From an interview conducted by Tina Becker in October 2008 regarding the origins of the Epworth Old Harp singings in Knoxville, Tennessee

_Tina:_ How did you get into shape note singing, and how did the Epworth singings begin?

_Gideon:_ It started in 1969 when the Epworth Methodist Church on Highland and 16th Street went out of business as a Methodist parish. Epworth was a town in England where John Wesley was born. His father was the Anglican priest at the Epworth church. The building there was built in the first years of the 20th century. Methodist churches sprang up like wild onions. By the 1960’s there were 60 of them in Knox County. Fort Sanders Presbyterian Church, which is now the Laurel Theatre, went out of business about four years before the Methodist Church on Highland did. They had leased their property to the Catholics while the John XXIII Center was being built on campus, so there was a Catholic connection, too.

_Condition on page 3_
A Word from the Board President

Current Board members for Friends of the New Harp of Columbia are: Kathleen Mavournin, President; Robin Goddard, Vice President; Joe Sarten, Treasurer; Ann Strange, Secretary; David Sarten; Claudia Dean; and Chaz Barber. Our focus is to support the groups that sing from *The New Harp of Columbia* and facilitate communication between them. We don’t, as a rule, sponsor singings; we publish this newsletter, maintain the OldHarp.org website, hold singing schools, sell *The New Harp of Columbia* tune-book and recordings of the music, and work with UT Press to keep the book in print. The board meets approximately quarterly, often just before a 2nd Sunday singing at the Laurel Theatre but also in conjunction with singings in other locations. Some board members will rotate off the board in June and we’d like to hear of people interested in taking a turn as a board member. Terms are for three years. If you are willing to serve or would like to nominate someone to serve, please notify Kathleen Mavournin [865-691-9506 or kmav@icx.net] between now and the end of March.

We have not yet scheduled a date for the annual meeting. It will be announced later. Everyone is invited. There are no dues or other formalities required to become one of the Friends of the NHC, and no responsibilities. Just show up and tell us what you think. We will be especially interested this year in ideas about additions or changes to our book as we look toward another reprinting in the near future.

Kathleen Mavournin

See Page 9 for the Treasurer’s Report and information on donations.
To be added to the listserv to receive information about singings each month, contact chris.stoddart@gmail.com or 865-470-9181
The Presbyterians donated a church, the Episcopalians donated Bill Daniels, and the Methodists donated a church and Renfro Sproul. These were the assets that went together to make up the Epworth ministry. Renfro Sproul was an Emory graduate, who got his Masters of Divinity from Vanderbilt, and for his thesis wrote an urban church plan, a protocol for the church that would fit the age. The Epworth ministry had these assets: two old churches and a bunch of old houses that were ready for use. It started a number of things, because it had the space. It was a locale for Marge Gregg, a fabric artist and a member of the Glenmary Sisters out of Cincinnati, and others of those ex-nuns had roles at Epworth ministry. The ministry started several existing institutions like the Laurel High School, the Methadone Clinic, and the Community Design Center. It was an alternative to tearing down a building and turning it into a parking lot. The building on Highland and 16th still stands, but the Methodists pulled out of Epworth ministry in 1976 and sold that building to a charismatic group called Christ's Chapel which is still there today. The Laurel Theatre, which is maintained by Jubilee Community Arts, is a performing arts locale.

**Tina:** Why do we get to sing at such a nice place as the Laurel Theatre?

**Gideon:** The programs and activities that got started under the aegis of the Epworth ministry sort of assumed they were included in the property, so the Harp Singers were considered one of the long time programs or assets, therefore, it ought to be accommodated, like the dance groups.

**Tina:** Why is there such a variety, do you think, of people that like to sing this music and enjoy each others' company?

**Gideon:** For the re-discovery of “roots.” See, we became a group at the time of the Bicentennial so we were invited or showed up at those kinds of celebrations because we were singing historical music, and for a period of years this is what we did. You could have considered us a performing group at this time and the people were intrigued by the method. In the beginning, it helped that we had people who were not familiar with the music and we had people who couldn’t sing, but it helped them to sing. I don’t have much of a musical background, but I was able to learn it, and I like the sound it produces.

