

OLD HARP

Number 42
2015

*The New Harp of Columbia
Annual Newsletter*

The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. In Memoriam for Old Harp singers

Odis Abbott, 94, bass, Maryville, July 14, 2014

Genevieve Wiggins, Old College singer, Athens, August 12, 2014

Gideon Fryer, 93, bass, Knoxville, December 13, 2014

Herb Clabo, 103, the singing family from Sevier County, December 28, 2014

Martha Graham, 96, alto, Pigeon Forge, January 2, 2015

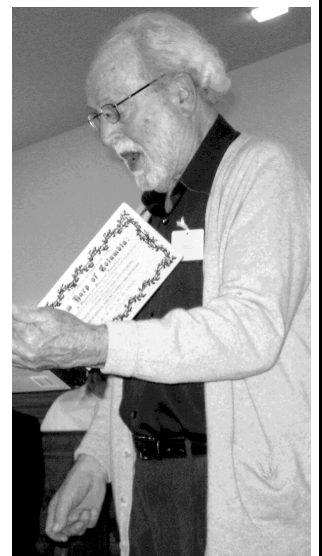
The East Tennessee Old Harp singers suffered big losses this year. Odis, Genevieve, Gideon, Herb, and Martha loved this tradition and sang with us for many years. Martha and Herb grew up singing with their families in Sevier County churches. Odis, who was born in Cades Cove, attended his last singing in the Great Smoky

Mountains National Park the day before he died. His wife, Phyllis, who preceded him in death, was a wonderful example of how singing is one of the last facilities that we maintain as we age. Gideon had such a rich and busy life that some didn't know he faithfully attended and sang with the Knoxville/Epworth Old Harp singers for many years and was a benefactor of the group's home in the Laurel Theatre in Knoxville. Dr. Genevieve Wiggins was a long-time member of the Old College harp singers, an English professor, writer, and editor.



Judy and Paul Clabo, Janet and Andrew Whaley, Herb Clabo (2014).

The hollow square is more empty today but we were certainly blessed by having them with us to share the stories and songs which they were part of for decades. Their presence enriched our understanding and we came to share their appreciation of this unique book and beloved tradition. They were welcoming to the young folk who hadn't grown up in this tradition. So those of us who are left behind are ever more charged to keep singing and sharing our love of this book and the people who sing from it. And it's very important to find the young folk to take over leadership and keep things going. Certainly change is inevitable but at ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, we remember why we sing in community. Sometimes we laugh and sometimes we cry. Recently, we cried to mourn the loss of our old friends. To honor them, we will keep singing.



Gideon Fryer (aka The Bishop of Fort Sanders)

The Singing Clabo/Whaley Family from Sevier County

By Chaz Barber



In the early days, when harp singing was a major community social event, it was families who sustained and grew the tradition. The Clabos and Whaleys and their extended dynasties are living but increasingly rare examples of what keeps us alive and singing. Their ancestors moved from points north and east into East Tennessee around the same time as our original 7-shape book “The Harp of Columbia” was published (1848).

East Tennessee remains committed to our unique 7-shape version of this early American traditional music. As seen in a recent video (available on www.oldsarp.org), our tradition is kept alive by both locations and by families. Though the video was made at a Greene County location, the family profiled is the Clabo/Whaley family from Sevier County. This family has lived and sung Old Harp music for almost as long as the music itself came into being. Both family names belong to early settlers of East Tennessee.

The most famous cove, or valley, is nearby Cades Cove in the national park. Wear’s Valley is twice the size of Cades Cove, was settled a few years before Cades Cove and is still inhabited; residents of Cades Cove

Andrew Whaley were moved out when the national park was formed in 1934. Both fertile valleys were hotbeds of Old Harp singing in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, and many of our elder singers and leaders come from Cades Cove and Wears Valley families. The largest and most well known East Tennessee annual singing (with dinner on the grounds) is at Headrick Chapel in Wears Valley.

