to legitimize the narratives of current Sacred Harp singers,³⁰¹ but history is reimagined by local performers. However, in this remaking of the past, certain attributes of the tradition must be manipulated and changed. According to local singers, such as Joan, the community in the Chesapeake Bay area has a slightly different overall profile its traditional counterpart. Some of the differences lie in the reencapsulization of Sacred Harp as a folk genre. Northern singers realize that they have changed the tradition from its historical performance practices. The entire process of change fits in with the reencapsulization of the tradition as folk music rather than religious music. Folklore and folk music societies not only perform historical American traditions, but they also take an academic approach and study them. When folklore societies take it as an object and perform it, they introduce their own musical heritages

³⁰¹ Hutcheon, 7.

into the performance. However, singers in the Chesapeake Bay area also see themselves as part of a community with traditional ones because they share the same system of conventions and small local meetings. Local singers are both fully a part of the Sacred Harp tradition and separate from it.

As Bob suggested in his interview, Sacred Harp in the Chesapeake Bay area, while frequently using “archival” objects, such as CD recordings, are in fact engaging with and preserving social practices. However, these practices have a slightly different intention for local singers because Sacred Harp has a strong tie with folklore societies, thus making it necessary for singers to interact with history on some level. While singers say that such an engagement is not always a primary motivation for pursuing Sacred Harp, it is necessary on some levels because of its encapsulation within folklore societies and in the revival movement in general. However, the history of Sacred Harp is not static because singers encounter it on a physical level, embodying it through their performances. Because of this, traditional practices are necessarily changed into new ones, although the two together make up one overall interacting community.

Chapter VII: Summary and Conclusions

Sacred Harp singing has a long history in the United States. Its immediate predecessor was the practice of “lining out” hymns in colonial churches; singing schools were designed to correct the poor ensemble singing that resulted from such practices. Singing-school masters, inspired by local ministers in New England, taught congregation members to read music, making lining out unnecessary. In the process, they composed their tunes, using forms such as the hymn tune, fusing tune, and anthem. In the nineteenth century, camp-meeting songs were added to these forms. In the process of teaching their compositions, colonial singing-school masters such as Andrew Law, William Little, and William Smith developed a notational system that aligned with the solfège syllables used in sight-singing, giving each separate syllable a differently shaped notehead. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Jesse Aiken expanded the earlier system of four shapes to seven. By the early part of the nineteenth century, singing schools had fallen out of fashion due in part to the activities of Lowell Mason and his brother Timothy; the center of shape-note singing changed from the urban north to sections of the West such as Cincinnati (a center of shape-note publishing) to conservative churches in rural sections of the South. The practice of shape-note singing remained there until the beginning part of the twentieth century, when it was discovered by folklorists and later was popularized even more by the recording activities of Alan Lomax. The tradition was taken as a symbol of American, and even more specifically Southern identity and was performed by folklore societies based upon its value as an indigenous American performance art.

After recordings made Sacred Harp visible to interested parties outside of its context in the South, the network of activities was expanded to include new areas, particularly through the convention system established in the nineteenth century. Sacred Harp continues to expand and attract new members. In the Chesapeake Bay area, many new performers first develop an interest in Sacred Harp through exposure to recordings, including those made by Alan Lomax, and are attracted to the musical sound of Sacred Harp. Even after they have become actively involved in performance, participants still use recordings, whether commercial or homemade, to expand their knowledge of the repertoire. One singer in the Chesapeake Bay area, Katie, even distributes compilation recordings to new singers so that they can become indoctrinated at an accelerated pace. The recordings that she distributes have left a strong mark on the repertoire of many of the local performers and groups in the Chesapeake Bay area.