**Tina:** How long did you sing with Helen Hutchinson?

**Gideon:** We sang from 1973, when the Epworth Old Harp Singers started, until her death in 1985. It started under John McCutcheon’s leadership. He was here on his personal mission to learn the music of Appalachia. An unpaid song leader at Epworth, he ranged widely in the area listening to, and performing himself. He could play anything on strings, autoharp, banjo, guitar, etc. He had attended singings in NC, using the Christian Harmony book, and we even purchased copies of that book to use. We went to these local Tennessee sings, and it was done in the New Harp of Columbia, so we were out of step there if we didn’t use that book. The singings we went to were at Headrick Chapel in Wears Valley and maybe a half a dozen annual singings that were held at local churches such as one in Anderson County in Jonesville and one in Greene County. The signature singing was the one at Wears Valley Missionary Baptist Church. That singing goes back to about 1920. It was held for three years at Wears Valley School. Then it moved from there to
the church building that was brought in from the National Park and built there at its present site, or re-built there, Valley View Baptist Church.

Tina: So you were already meeting at the Laurel Theatre when it caught on fire Aug. 13th, 1982, and moved the singing to Helen Hutchinson's home. How long did it take to re-build the Laurel Theater?

Gideon: It was out of service about two or three years. It was ready for use in 1985.

Tina: What was the Smathers Family String Band's influence on bringing shape note singing to this area?

Gideon: The Jubilee Festival started about 1970. Bill Daniels, the Episcopal anchor of the Epworth ministry, got a little money to pay for individual musicians and bands to perform at the Laurel Theatre which was the beginning of the present Jubilee Community Arts and money from the National Endowment for the Arts to put on these festivals. Bill would get performers to come on Friday and Saturday nights and then on Sunday mornings there would be gospel groups. The Smathers Family came for the Friday/Saturday music program and was there on Sunday to sing from the Christian Harmony book. They passed around books and we had a chance to experience the phenomenon and decided to get a group together to do it. We met at Kathleen Mavournin’s home.

Tina: What about John McCutcheon’s influence?

Gideon: John would do two or three performances for a typical Jubilee Festival, one solo, and then with a band. John is a talented performer and did this for a living. His initial repertoire was the protest songs of the 1960’s. He was a part of the folk movement when black lung was a social issue and union songs and protest songs were popular.
### THE NEW HARP OF COLUMBIA - 2009 CALENDAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>POTLUCK?</th>
<th>INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 15</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Knoxville Dance Festival, Laurel High School across from Laurel Theatre, Knoxville</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>6:15 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Jubilee Festival, Laurel Theatre, Knoxville</td>
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<td>March 21</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SINGING SCHOOL</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 22</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Epworth Old Harp Singers Annual Singing, Laurel Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Oldhams Creek Missionary Baptist Church (end of Kings Branch Rd), Sevier County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 12</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>5:30 PM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Easter Singing, Gooch-Mabbs Residence, 4401 Alta Vista Way, Knoxville</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 26</td>
<td>Sunday (4)</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Tuckaleechee Methodist Church Singing, Townsend</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Spring Festival, Townsend Visitor Center, Townsend, TN</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 3</td>
<td>Sunday (1)</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Middle Creek United Methodist Church, Sevierville</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 17</td>
<td>Sunday (3)</td>
<td>2:30 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Old College Singing at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Athens, TN</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 6</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Franklin Singing at New Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Greene County</td>
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<td>June 28</td>
<td>Sunday (4)</td>
<td>NOON</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church Singing, Sevier County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 16</td>
<td>Sunday (3)</td>
<td>2:30 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Cades Cove Missionary Baptist Church Singing, Great Smoky Mtns. National Park</td>
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<td>Sept. 6</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wears Valley Methodist Church Singing, (Wears Valley Rd.), Sevier County</td>
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<td>Sept. TBA</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>6:30 PM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Music of Appalachia class from the University of Tennessee, Laurel Theatre, Knoxville (call to confirm)</td>
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<td>Sept. 19</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Pittman Center Singing (above Gatlinburg)</td>
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<td>Sunday (4)</td>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Headrick Chapel Singing, (Wears Valley Rd.), Sevier County</td>
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<td>Oct. 4</td>
<td>Sunday (1)</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Valley View Baptist Church, (Wears Valley Rd.), Sevier County</td>
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<td>Oct. 10</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>11:00 to 11:30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Pumpkin Town Festival, Athens, TN (call to confirm)</td>
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<td>Oct. 18</td>
<td>Sunday (3)</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Dollywood Singing presentation, Pigeon Forge (call to confirm)</td>
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<td>Oct. 25</td>
<td>Sunday (4)</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Maryville College Singing, Maryville</td>
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<td>Oct. 31</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Johnson City Singing, Sycamore Shoals State Park, Elizabethton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 25</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>6:30 PM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Eve Potluck &amp; Old Harp Singing, Laurel Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 6</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>2:30 PM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Christmas Singing at Kathy Jones’ home, Karns (Note time change)</td>
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<td>Dec. 12</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>9:30 AM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sugarlands Singing, Sugarlands Visitors Center, Great Smoky Mountains National Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 10, 2010</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wilderness Wildlife Week Singing, Pigeon Forge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. TBA</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>12:00-4:00</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Larry O Annual Memorial Potluck &amp; Singing, Laurel Theatre</td>
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</table>