Paul Clabo, who has a collection of 15 shape-note books and numerous other old songbook editions dating back well over 100 years, remembers when the current incarnation of the Headrick Chapel singing started up in 1968, and was led by a certain Charlie Clabough. They are distant cousins. Paul’s grandfather dropped the “ugh” somewhere along the way, but they had never met until Headrick Chapel. In the picture on the front page is the recently deceased patriarch, Herb Clabo, his son Paul and his wife, and two younger generations.



Sharee Green and Martha



Odus and Jeremy Shipp and youngest Shipp

Paul presides over shape-note and gospel singing at family gatherings and attends pretty much every annual singing held in the area. Paul says that though he grew up with harp singing in church, he didn’t really get into it until he married his wife Judy (McCarter), who was “from a harp-singing family.” Judy, on the other hand, readily admits she has never liked singing harp, though she is an enthusiastic supporter. Their daughter Janet Whaley attends many singings and is deeply connected to both the music and the poetry. Her children, Erin and Andrew, sing Old Harp, though these days Erin is distracted by her participation as a clarinetist in the University of Tennessee Pride of the Southland Band. The old-timers look to Andrew Whaley to carry on this tradition for both his family and the greater community of singers.

Old Harp Newsletter • ISSN No. 1546-038X

Founder: Larry Olszewski; Publisher: Friends of The New Harp of Columbia; Editor: Ann Strange. Thanks to contributors Chaz, Claudia, Corey, and Sean, and all the moderators of all the singings.

Treasurer’s Report

2013 proved to be on par with the previous three years for income as the Friends of *The New Harp of Columbia* continued at \$1,413 of income, only about \$70 below the average of the previous three years. However, expenses were another story. For the year we spent \$3,632 of which \$3,000 was for reprinting our songbook. Even with this large expenditure, Friends is still on a sound financial footing with \$4,195 in funds remaining.

As always, we are most appreciative of your continued support. We hope you believe that we are making wise use of your donations and continue to support us. Please make contributions via Pay Pal at oldharp.org or send checks to Old Harp, 307 Lake Forest Drive, Knoxville, TN 37920.

Joe Sarten, Treasurer

The University of Tennessee's "Music of Appalachia" Class

By Professor Sean McCullough

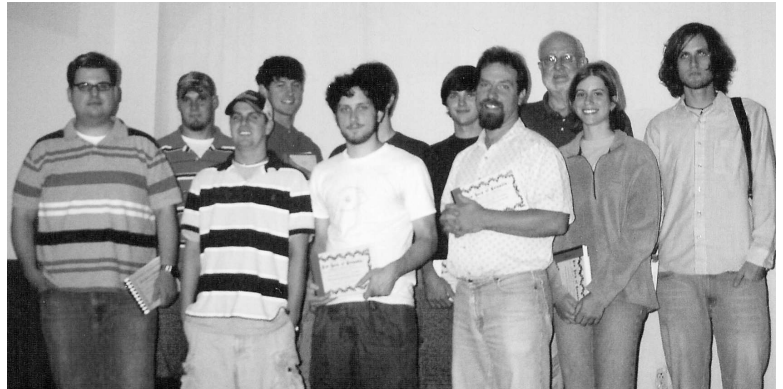
I've been bringing my Appalachian Music class to sing Old Harp at the Laurel Theatre for almost twenty years. At this point I imagine one could accurately call it an annual tradition. I've been around long enough to see changes in leadership. I've seen singers who were once the young folk-revivalists in the group become the old guard as many of the "old-timers" have passed on. I've come to appreciate the many different experiences of Old Harp - a religious experience for some, a spiritual practice for others, historic preservation for those who are so inclined, and community-building for all. I look forward to bringing my students each year and am thankful for the experience for them.

Our trip to the Laurel Theatre to sing is always the first field trip of the semester. My students are typically nervous – about the "strange" music that I have introduced to them in class, about having to sing, about having a potluck with a group of strangers who are mostly older than them. But it is really the perfect way to start the semester. Half way through the potluck I can see the nerves begin to subside as they get to know each other, visit with the harp singers, and eat food that likely reminds many of them of home. By the time we begin to sing, they are comfortable enough that most of them actually join in and most of them enjoy themselves.

