



# OLD HARP

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The *New Harp of Columbia*  
Annual Newsletter

## In Praise of Swan Compositions

By: Jeremy Shipp

East Tennessee old harp singers have many grounds upon which to be justly proud of our book:

- It has a good mix of old New England compositions, folk hymns, revival tunes, and European hymn and psalm tunes.
- It is one of only about six 19<sup>th</sup>-century books which has continued in active use since its publication.
- It has survived despite having the most constricted territory of all these (except perhaps the *The Southern Harmony* with its one annual singing in Benton, Kentucky)—arguably about five or six counties in recent times.
- The forms of its “Swan shapes” are more handsome, distinctly drawn, and well-printed than the shapes in any other book.
- It includes some excellent previously-published tunes which appear to have been entirely passed over by the other traditional books in use today. Gleaning from Marion Hatchett’s *A Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, Appendix 1:
  - early American fusing tunes 113t SUTTON (Goff, 1793) and A59 NEW DURHAM (Austin, 1805);
  - tunes by the composer of the famous IDUMEA, Ananias Davisson: 13 REFLECTION, A58 EMERALD GATES, and A154 SOLITUDE IN THE GROVE;
  - excellent tunes from Lowell Mason: 144 ROWLEY and 162 MERDIN, not to mention a three-page anthem complete with fusing section, 216 O PRAISE GOD IN HIS HOLINESS;
  - other 1830s American tunes: the good beginner song 131 MARSTON (Collier, 1837) and the local-named A63 NEW-MARKET (Caldwell, 1837);
- It contains some beloved tunes which we sing in the very same East Tennessee counties in which their composers lived: 24 SALVATION by Robert Boyd of Blount County, 163 NEW TOPIA by Reubin Monday of Knox County, and 67b NEW YEAR by P. M. Atchley of Sevier County.
- It contains many tunes never before published, namely, everything composed by the Swans and the Atchleys. The 21-year-old Pleasant M. Atchley contributed 67t SODA and 67b NEW YEAR, lovely tunes which were later picked up by both *The Southern Harmony* and *The Christian Harmony*. W. H. and M. L. Swan, however, contributed the lion’s share of original tunes, many of which have not appeared again in any other harp book.



*Singers at Headrick Chapel for the Sunday session of the 2021 Wear's Valley Convention*



*The Knoxville home where W.H. Swan was rumored to have lived during the composition of the New Harp of Columbia*

The remainder of this article will celebrate the music composed or arranged by the Swans for the two editions of our book, in the form of a top-ten list:

**10. “Mischievous as Hell”.** In the rollicking 6/8 time A97 AFRICA, by Swan (1848), the phrase “mischievous as hell” is sung three times over. On one repetition, the tenor line descends to an extreme low note on “hell”. Mischievously, AFRICA has a melodic range equal to THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER (Hatchett, p. 235). Did Swan remove the song for the *New Harp* because he was embarrassed at such a bald joke?