After their first exposure through recordings and first attraction to the musical sound, some performers increase the amount of their participation due to their affection for the community of singers in the Chesapeake Bay area, which exists on three interconnected tiers. The first tier of community is that of local monthly, biweekly, and weekly meetings, such as the ones in Washington, DC and Baltimore. Although the participants in these groups may live relatively close to each other because of the meetings' local nature, each event only occurs periodically. The second tier of community exists on a regional, rather than a local, level and is formed by two mechanisms. The first is through attendance at regional conventions, of which there are several throughout the year. The second mechanism is those singers that travel to multiple local meetings each month, increasing the amount of face-to-face interaction

between singers and cementing the connections between local meetings. The third tier exists on an inter-regional level and occurs when singers travel to conventions and other events outside their home region. In the same way that connections between local groups are formed through conventions and through singers that travel to groups outside their local meeting, connections between regions are formed through singers that travel to conventions outside their region.

As singers in the Chesapeake Bay area move from smaller to greater levels of participation, they enact several different roles, using terminology borrowed from Mark Slobin. The tourist has the least permanent level of commitment to Sacred Harp. The role is characterized by “shopping around,” or moving between multiple activities to find one with the greatest level of attraction for the participant. Those singers who are undergoing initial exposure through recordings and other entranceways such as folklore societies are tourists because they are moving between different activities. Eventually, however, some singers decide that Sacred Harp fulfills them, either through its musical sound or its community of other singers, or both, and decide to center their attention upon it. These participants move into the second role described by Slobin, that of the immigrant. Immigrants have a much stronger desire to become involved in the community of singers by attending larger numbers of conventions and local meetings and try to learn a larger portion of the total repertoire, sometimes, ironically enough, through collecting recordings. Immigrants sometimes also try to align themselves more closely with traditional Sacred Harp practices by seeking out those enacting the third role, the old master. Old masters are “natives” to the tradition, who become the authorities both on repertoire and on performance practices. The movement between roles is aided by the

three tiers of community. Tourists frequently participate in the first tier because of the smaller time commitment in traveling to local events and the relative infrequency that they occur. Tourists may also participate in the second tier, particularly in attending conventions. Immigrants interact on the first, second, and sometimes third tier by attending multiple local meetings, regional conventions, and, for a few, intra-regional conventions. These largest conventions also afford an opportunity to engage with old masters, of which there are only a small number in the Chesapeake Bay area.

Although singers usually are attracted to Sacred Harp because of its musical sound and the members of its community, participants in the Chesapeake Bay area must confront Sacred Harp's history, particularly because several local groups are sponsored by folklore societies, which have the express purpose of preserving historical forms. I have found that singers interact with historical precedent on an intimate level when performing Sacred Harp. The Chesapeake Bay area community gained legitimacy through its attention to traditional and historical practice and expanded its conception of community to include historical singers. The devices that bind the community together are, first, the common repertoire from the *Sacred Harp*, and two, the social practices at meetings, such as singing in the formation of a hollow square, beating time, and having potluck meals. All of these things contribute to the format of what Diana Taylor calls a scenario, which are a crucial part of engaging with history through a repertoire. Taylor makes a distinction between knowledge present in the archive, which consists of static objects, and the repertoire, which is made up of embodied knowledge repeated through individual scenarios. Since the repertoire is contained in practices rather than in static

objects, it can be transformed while still conforming to the general outline of the scenario.

The process of interacting with historical knowledge through the repertoire is used by Sacred Harp singers in the Chesapeake Bay area. Performers share the same outline of scenarios as both current singers in other regions and with historical singers. This allows singers in the Chesapeake Bay area to imagine themselves as part of a community that includes both singers from other regions and historical participants as well. Once historical singers were accepted into the national Sacred Harp community, they were reimagined through the lens of current performance practices with the image and motives of current Sacred Harp singers. Conversely, historical singers added legitimacy to folkloric singers. This was accomplished through the process of doubled memory, in which the singer exists both as himself and herself and in the role of a historic figure, and the subsequent reframing that happens during the combination of the two roles in performance. The liminality achieved through this process enabled singers to achieve a transformation and rejuvenation, but they change the tradition itself through its reenactment. Even though modern Sacred Harp singers interact with history through performance, the performance never quite is the same as its historical counterpart.

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