I have had various reactions over the years, but the overwhelming response has been positive. Students make comments ranging from "that was a lot cooler than I thought it would be," to "that was really powerful" to "I want to do that again!" They don't all "like" the music, but the vast majority appreciates the experience and the role that the music plays in people lives.

I have had a handful of students over the years who could not get past their dislike of the music. If my memory serves me correctly, all of these have been music majors who just could not overcome the rather closed-minded training that often comes with studying classical music. They are put off by the fact that the singers don't sing "pretty," that the composers of the songs didn't "follow the rules," etc. But the other students typically defend harp singing for the beautiful tradition that it is. And some of the detractors have even come around in the end.

One interesting change in students' attitudes over the years has been more and more enthusiasm. I have seen this trend in students' response to old Appalachian styles in general. It may be related to the exploding popularity of "Americana" which seems to have built a younger audience for "rough-around-the-edges" music such as old-time and harp singing. It is a trend that I am very happy about. I hope it continues, and I hope to continue the tradition of bringing my class to sing at the Laurel. (It's scheduled this year for September 13.)



An earlier version of Sean's class

New Thoughts On An Old Tradition: A Student's First Impression

By Corey M. Blake

I first experienced Old Harp and the shape-note singing traditions during the fall of 2014 as part of my Music in Appalachia class. We took a field trip to the Laurel Theatre, where there was a potluck-style lunch available to all of the attendees. The potluck was especially important, particularly for us newcomers, in helping to establish a sense of community. Like many of the students in my class, this was our first time attending a "singing." Everyone seemed to be excited about the event and the regular members were all incredibly welcoming, offering conversation and stories about their experiences. It seemed to me that for many of the regulars in attendance, the shape-note tradition of singing is more than just a chance to sing in a community choir. From my own observations, each person came for a different reason. For some, the event is a form of religious expression and praise, rooted in a style that has been passed down many generations in East Tennessee. For others, there is not necessarily a religious aspect, but instead there is a sense of community and companionship in singing and creating music with other people. All of these reasons for attending showed through in the performance of the various songs. The sense of freedom in expression in both religion and communion gave all of the performers a liberty to sing loudly and without judgment. As a student who has spent many years singing in choirs, it came as a pleasant surprise. It was an experience of entertainment and companionship.

"New Thoughts," continued from previous page

As we sang, students were encouraged to take turns to join the leader in the center of the square. The opportunity to hear the singing coming from all directions was one of profound beauty. Every person who had the chance to do so would later go on to discuss with each other how exciting the experience was to them. The overall first experience of Old Harp singing is one that forms a lasting impression. As Ryan Taussig, a first-time attendee the prior year, would come to say, these singers “become more than simply a singing group; they become a community—a sort of musical family.” Having continued to attend singings in Sevier County after my first experience, I definitely agree. I have come to discover the familial experience of Old Harp singing and I look forward to continuing my participation in this wonderful and rich tradition.

Let's Sing the Whole Book

by Claudia Dean

In 2014, several years' efforts by the Friends of The New Harp of Columbia (our non-profit 501(c)3 organization) resulted in the reprinting of our book, the Restored Edition of the New Harp of Columbia. We are selling the new book at \$20, significantly less than the price of the old book. Your generous donations through the years allowed us to do this.

Now let's sing from the book. We all have our favorite songs which drew us into harp singing and have special places in our hearts. However, we need to broaden our horizons. Our book has wonderful, traditional music which we never sing, some of which is found in no other tune book. When we explain the shape note system to visitors, we say it makes it easier to learn the music. So? Let's (ahem) put our mouths where our money is and learn more songs.

For those of us who are not musically trained (and this includes me) this is truly not all that easy. One way to make learning new music less painful (and improve our singing of familiar songs) is to carefully count time. If we all beat time while singing as well as leading, giving rests their due as well as notes, we will stay together. Additionally, an occasional glance at the Rudiments in the front of the book would help us all.

