



# OLD HARP

Number 47  
2020

The *New Harp of Columbia*  
Annual Newsletter

There are several families in East Tennessee whose names are synonymous with old harp singing. Perhaps the most notable and prolific of these, is the Lamons family. James and Elizabeth Lemons (the surname was later changed to Lamons) lived in the Big Dudley area in what is now the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. They later moved to Caney Creek near Pigeon Forge, and eventually settled in an area known as the "Lemons holler" near the communities of Boogertown and Shady Grove in Sevier County. They had ten children that lived to adulthood and just about all of them sang old harp- and sang it extremely well. You may have never got a chance to sing with one of the Lamons, but you've likely sang with their descendants; many of whom still frequent singings in Sevier County. David and Joe Sarten are well-known descendants, as grandsons of Lou Emma "Lula" Lamons Cardwell. Also, many of you will remember singing with the bearded basket maker, Connie Clabo, who passed away in 2011. Connie was the son of Grace Lamons Clabo, who is featured in the following article written by Larry Olszewski in 2001.



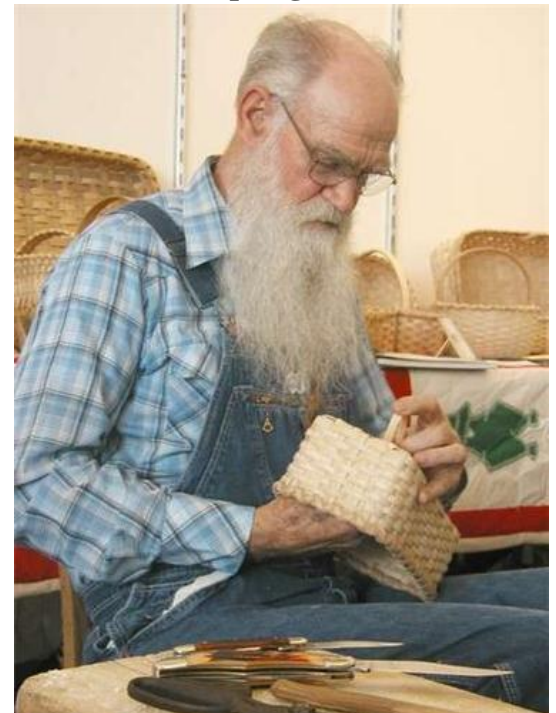
Sitting: James and Elizabeth Lamons  
Kneeling behind them: Roxie Sneed and Wiley Lamons  
Back Row left to right: Reford Lamons, Minnie Whaley,  
Bessie Eledge, Bernice Barnes, Grace Clabo,  
Mary Williams, Conard Lamons, Lula Cardwell

## Grace Clabo- From an interview by Larry Olszewski in Newsletter Number 26- Spring 2001

Look at the "wish-es engage" on the lead line of #89, Morality. Ti-do re-do-ti-la sol sung with eights and 16th notes in 2/4 time. We had just played some tapes with Reford and Velma Lamons, Wiley Lamons, and Grace singing out on the front porch. The katydids are doing the drone. I asked Grace if she would sing the ti-do, re-do, ti-la-sol for me. Grace repeats it back for me without missing a lick. Grace Clabo and Henrietta Sharp usually wind up sitting behind me at Headrick's Chapel, and when Paul Clabo leads #89, they hit those notes solid. I have to refrain from rubber necking around and saying, "how did you do that?"

Now, I have Grace alone for this interview and ask her to repeat it for me once more, finally telling her I have never gotten those notes together in the time it needs to be sung. That piece of information gets her tickled. Her dad made her learn that. That was James Lemons. Her mother, Elizabeth, would always sing tunes while she cooked. Sunday afternoon was a time for sitting around and singing Old Harp as well as gospel tunes.

Grace had a couple of Primitive Baptist hymnals, "Good Old Songs," by Cayce they would sing from. Sunday was a family time for keeping the Sabbath holy. Singing those old tunes always kept them in good measure.



Connie Clabo weaving one of his baskets

The tape on the recorder switches over to Wiley Lamons. Wiley is singing the lead line solo of many of the Old Harp tunes. In the last 15 years that I've known him, Wiley never got up to lead except once and that was at Caney Creek (Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church). He wanted to hear #83. Wiley got up and led that one song standing in the pew. His voice was still strong and carried the church.