*If you are interested in riding a bus to the singings, please contact Al Wishart at (865) 696-7125 a few days in advance.*
Knox County, The
Epworth Old Harp Singers

MONTHLY: Second Sunday,
6:30 p.m., Laurel Theatre, Knoxville
February 8
May 10
June 14
July 12
August 9
September 13
October 11
November 8
December 13

KNOXVILLE DANCE WEEKEND SINGING — Sunday, February 15, 10:00 a.m. at Laurel High School, Knoxville.
  Contact: Ann Strange (865) 573-4468 or strange@esper.com.

JUBILEE FESTIVAL — FRIDAY PRESENTATION, March 20, 6:30 p.m.; SINGING SCHOOL Saturday, March 21, 9:30-4:00; ANNUAL EPWORTH OLD HARP SINGING Sunday, March 22, 10:00 a.m. with potluck at noon at the Laurel Theatre, Knoxville.
  Contact: Tina Becker (865) 982-7777 or loudsinger@gmail.com

EASTER SINGING — Sunday, April 12 Potluck at 5:30 p.m. at Bill Gooch and Meg Mabbs house at 4401 Alta Vista Way.
  Contact: Bill Gooch or Meg Mabbs at (865) 522-0515.

MUSIC OF APPALACHIA CLASS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE — September Date TBA, 6:30 p.m. at the Laurel Theatre, Knoxville.
  Contact: Tina Becker (865) 982-7777 or loudsinger@gmail.com

EPWORTH THANKSGIVING EVE SINGING — Wednesday, November 25, Potluck at 6:30 p.m.
  Contact: Gideon Fryer 24-3136 or Tina Becker (865) 982-7777 or loudsinger@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS SINGING AT KATHY JONES — Sunday, Dec. 6, 2:30 PM, 9121 Garrison Road.
  Contact: Call Kathy (865) 690-3906 or kej37931@comcast.net. (new time this year)

LARRY O ANNUAL MEMORIAL OLD HARP SINGING AND POTLUCK — Saturday, January Date TBA, 2009, Noon, at the Laurel Theatre, Knoxville.

SINGINGS ADDED TO THE CALENDAR IN 2008

January 15, Wilderness Wildlife Week, Pigeon Forge
April 24, Pigeon Forge Elementary School
June 13, Shannondale Retirement center, Maryville
July 5, Cora and Kirby Sweatt’s 50th wedding anniversary, Athens
July 19, Wedding of Jeremy and Sarah Shipp, Kingsport
August 15, Benefit for TVUUC, the Valarium, Knoxville

After the horrible shooting event at the Knoxville Unitarian Universalist Church, many singers stood together at the Valarium to show their support.
Blount County, The Maryville Old Harp Singers

Monthly singings have been discontinued

Contact: Nancy Olsen at 983-7631 or Nan at 984-8585.

Cocke County, The Newport Old Harp Singers

Monthly singings have been discontinued

Contact: Judy Bryant at (423) 623-6811 or mtnmama2@earthlink.net

Greene County, The Franklin Old Harp Singers

MONTHLY: Last Sunday, 3:00 p.m., Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Greeneville
January 25
February 22
March 29
April 26
May 31
June 28
July 26
August 30
October 25
November 29
December 27

Spring Festival Singing, 75th Anniversary of the Smoky Mountain National Park — Saturday, May 2, Time TBA, Townsend Visitor Center, Townsend, TN
Contact: Robin Goddard at (865) 982-6148

Cades Cove Missionary Baptist Church Singing — Sunday, August 16, 2:30 p.m.
Contact: Robin Goddard at (865) 982-6148 or rlgodnard@aol.com or Tom and Nan Taylor at (865) 984-8585.