I find, when learning a new song, it helps me to practice with a piano (or any instrument that produces a pitch). I find out how far off key I have wandered and I can verify unexpected intervals. Our modern instruments are "tempered", adjusted ever so slightly so that it is possible to play a major or minor scale in any key, and perhaps our oldest music was not conceived for tempered instruments, but, heck, it works for my twenty-first century ear. Learning new music does get easier with practice. And we are not performers, we are a work in progress.

Our book is an important part of the great tradition of shape note singing and many of our songs do appear in other books, sometimes with a different name, poetry or a slightly different form. It is wonderful to discover that one knows the tune or the poetry when singing from another book and to feel an overarching connection with the American shape note tradition.

Let's not be afraid to learn and sing more songs. It is not important that we be perfect but that we make an effort and continue to improve. If we want to keep our Old Harp tradition alive and vigorous we must know and sing the music.

Epworth's Jubilee Singing—Big changes!

by Claudia Dean

This year Epworth's Jubilee Festival Singing will be held on Sunday, **February 22** with a potluck lunch at **12:30** at the Laurel Theatre in Knoxville. The Jubilee Festival is scheduled several weeks earlier in 2015 by Jubilee Community Arts; this is one change over which we have no control.

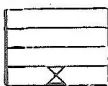

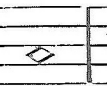
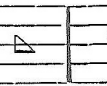

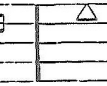


The second change is the time. Poor attendance last year made clear it was not a good plan to start at 10:00 am. I emailed our singers and asked if changing the time to afternoon would encourage more people to participate. The answer was a resounding YES! This year we'll try something new. We'll start with a potluck lunch at 12:30 and sing from 1:30-4:30 with a break around 3:00 for refueling. Those who can't attend the lunch can still enjoy a little social time and dessert.

An additional benefit is that Chaz Barber's congregation, which meets Sunday morning at the Laurel, can have their regularly scheduled service, join us for lunch, and maybe stay for singing.

Thanks to everyone, and there were a lot of you, who took the time to email me with their thoughts about this change. I hope to see you at the Jubilee Singing on February 22.

OLD HARP ANNUAL SINGINGS IN 2015

Date	Day	Time	Potluck?	The Singing
Jan. 25	Sunday	2:00	No	Wilderness Wildlife Week, LeConte Center. Contact: David Sarten or Veta King.
Feb. 22	Sunday	12:30	Yes	Epworth Annual Singing during the Jubilee Festival, Laurel Theatre, Knoxville. Contact: Tina Becker or Claudia Dean.
March 29	Sunday	2:00	No	Oldhams Creek Missionary Baptist Church, 3629 Boogertown Road, Sevier County. Contact: Veta King or Hal Wilson.
April 5	Sunday	5:30	Yes	Easter Singing at Bill Gooch and Meg Mabbs home, 4401 Alta Visa Way, Knoxville.
April 12	Sunday	2:00	No	Tuckaleechee United Methodist Church, Townsend. Contact: Tom Taylor.
May 2	Saturday	TBD	No	Townsend Spring Festival, Visitors Center, Townsend. Contact Robin Goddard.
May 3	Sunday (1st)	2:00	No	Middle Creek United Methodist Church, Sevierville. Contact: David Sarten
May 17	Sunday (3rd)	2:30	No	Old College Singing at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Athens, TN. Contact: Cora Sweatt.
May 31	Saturday	10:00	Yes	Franklin singing at New Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Greeneville, TN. Contact: Jeff Farr.
June 28	Sunday (4th)	12:00	Yes	Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church, Sevier County, Contact: Sharee Green
July 12	Sunday	2:00	No	Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse. Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Contact Robin Goddard.
Aug. 6-9				Camp Do-Re-Mi, Wildacres Resort, Little Switzerland, NC. www.campdoremi.com
Aug. 16	Sunday(3rd)	2:00	No	Cades Cove Primitive Baptist Church, Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Contact Robin Goddard or Tom Taylor.
Sept. 6	Sunday	TBD	No	Wears Valley United Methodist Church, Sevier County. Contact Bruce Wheeler.
Sept. 13	Sunday	5:30	Yes	Music of Appalachia class from the University of Tennessee and regular Second Sunday singing. Laurel Theatre, Knoxville, TN. Contact: Claudia Dean.
Sept. 27	Sunday (4th)	10:00	Yes	Headrick Chapel, Wears Valley, Sevier County. Contact David Sarten or Bruce Wheeler.
Oct. 4	Sunday (1st)	TBD	No	Valley View Baptist Church, Wears Valley, Sevier County. Contact: Bruce Wheeler
Oct. 18	Sunday (3rd)	2:00	No	Dollywood Singing, Pigeon Forge, Contact: David Sarten.
Oct. 25	Sunday (4th)	2:00	No	Maryville College, Center for Campus Ministry. Contact: Tom or Nan Taylor or Nancy Olsen.
Nov. 25	Wednesday	6:30	Yes	Larry Olszewski Memorial Singing during the traditional Thanksgiving Eve potluck and Old Harp singing. Laurel Theatre, Knoxville, TN. Contact: Tina Becker.
Dec. 12	Saturday (2nd)	9:30	No	Sugarlands Visitors Center, National Park, Contact Paul Clabo or David Sarten.