Lamons Reunion 1985

Back to Grace. One of her uncles was Russell Henry Clabo. "He was preacher over at Caney Creek. Many of the traditional singers have come from there," she said. "Arthur Blaine Shields, Giles Adams and others of the Adams clan. Also remembered were Haskew Trevena, James King, Will Perryman and his daughters, Zelma, Rue and Althea (Alred). All these people were great singers that formed great memories in our minds growing up." After most of her elder siblings moved away, she can remember walking through Pigeon Forge and Wears Valley on a Saturday to make the Singing at Coker Hill, Blount County, with her father. Her dad called it Tuckaleechee as Grace remembers it. She spent the night with friends and sang all day, then trekked back to Pigeon Forge later that Sunday after the singing. That was in the 1930's.

Fond memories, warm humor, old stories, good folks all tie in. She is happy to have us youngsters take up the Singings. She hopes that we know we are entrusted in something that means a lot to her and her folks, that we are to treasure it and pass it on like the Lemons have. Before I leave, I get a promise of one of Grace's tapes, as well as a copy of #89 Morality.

## Reminiscences of Wiley Lamons

**From an interview by Sharee Rich (Green) in Newsletter Number 20- Fall 1997**

I have heard of Old Harp since I was born. My mama and daddy sang it as well as my grandparents. I did not hear my Granny Lucinda (Ogle Clabo) sing any.

All my brothers and sisters could sing it. My aunts and uncles on both sides as well. One way you could tell a Lamons – if you could sing Old Harp. We'd just gather around the table after supper and sing and sing.

I remember going to singings at the schoolhouse up on the mountain gap between Big Dudley and Little Dudley. I don't know or remember if the school had a name; it was just for the community. I wasn't even old enough to go to school back then, but the whole family would go and sing.

*(Compiler's note: Early schoolhouses in the lower Appalachians were situated at the headwaters of two streams on opposite sides of a mountain, in a gap. Students would walk up hill in the morning and back down in the afternoon. There is a "School House Gap" between Townsend and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park that is of this type.)*

Zachary McCarter (*Thomas Zachrius McCarter 1868-1951*) taught the first singing school I attended. I was about five years old then. He was the regular schoolteacher, but during the times school was out, we'd have singing schools, and he'd teach them, too. Y.J. Schultz (*Young John Schultz 1883-1949*) would be another fellow who taught the singing schools back then.

How did they pitch the song in the old days? At the singing schools like Zachary had, they would have a tuning fork, but hardly anybody around here would have one. Mostly at the singings they would just get the pitch naturally. Columbus Conner would pitch with his voice, but he would have a peculiar way of doing it, I thought. He would get up and sing fa-me-do, fa-me-do, til he got it right. It didn't matter what the song was- it was always fa-me-do.

How did I learn music? The singing schoolteacher would write the notes on the scale, and we would go over them. The first song I could learn to sing by myself all the way through was "How tedious and tasteless the hours," (#16). I was five or six when I learned that one.

I was born up on Big Dudley at the Roundtop, in a two-story log cabin that was built by Ol' Dr. Fish. He had been a doctor in the Confederate Army in the War Between the States. It is now in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We lived there 'til I was seven. Then we moved to Caney Creek, near Grandpa Clabo.

What do I remember about Beech Grove (on Caney Creek)? I remember going to lots of singings there. They would have them pretty often and our whole family would go. They had a lot of good singers there- Beecher, Pate (Granville), Bud and Rob Perryman, Arthur Blaine Shields, Nancy Perryman. They were real good singers.

Yes, I do remember Will Perryman. And, yes, he was a good Old Harp singer. He was also an awful good fox hunter and always had really good hounds to hunt with. His wife, Nan, she was a Myers, was a good singer too. There was Mantha, Ruby, Herstel, Blaine- all good singers.

My grandpa Henry Clabo was a great lead singer. In my mind he was the best I ever saw and I have seen a lot of Old Harp singers. Grandpa Henry had a little hymn book that he carried around with him about all the time. It didn't have any notes in it, just words to the songs. He knew the rhythms so well that he could sing the Old Harp to it. He did it all by ear. He impressed me at my early age to do that.