Maryville College Singing — Sunday, October 26, 2:00 p.m.
Contact: Nancy Olsen at 983-7631 or bryne_olsen@yahoo.com or Tom Taylor at (865) 984-8585 or TTaylor706@aol.com.

GreenEvil/FRANKLIN OLD HARP SINGING — Saturday, June 6, 10:00 A.M. at New Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church,
Contact Jeff Farr at (423) 620-8267 or Summersfarr@embarqmail.com
Mcminn County, The
Old College Harp Singers
MONTHLY: Third Tuesday,
7:00 p.m., St. Paul’s Episcopal Church,
Athens
January 20
February 17
March 17
April 21
May 19
June 16
July 21
August 18
September 15
October 20
November 17
December 15

Old College Singing—Sunday, May 17, 2:30 P.M. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Athens
Contact Cora Sweatt at (423) 745-0248, or
Genevieve Wiggins at (423) 745-5322 or
drgewi@bellsouth.net

Pumpkin Town Festival—Saturday, October 10, 11:00 to 11:30 in Athens, TN
Contact: Cora Sweatt at (423) 745-0248,

Sevier County, The
Sevier Old Harp Singers
MONTHLY: Third Tuesday,
7:00 p.m., Middle Creek United Methodist Church, Pigeon Forge
January 20
February 17
March 17
April 21
May 19
June 16
July 21
August 18
September 15
October 20
November 17
December 15

Oldhams Creek Missionary Baptist Church Singing—Sunday, April 5, 2:00 P.M.
Contact: Hal Wilson at 436-2590 or Veta King at 428-1375, king2717@bellsouth.net

Middle Creek Methodist Church Singing—Sunday, May 3, 2:00 P.M., Sevierville
Contact David Sarten at (865) 428-0874 or D_Sarten@msn.com

Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church Singing—Sunday, June 28, Potluck at noon, Sevierville
Contact Shirley Henry at (865) 453-5983 or Sharee Green at (865) 654-3557 or
auburnact@yahoo.com.

United Methodist Church Singing—Sunday, Sept. 6, 2 P.M., Wear’s Valley
Contact Bruce Wheeler at (865) 453-9328 or wwheele1@utk.edu

Headrick Chapel Singing—Sunday, September 27, 10 A.M., Wears Valley
Contact Ann Strange at (865) 573-4468 or strange@esper.com or David Sarten at (865) 428-0874 or D_Sarten@msn.com

Pumpkin Town Festival, Athens, 2008
OLD HARP SINGINGS - 2009

WEARS VALLEY SINGING AT VALLEY VIEW BAPTIST CHURCH SINGING—Sunday, October 4, 2:00 P.M. in Wear’s Valley.
   Contact: Dr. Bruce Wheeler (865) 453-9328, wwheele1@utk.edu or Paul Clabo (865) 453-5847.

DOLLYWOOD SINGING — Sunday, October 18, 2:00 P.M., Pigeon Forge
   Contact: David Sarten at (865) 428-0874 or D_Sarten@msn.com

SUGARLANDS VISITORS CENTER SINGING —
   Saturday, December 12, 9:30 A.M.
   Contact: Paul Clabo at (865) 453-5847

Carter County, The Old Fields Singers

ALL DAY SINGING AND DINNER ON THE GROUNDS (TWO-BOOK SINGING) — Saturday, October 31, 10:00 a.m., Sycamore Shoals State Park, Elizabethton
   Contact: Don Wiley at (423) 341-8893 or drw509@embarqmail.com

TREASURER’S REPORT

2008 was another good year for Friends of The New Harp of Columbia. Thanks to some very generous contributions, we ended the year on a positive note.