Numbers of the Scale. 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
								
Names of Syllables. Pronounced.	Do. Do.	Ra. Ray.	Mi. Mee.	Fa. Faw.	Sol. Sole.	La. Law.	Si. See.	Do.

Old Harp Regular Singings

ATHENS, TN—Old College Singers—at McMinn Living Heritage Museum (Call Cora Sweatt to confirm)
Third Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m.

Jan. 20, Feb. 17, Mar. 17, Apr. 21, May 19, Jun. 16, Jul. 21, Aug. 18, Sept. 15, Oct. 20, Nov. 17.

BLOUNT COUNTY—NEW QUARTERLY SCHEDULE—at Asbury Place, Maryville (call Kathleen Mavournin to confirm)

First Thursdays at 6:30 p.m.: March 4, June 4, Sept. 3, Dec. 3

GREENE COUNTY—Franklin Singers at Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Greeneville (Call Jeff Farr to confirm)
Last Sunday of the month at 3:00 p.m.

Feb. 23, Mar. 30, Apr. 27, May 25, Jun. 29, Jul. 27, Aug. 31, Oct. 26, Nov. 30.

KNOX COUNTY—Epworth Singers at the Laurel Theatre, Knoxville (Call Claudia Dean to confirm)
Second Sundays at 6:30 p.m.

Jan. 11, Feb. 8, March 8, May 10, Jun. 14, Aug. 9, Sept. 13, Oct. 11, Nov. 8.

SEVIER COUNTY—at Middle Creek United Methodist Church, Pigeon Forge (Call David Sarten to confirm)
Third Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m.

Jan. 20, Feb. 17, Mar. 17, Apr. 21, May 19, Jun. 16, Jul. 21, Aug. 18, Sept. 15, Oct. 20, Nov. 17.

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Web Sites of Interest:

www.oldharp.org

www.christianharmony.org and
www.thechristianharmony.com (NC, Ala, GA,
seven shapes) • www.campdoremi.com •
www.oldfieldssingers.com (Upper East Tennessee,
seven shapes) • www.fasola.org (Sacred Harp/four
shapes) • www.sacredharpnashville.org (Nashville
Sacred Harp singers) •
www.shenandoahharmony.com (a new four-shape
note songbook with a concentration on Shenandoah
Valley music of the early nineteenth century)

*To be added to the Old Harp listserv and get
regular notice of singings, send an email request to
chris.stoddart@gmail.com*

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Strange, Claudia Dean, and Robin Goddard.