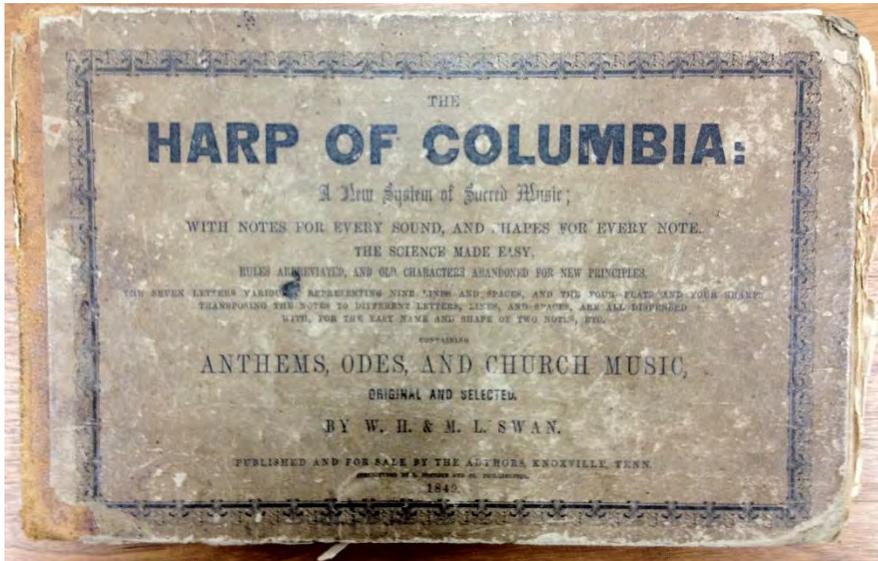
9. **New Fuging Tunes.** 1848 “is a rather late date for the appearance of a new fuging tune” (Hatchett, p. 107), so let’s commend Swan for composing three of them. Curiously, 90t ARBOUR has little movement in any part, and the tenor only hits the tonic *do* once. We sometimes sing 66 CLINTON and it seems the Library of Congress holds a 1951 recording of it from Greeneville, Tennessee. Hark! how we strike our golden harps on 51 MOUNT OLIVET, our favorite of Swan’s three fuging tunes.
8. **“A garden enclosed”.** For pure bravura, can any compiler of shapenote tunebooks match Swan’s one and only anthem, an eight-pager with thirteen time-signature changes, setting the King James Version of the entire fourth chapter of Song of Solomon. Perhaps one day we will open this “garden enclosed”, this “spring shut up”: 187 SOLOMON’S SONG.
7. **Southern Gospel[?].** 79 TRAVELLING TO THE GRAVE (Swan, 1848) sounds like a Stamps Baxter gospel tune, with its quick, cheering, colorful melody and its plentiful repeating notes. This tune is a joy to sing, even while it is paired with a morose text calling out from the grave against careless worldlings, which brings us to:
6. **Weird Swan.** I admit the work labeled with the Swan name can often seem simplistic, lines resolving in a dull fashion. But M.L. and W.H. Swan composed or arranged some tunes so far from plainness as to venture into the delightfully bizarre. Try the “highly syncopated” (Hatchett, p. 103) and colorful 138 CARDIPHONIA (Swan, 1848), depicting the torment of being “Far distant from my Father’s house” where “skies are dark, the thunders roll”. Strangely, the first chord of the minor-mode 120t CHRISTIAN SOLDIER (Swan, 1848) is major (*do-mi-sol*). In another stretch the tenor seems to be keyed at *re*. It well expresses lament and horror at a “wretched land” full of “prickling thorns”, “mortal poisons”, and “dang’rous waters”. 136 THE PEARL (Swan, 1848) is unusual in employing a two-beat rest before the final syncopated phrase—and in keeping both alto and treble silent for almost two thirds of the song. Another “set piece”, the three-brace 174 THE RIVULET (Swan, 1848) with its quaint simplicity reminds me of B. F. White’s BAPTISMAL ANTHEM (1844); it has many repeating notes but I think it would come together charmingly in harmony. The intriguing 1848 Swan arrangement 71 BEQUEST is a rare secular song. Its romantic theme, florid lyrics, and quirky melody make it comparable to A81 FEW HAPPY MATCHES. “Weird” Swan is always beautiful, but my favorite is 29t CONVOY, a stately major-mode tune in which the tenor’s repeated use of *si* gives it an otherworldly tone. Find the brilliant recording by [The Tudor Choir on “An American Christmas: Shapenote Carols”](#)

**5. Contrafacti of Folk Melodies.** Swan provided arrangements of several traditional ballad and fiddle tunes: 118 CELEBRATION is Swan’s 1848 setting of the lovely traditional Scottish tune “O Where and O Where Has My Highland Laddie Gone” aka “The Bluebells of Scotland”; this is seven years before the same old tune was arranged as SINGING SCHOOL in *The Social Harp*. Swan’s 148 FRANCE (1848), if akin to *The Southern Harmony*’s earlier THE FAMILY BIBLE, is more in the spirit of the traditional fiddle tune NAPOLEON CROSSING THE RHINE, of which it seems to be a setting (hence, perhaps, the title FRANCE?). This set-piece has a wide range, but it sounds very sweet and well-paired with the text “Good morning brother pilgrim, What! Bound for Canaan’s coast?”. Swan (1848) also made 111 HAMBURG, his own arrangement of the old tune AULD LANG SYNE, a distinct arrangement from A. Clark’s PLENARY which appears in other books of the time. Swan (1848) set “As I sat on a sunny bank (I saw three ships)” in 91 LANCASTER. A76 PERSIA is another rollicking major-mode tune that sounds like it’s based on an old fiddle air. It uses the patriotic text “As down a lone valley with cedars o’erspread”, but Swan’s 1848 tune is far superior to the inordinately popular MURILLO’S LESSON in *The Sacred Harp*.