We had income as follows:
Donations $1,313.24
Book and CD Sales $1,293.00
Miscellaneous $75.92
**Total Income** $2,682.16

Expenses of:
Newsletter, Spring 2008 $490.58
Postage $209.17
Books $1,307.12
Headrick Chapel toilet and supplies $140.00
Miscellaneous $20.00
**Total Expenses** $2,166.87

With a total net income for the year of $515.29. Total assets, including book inventory, for the organization at the end of 2008 were $5,559.12

Joe Sarten, Treasurer

DONATIONS

The non-profit Friends of The New Harp of Columbia added a donation button to the www.oldharp.org website. This PayPal button will allow people to make a donation online using a credit card. While the Board believes this will be a convenient and valuable tool, it does not come without cost. PayPal (and other such companies) charge a handling fee. Since we are a non-profit, we get a reduced rate of $0.30 + 2.2% per donation. For a $10 donation, this would amount to $0.52. For a $100 donation, this would amount to $2.50. While the donor would be able to count the entire amount for tax purposes, the amount Friends receive will be reduced by the service charge. We hope that you take advantage of this convenience to make a donation. You can also still send checks made out to “Old Harp” mailed to 307 Lake Forest Dr., Knoxville, TN 37920.

THANK YOU!
I Survived Camp FASOLA
by Claudia Dean

Camp Fasola, “an old-fashioned summer camp for learning and singing Sacred Harp” was held at the end of June 2008 at Camp Lee on the outskirts of Anniston, Alabama. Singers came from 30 states, 2 Canadian provinces, and the U.K.

Camp Lee is a large and comfortable retreat/summer camp located on an old farmstead. There are two ponds and a small lake, an extensive network of dirt roads and paths through the woods and an old country church where we sang. I spent much of our limited free time walking in the woods, trying to replace do re mi with fa so la in my overloaded mind.

Camp Fasola is not laid back. Classes were tightly scheduled and included beginner classes on theory and leading, and more advanced classes on keying, composing, and leading, and also classes on the music of regional composers who wrote Sacred Harp music in the 20th century. Some of these contemporary songs are favorites and sung often, at least in this part of Alabama. All of the teachers were very competent but also personable, kind and extremely generous in their teaching.

Sacred Harp singing is different from Old Harp or Christian Harmony although we share many tunes. When I said I sang Old Harp and a little Christian Harmony, someone said in a stage whisper to her companions “Those folks don’t hold with fast singing.” And it is true that, while singing, I felt that I had been left at the station while a bullet train zoomed by. What these singers lack in shapes they make up in speed. They also accent beats of the measure which results in a precise, almost staccato sound. The hardest thing for me was beating 4/4 music in 2, so that the singers fire out the music while the leader’s arm dispassionately goes down...up. This style of leading is not animated; one does not tap one’s foot, rock, or lean into the beat.

The level of ability and musicianship among these singers is very high. The camp attracts dedicated and experienced singers, and, had I realized their level of competency, I would have been too intimidated to attend. However, I was introduced to more music to love and a great desire to improve my singing.

I Loved Camp DOREMI
by Robin Goddard

The second Camp Doremi was held August 7-10, 2008 but I was a newcomer. I had never sung from any book except The New Harp of Columbia and old hymnals, so seeing new shapes was confusing and I was not exactly sure what I had gotten myself into. I realized it didn’t matter, for someone in my section was always willing to help and keep me on track. When we chorded for the first song, it was a sound from the past of 60 voices, all dedicated to sharing their love of shaped note singing. It sounded as if the heavens had opened the doors and angels were helping me sing. I could just see smiles coming from all the people who were sitting up there remembering their lives on earth and

Continued on page 11
Camp DoReMi, Continued

the beautiful sounds from their singing schools. The sound from that first evening will be imprinted on me forever.

The history of shaped note singing was taught by John Hollingsworth. With his soft-spoken voice, he explained all the revisions that have taken place since the 1800’s in America. Finding myself needing confidence in leading a song, I again attended John’s leading class and found myself thinking about leading a song for the evening singing. As we spent the three days together as a family dedicated to keeping an American tradition alive, my heart continued to thump with anticipation on what would be introduced next. My moment was drawing closer to the Saturday evening sing. I found myself practicing the beat and my hand was constantly moving as my mind silently rehearsed the song I planned to lead.

The time had come and Jane called my name. With my knees shaking, I kept telling myself I could do this. I watched all the veteran members of the group, especially Robert Kelly and Michael Spencer. I remember, you just face the lead section and watch the hands on the front rows. Robert gave the pitch, we chorded, and sang. The sound from that moment is forever printed in my memory. This was an experience of faith, admiration and happiness. Yes, the heavens again had opened their doors and the sound of angles on Earth had taken over. As I looked around the square, I then realized that I had become a member of a very elite family who is preserving a tradition that will forever be shared.