Brothers David & Joe Sarten lead at the Wear's Valley Convention

Wiley Franklin, Henrietta Sharp's and Martha Graham's daddy was a great bass singer. Since I sang bass, too, I would try to sit by him at a singing so he could make me look good at the rough parts of a song. He was a good one, alright. Later years, when I went to church at Pigeon Forge Baptist, we sang in the choir together- the three Wileys- Wiley Ward and Wiley Franklin.

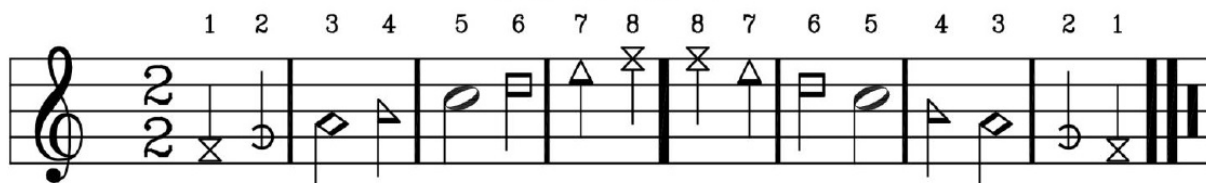
Haskew Trevena probably knew more Old Harp Songs than anyone I ever knew. I don't know of him teaching a singing school, but he could have. Columbus Conner was another good singer as well as Andy Davenport, Y.J. Schultz, and of course, Zachary McCarter, my first teacher.

The singings today are like the old days in that they are pretty lively; people seem to enjoy them. There was always just a bunch of people in the community who were Old Harp Singers just like today. Not everybody sang it and not everybody went to the singings.

The singings differ by one major point in that it is not being passed down to the younger generations like in my childhood days. My daughter knows how as well as a few of my nieces and nephews, but I don't believe any of their children know how to sing it. My grandsons have good voices, but they have never learned how to sing the Old Harp.

My advice to all is just learn the shapes and enjoy Old Harp. Old Harp is sacred music; not everybody likes it. I enjoy going to the singings, and I can't sing like I used to, but enjoy listening. (Wiley Lamons will be 90 years old on December 14<sup>th</sup> of this year. We thank him for allowing us to become a small part of him in his life, as he is a part of us.)

#### MAJOR SCALE.



Name: Do Ra Mi Fa Sol La Si Do Do Si La Sol Fa Mi Ra Do

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# OLD HARP ANNUAL SINGINGS 2020

Visit [www.oldharp.org](http://www.oldharp.org) or follow Old Harp Singing in East Tennessee on Facebook

<b>Date</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Potluck?</b>	<b>Singing Location &amp; Contact</b>
<b>Mar. 22</b>	Sunday	2:00	Yes	<b>Epworth Annual Singing-</b> Jubilee Festival Laurel Theater- Knoxville, TN <i>Claudia Dean</i>
<b>April 5</b>	Sunday	2:00		<b>Boogertown Singing-</b> Oldham's Creek Missionary Baptist Church- Sevier County, TN <i>Hal Wilson and Andrew Whaley</i>
<b>April 12</b>	Sunday	5:30	Yes	<b>Easter Singing</b> with Meg Mabbs & Bill Gooch 4401 Alta Vista Way Knoxville, TN
<b>April 19</b>	Sunday	2:00		<b>Tuckaleechee United Methodist Church,</b> Townsend, TN <i>Tom &amp; Nan Taylor</i>
<b>May 3</b>	Sunday (1 <sup>st</sup> )	2:00		<b>Middle Creek United Methodist Church-</b> Pigeon Forge, TN <i>David Sarten</i>
<b>June 6</b>	Saturday	10:00	Yes	<b>Franklin Singing-</b> New Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church- Greeneville, TN <i>Jeff Farr</i>
<b>June 28</b>	Sunday (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	12:00	Yes	<b>Caney Creek Singing-</b> Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church- Pigeon Forge, TN <i>Sharee Green</i>
<b>July 19</b>	Sunday	2:00		<b>Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse-</b> Great Smoky Mountains National Park <i>Robin Goddard</i>
<b>Aug. 13- 16</b>	Thursday- Sunday			<b>Camp Do Re Mi-</b> Wildacres Resort- Little Switzerland, NC. <a href="http://www.doremicamp.org">www.doremicamp.org</a>
<b>Aug. 16</b>	Sunday (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	2:00		<b>Cades Cove Primitive Baptist Church</b> Great Smoky Mountains National Park <i>Robin Goddard</i>
<b>Sept. 6</b>	Sunday (1 <sup>st</sup> )	2:00		<b>Wears Valley United Methodist Church-</b> Sevier County, TN <i>Dr. Bruce Wheeler</i>
<b>Sept. 26</b>	Saturday	10:00	Yes	<b>Wears Valley Convention-</b> Valley View Baptist Church (Saturday) & Headrick's Chapel (Sunday) <i>Dr. Bruce Wheeler, David Sarten and Andrew Whaley</i>
<b>Sept. 27</b>	Sunday (4 <sup>th</sup> )	10:00	Yes	
<b>Oct. 11</b>	Sunday	5:30	Yes	<b>Singing with UT's Music of Appalachia Class-</b> Laurel Theater- Knoxville, TN <i>Claudia Dean</i>
<b>Oct. 18</b>	Sunday (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	2:00		<b>Dollywood Singing-</b> <i>David Sarten</i>
<b>Oct. 25</b>	Sunday (4 <sup>th</sup> )	2:00		<b>Maryville College-</b> Center for Campus Ministry <i>Nancy Olsen and Tom &amp; Nan Taylor</i>
<b>Nov. 21</b>	Saturday			<b>Heritage Center-</b> Townsend, TN <i>Robin Goddard</i>
<b>Nov. 25</b>	Wednesday	6:30 PM	Yes	<b>15<sup>th</sup> Annual Larry Olszewski Memorial-</b> Laurel Theater, Knoxville <i>Tina Becker</i>
<b>Dec. 12</b>	Saturday	9:30 AM		<b>Sugarlands Visitor Center-</b> Great Smoky Mountains National Park <i>David Sarten</i>