Sevier County singer Elizabeth Wood leads a song

**4. Folk Hymns.** Dorothy Horn, in her “Introduction to the New Edition” of our book (p. *xvi-xvii*), identifies over 50 folk hymns, including some credited to the Swans—30 SION’S SECURITY, 49 LONE PILGRIM, 75t ANTICIPATION, 78 GRAY RIDGE, 85 GREENLAND, 119 HOLY ARMY, 122 SUMMER, 123 RAPTURE, 138 CARDIPHONIA, and 164t MARION. Swan was perhaps the first to publish 90b MARIETTA (1848), which appeared in *The Sacred Harp* in 1850, *The Southern Harmony* in 1854, and *The Social Harp* in 1855. It is a spectacular minor-mode tune for a remarkable bit of poetry: “Lo! On a narrow neck of land, ‘Twixt two unbounded seas I stand, Yet how insensible!” 147b MEXICO (Swan, 1848) is another harrowing minor-mode folk hymn. Both MARIETTA and MEXICO deserve to be sung regularly. 69 MIDDLETON is apparently a unique text pairing (“Sweet is the mem’ry of thy grace”) with the tune commonly associated with “Amazing Grace”, and it is a unique arrangement of that tune: For example, in M. L. Swan’s 1867 version the tenor (lead) part hits the high note three times rather than the usual two times. The contemplative and comforting 68t PARADISE (Swan, 1848) is a favorite. 85 GREENLAND (Swan, 1848) appears on our 1948 Happy Hollow recording and 87t HIGHTOWER (M. L. Swan, 1867) appears on both that and our 1951 Folkways recording. 124 THE SAINT’S ADIEU (M. L. Swan, 1848) is another favorite among old harp singers, and it suits us well.



An 1849 edition of *The Harp of Columbia*

2. **A Superior Seaman.** Sacred Harp singers love their minor-mode fuguing tune SAVE, LORD, OR WE PERISH (M. Mark Wynn, 1869), but Swan's 121 SEAMAN (1848), also minor-mode and with the same text, is every bit its equal in conveying the desperation of the seaman in the midst of a "wild tempest", "torn sail", and "red lightning". Swan does better than *The Sacred Harp*, however, in placing melismatic emphasis on "Save" in the sailor's concluding prayer "Save, Lord, or we perish!" SEAMAN is infrequently sung but ought to be a standard.
1. **30 SION'S SECURITY** is rightly a favorite among us, and we sing it extremely well. Dorothy Horn recognizes it as a folk hymn, but M. L. Swan is credited (1848). Once you've heard this stately minor-mode setting of "Glorious things of thee are spoken, Sion city of our God", the near-universal tune AUSTRIAN HYMN just seems light and trivial. SION'S SECURITY meditates on and wonders at the everlasting Church and her eternal God. This song is the Swans—and old harp singing—at their very best.

We have not even considered 65 TEXAS (Swan, 1848, one of Larry Olszewski's favorites to lead), 29b COME, YE DISCONSOLATE! (Swan, 1848, thought good enough by William Walker to include in both his 1854 *Southern Harmony* and 1867 *Christian Harmony*), or A184's delightful rounds (of which WELCOME and SABBATH might be Swan compositions and MORNING BELL may be Swan's arrangement of an 1834 Lowell Mason version). Dorothy Horn, estimating the Swans composed about 44 songs (she seemed to think all were by M. L.), ungenerously wrote, "Unfortunately for his reputation as a composer, they seem never to have been very popular", and that she never heard any of them used in a singing ("Introduction", p. xvii). Please take the list above as evidence that not only are Swan compositions frequently sung (consider 30 SION'S SECURITY, 68t PARADISE, 124 THE SAINT'S ADIEU, 51 MOUNT OLIVET, 65 TEXAS, 87t HIGHTOWER), but Swan's reputation as a composer (and arranger) deserves to be much higher than perhaps many reckon it.

3. **A Difficult Si.** I wonder if a special use of the *si* is one of Swan's frequent maneuvers (cf. 29t CONVOY). Here in the minor-mode 38 BRADLEY (Swan, 1848), *si* follows *sol* in two places in the tenor. It is a progression both unnatural to sing and haunting to hear. The tune keeps a steady driving 2/2 rhythm throughout, pausing between phrases, the melody first narrow then wide. The self-rebuking text by Watts is well fitted to this somber, strong tune: "The little ants for one poor grain/Labour and tug, and strive". Swan's BRADLEY appears to be unnoticed outside East Tennessee, but it deserves a central place in the shapenote canon.

# The Old College Harp Singers

By: Cora Sweatt Jones

In early 1992, attorney Carroll Ross (later became Judge of McMinn County) started a class at Tennessee Wesleyan University teaching shape notes using the New Harp of Columbia. I was delighted to attend, since I grew up singing shape notes, namely the Sacred Harp in Alabama.

That was my family heritage. I don't know how far back my ancestors sang the tradition. I do know that my grandparents were singers in the 1800s.

My parents met each other at a singing in Alabama in 1925 and married in 1927. They wrote letters to each other telling where they could see each other at the next singing. The 131 letters are well preserved. I had the privilege of inheriting them.