This is our mission to pass onto the next generation.

A Short Course on Leading

(EDITOR’S NOTE: Chaz Barber is a long-time Old Harp singer and also is a choral director by profession. He spoke with and wishes to thank Claudia Dean, Virginia Douglas, Kathleen Mavournin, Ann Strange, and Paul Clabo for their input on this article. Also, Chaz will teach leading at the March Singing School.)

A big issue for some Old Harp singers is that many of us did not grow up in families or church traditions of Old Harp singing. As a traditionally-trained choral director, I would like to take a quick look at the two disciplines and suggest how those who would like to learn to lead or strengthen their leading could approach this task. Most importantly, simply affirm to yourself that when you get in the middle of the square to lead a song, you must lead. It’s an attitude and it requires at least some attention, including the tempo you want the song to go. That said, be gentle with yourself as you are learning, and the singers will be your enthusiastic supporters. The most basic leading requires the leader to keep a steady beat. It may feel awkward, but it will become easy as you learn to sense the movement. Leading takes practice, just as singing does.

You will also need to know the meter of a song. To determine the meter, or--time--of a song, look at the stacked numbers at the beginning of each song; they are called the time signature. Lesson III of Elements of Vocal Music in the front of The New Harp of Columbia

Continued on page 12
describes “three distinct kinds of time.” Metered music consists of a repetitive pattern of strong and weak beats. I will simplify and describe them as duple, triple and quadruple; that is, two-beat patterns, three-beat patterns, and four-beat patterns. The first beat of each pattern is down, then other beats must be either sideways or up in direction, so that you can go down again on the next strong beat. The strongest beat of each pattern needs to be a downward motion. Strong equals down. In all musical styles this is called the downbeat. Simply put, in duple meter your arm motion is down-up, down-up, etc. Triple meter is down-side-up, down-side-up, etc., (some call it a triangle beat pattern) and quadruple meter is down-side-side-up, down-side-side-up, etc.

Notice that not all songs begin with a strong beat, so you will need to decide whether to begin with upward or downward movement. A few well-known songs can clarify this point: No. 14 Mear begins one beat prior to a barline, so the first beat is up; the first downbeat is on the word “God’s.” No. 53 Dundee also begins on an upbeat. No. 115 Northfield begins on a downbeat.

There are three more things I will ask you to consider. First, it is a great idea for you to keep time with the leader. Keeping steady and clear time is the most fundamental aspect of leading. You will also learn to feel the traditional tempos by doing this.

Next, take some time to choose a couple of songs and practice leading them at home. The late Bruce Helton, one of the strongest leaders we have ever had, would often spend 3-4 hours a day, sitting in his green recliner, singing and leading the air. Decide how fast you want the song to go and get used to keeping your arm pattern as regular as possible while singing the song.

Finally, if you are really serious about improving your leading, get thee to a summer camp! I have seen several singers who attended either Camp DoReMi and Camp FaSoLa come back to us being so much easier and more inspiring to follow! One camp devotee told me the following:

“I started shape note singing about five years ago and realized very quickly that, if I wanted to sing a particular song, I’d better lead it...abject embarrassment led me to want to refine my skills...the fog began to lift when I went to Camp Doremi 2 years ago and took a rudiments class and leading for beginners...this past June I went to Camp Fasola in Anniston, Alabama and took more rudiments and leading classes...I learned a tremendous amount.... Jane Spencer, at Camp Doremi, emphasized that singers in the front row of the lead section must beat time with the leader so that the beat is communicated with other singers (often altos) who can’t always see the leader’s arm, and, it helps new leaders a lot...most leaders can improve, by learning more about the music and also by asking themselves “What is the beat and how can I communicate it best?”

In our tradition, leading is as fundamentally important as singing, in its way. So get to as many singings—from any tradition—as you reasonably can. Sit in the front row and practice leading at every singing. Notice which leaders get the best response from the group, and study their arm movements. Though you may see some variation in styles, you’ll notice that we sing our best for the folks who have a steady, strong beat. And you can bet that every one of them learned from other strong leaders. Come, join the tradition!