**Monthly Singings:** SEVIER COUNTY, TN- Middle Creek United Methodist Church- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays at 7:00 PM  
 GREENEVILLE, TN- Cumberland Presbyterian Church- Last Sunday of the Month at 3:00 PM (Jeff Farr)  
 ATHENS, TN- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays at 5:00 PM (Call Cora Sweatt 423-745-0248)  
 JOHNSON CITY, TN- St. John's Episcopal Church- 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays at 2:00 PM (Don Wiley)

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Hal Wilson: (865) 436-2590, (865) 654-9503

## **SINGING LOCATIONS**

Laurel Theater- 1538 Laurel Ave. Knoxville, TN 37916  
Oldham's Creek Missionary Baptist Church- 3629 Boogertown Rd. Sevierville, TN 37876  
Meg Mabbs & Bill Gooch Residence- 4401 Alta Vista Way Knoxville, TN  
Tuckaleechee United Methodist Church- 7322 Old Tuckaleechee Rd. Townsend, TN 37882  
Middle Creek United Methodist Church- 1828 Middle Creek Rd, Pigeon Forge, TN 37863  
New Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church- 90 Cox Rd, Greeneville, TN 37745  
Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church- 625 Caney Creek Rd, Pigeon Forge, TN 37863  
Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse- Turn off Wear Cove Gap Rd. onto Little Greenbriar Rd. (The schoolhouse is at the end of the road on the right)  
Cades Cove Primitive Baptist Church- Cades Cove Loop Rd, Townsend, TN 37882 (Turn off Cades Cove Loop Rd left onto a gravel road, if you get to the Methodist or Missionary Baptist Churches you've gone too far)  
Wears Valley United Methodist Church- 3110 Wears Valley Rd. Sevierville, TN 37862  
Valley View Baptist Church- 2219 Little Cove Rd, Sevierville, TN 37862  
Headrick's Chapel- 4317 Wears Valley Rd, Sevierville, TN 37862  
Dollywood- Robert F. Thomas Chapel (Craftman's Valley)- Pigeon Forge, TN 37863  
Maryville College Center for Campus Ministry- 211 Maryville College, Circle Dr, Maryville, TN 37804  
Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center- 123 Cromwell Dr, Townsend, TN 37888  
Sugarlands Visitor Center- 1420 Fighting Creek Gap Rd, Gatlinburg, TN 37738  
Greeneville Cumberland Presbyterian Church- 201 N Main St, Greeneville, TN 37745  
McMinn County Living Heritage Museum- 522 W Madison Ave, Athens, TN 37303  
St. John's Episcopal Church- 500 N Roan St, Johnson City, TN 37601