*The Old College Harp Singers in 2008*

Carroll Ross had a large class of beginners- about 30 people. We scheduled our first annual singing for the third Sunday in May of 1992 at the Old College building on the Tennessee Wesleyan campus. This is the oldest building on campus, which was a ladies college, originally. We began to have regular classes for quite some time and our annual third Sunday in May singing continued to approximately 2014. Cora Sweatt Jones and Dolores Reynolds are the only two people of Carroll Ross's first class that have continued to the present day.

We still meet on the third Tuesday of each month from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM. The location has changed from the McMinn Living Heritage Museum to the home of a member of our group, Kay Frank. 800 Woodward Ave. Athens, TN 37303.

Sadly to say, over the years the group has reduced in size. Many of the very faithful have passed on- I'm sure singing in heaven!

We decided in early years to name our local group Old College Harp Singers because that is where we began. We have been invited to sing in over twenty locations over the years: churches, historical societies, festivals in downtown Athens, local schools and senior citizen groups.

I have greatly enjoyed these many years singing locally as well as attending as many singings as I can on the East Tennessee singing schedule.

The following names are the regular attendees at our monthly singing and we are always looking for more: Cora Sweatt Jones, Dolores Reynolds, Kay Frank, Joann Love and Mike Aikens.

Carroll Ross attended the University of Tennessee and that's where he became acquainted with Old Harp, the Laurel Theater, the John C. Campbell Folk School and Christian Harmony. He also learned to play the dulcimer. He made one at the folk school and played it locally.

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Founder: Larry Olszewski

Publisher: Friends of The New Harp of Columbia

Editor: Andrew Whaley

MAJOR SCALE.

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

# OLD HARP ANNUAL SINGINGS 2022

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>Singing Location &amp; Contact</b>
<b>Jan. 15</b>	Saturday	*12:00	<b>Central United Methodist Church-</b> Knoxville, TN <i>Jeremy Shipp &amp; Phillip Pardue</i>
<b>Mar. 27</b>	Sunday	2:00	<b>Boogertown Singing-</b> Oldham's Creek Missionary Baptist Church- Sevier County, TN <i>Hal Wilson</i>
<b>April 10</b>	Sunday	2:00	<b>Tuckaleechee United Methodist Church-</b> Townsend, TN <i>Tom &amp; Nan Taylor</i>
<b>May 1</b>	Sunday (1 <sup>st</sup> )	2:00	<b>Middle Creek United Methodist Church-</b> Pigeon Forge, TN <i>David Sarten</i>
<b>June 4</b>	Saturday	†10:00	<b>Franklin Singing-</b> New Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church- Greeneville, TN <i>Jeff Farr</i>
<b>June 26</b>	Sunday (4 <sup>th</sup> )	*12:00	<b>Caney Creek Singing-</b> Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church- Pigeon Forge, TN <i>Sharee Green</i>
<b>July 17</b>	Sunday (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	2:00	<b>Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse-</b> Great Smoky Mountains National Park <i>Robin Goddard</i>
<b>Aug. 21</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>TBD</b>			<b>Wears Valley United Methodist Church-</b> Sevier County, TN <i>Dr. Bruce Wheeler</i>
<b>Sept. 24</b>	Saturday	†10:00	<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. 25</b>	Sunday (4 <sup>th</sup> )	†10:00	
<b>Oct. 16</b>	Sunday (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	2:00	<b>Dollywood Singing-</b> Robert F. Thomas Chapel <i>David Sarten</i>
<b>Oct. 23</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. 23</b>	Wednesday	*6:30	<b>Larry Olszewski Memorial-</b> Laurel Theater, Knoxville <i>Tina Becker</i>
<b>TBD</b>			<b>Sugarlands Visitor Center-</b> GSMNP <i>David Sarten</i>

\*Dinner on the ground followed by singing

†Dinner on the ground in between singing sessions

**Monthly Singings:** (Please, contact to confirm as some monthly singings are subject to cancellation)

SEVIER COUNTY, TN- Middle Creek United Methodist Church- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays at 7:00 PM (David Sarten)

ATHENS, TN- 800 Woodward Ave.- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays at 5:00 PM (Cora Jones)

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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

## **SINGING LOCATIONS**

Laurel Theater- 1538 Laurel Ave. Knoxville, TN 37916  
Central United Methodist Church- 201 East Third Avenue, Knoxville, TN  
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 3788  
Sugarlands Visitor Center- 1420 Fighting Creek Gap Rd, Gatlinburg, TN 37738  
Greeneville Cumberland Presbyterian Church- 201 N Main St, Greeneville, TN 37745