



# OLD HARP

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2023

The *New Harp of Columbia*  
Newsletter

## Living Tradition

By: Jeremy Shipp

Old harp has returned from COVID-19 lockdown.

Hungry to sing after several lean years, Sara Melton (Oak Ridge), Phillip Pardue (Loudon), and I (Solway in west Knox Co.), experimented with hosting some unusual singing events in Knox Co. (Central UMC, Jan. 1; Statesview mansion, May 6) and Anderson Co. (Claxton Community Center, July 15 and Dec. 31).

We are three singers who came into the tradition in young adulthood and were spurred by the COVID closures to realize that with greater maturity we have a greater duty to make old harp happen in our part of the world: "We're the adults now," remarked Sara.

With the resumption of the monthly Sevier Co. practice singings in fall 2020 (recall the lockdowns started late March 2020), there appeared a cheerful ethnomusicologist and music teacher, Mandy Askins (née Rogers). Mandy not only authored an academic study of old harp, but also quickly became an ardent old harp singer. Last year she joined the board of the Friends of the New Harp of Columbia.

The Epworth old harp singers resumed monthly practice singings in September, and the group who met at that first singing chose Mandy as their leader. These monthly Epworth singings have been well attended (low 20s to mid-30s), especially by new singers. Tina Becker, having been assigned to the work by Larry Olsewski, led the annual Thanksgiving-Eve Larry O. Memorial singing, which saw a full house and many old faces.

And local singing schools were conducted for the first time in many years. Mandy and I (mainly Mandy) taught a four-session beginners' singing school at Claxton Community Center on Wednesday evenings in August, attended by over 45 people. We tried out an old-time drone, in which a quartet sang a tune in the middle of the square while the class walked in a circle around the outside singing one note continually. In the fall, Mandy brought a singing school to Sevier County; it was five Tuesday evening sessions at Walters State Community College plus a concluding singing at King Family Library. Notably, the curriculum included instruction in pitching by ear.

I spoke with Kathleen Mavournin about her history with old harp and especially with old harp singing schools. Kathleen grew up in Southern Minnesota, where Laura Ingalls Wilder's accounts of her own life in that part of the country were read in school. Wilder's accounts of being a schoolteacher and going to singing schools, where she courted the man she would marry, were thus made a part of Kathleen's personal Southern Minnesota heritage. In addition, as a kid Kathleen was taught to sing using solfège (though not with shapes).



*Mandy Askins teaches at the singing school held at Claxton Community Center*



*Kathleen Mavournin leading at the GSMNP Sugarlands Visitors Center singing (1990s)*

Kathleen was friends with musician John McCutcheon before either of them had discovered old harp singing in East Tennessee. “He babysat my child.” The story is often told of McCutcheon’s wandering through Wear’s Valley looking for (and listening for) old-time Appalachian music, coming to a full stop as he passed by one of the churches—I’m guessing it was between 2 PM and 4 PM on a warm Sunday afternoon. McCutcheon quickly found a couple of books, made some photocopies, and organized the Epworth old harp singers; Kathleen recalls the first Epworth gathering may have been in her living room in South Knoxville. This was the early 1970s. That group more or less taught themselves.

The first old harp singing school of any sort that Kathleen recalls was when Burl Adams of Wears Valley, a prominent singer, hosted a regular, ongoing gathering in his home in the 1980s, which was a combination practice singing and singing school. Kathleen notes that Tom and Nan Taylor were there and could tell more about it.

In the early 1990s, Larry O. recruited gospel shape note singing instructor Eugene McCammon to teach singing schools at the Laurel Theater using the old harp book and

notation. (McCammon also taught a couple singing schools at Oldham’s Creek (Boogertown) in Sevier County). Later in the 90s, Larry, unable to find an experienced singing instructor from within the old harp tradition, asked Kathleen to become one. Kathleen agreed to do it. She felt that teaching this Appalachian tradition was teaching something that came out of her Southern Minnesota heritage. Kathleen had listened to people talk about old-time singing schools. She knew that the old-time instructors taught the rudiments at the front of the book, so in Swan’s rudiments she had everything she needed to organize her own lessons. “It’s all there.” From accounts of the old-time singing schools, she gathered they should be a community social event centered around community music, not like rehearsals for performance. And it was important to let people learn at their own pace.

Kathleen taught around six or seven singing schools over a period of about ten years from the late 90s through the early 2000s (details can be found in past newsletters). They were generally five sessions each. Kathleen recalls two schools at the Pigeon Forge library, one at the Blount County library (I recall this school is where I got my start around 2003), two at the Laurel Theater, one at the Heritage Center in Townsend, and one at the Unitarian Church in Knoxville. In Kathleen’s singing schools, about a quarter of the class would be verbal instruction and about half the class would just be practice singing, but instruction would be in small bits interspersed with songs, and relevant to the song to be sung next.



*Singing School at Oldham’s Creek (Boogertown) in the early 1990s. Pictured are Reford and Velma Lamons, Hal Wilson and others*



*Sharee Green and Claire White lead at Headrick's Chapel*

There would be a few exercises at the beginning of each class, particularly for intervals, “but it’s pretty dull”; she told students they needed to practice their exercises at home to really learn the intervals.

These schools yielded new singers, Kathleen recalls. But after a while it seemed not many new singers were signing up, so she felt the schools needed a rest for a couple years so new interest could build up. Maybe it was given a rest for too many years, Kathleen said, but age and circumstances also conspired against her picking it up again. When Mandy began to prepare for last summer’s singing school, she sat down with Kathleen to discuss her course outline and handouts and generally learn everything she could about how Kathleen taught singing schools.

Many of us are interested in continuing the singing school tradition, as it is a good way to help people learn to sing old harp. Mandy and I would like to teach more schools, and there are still others who would be quite capable of doing so. Stay on the lookout for more singing schools in the future!

## Digital Resources for Learning Old Harp

By: Andrew Whaley

All singers are encouraged to check out the learning resources available on our website at [oldharp.org/songs/](http://oldharp.org/songs/). There you’ll find links with learning tools for over 150 songs in *The New Harp of Columbia*. These links include field recordings and videos of traditional old harp singings made available by singers Jonathon Smith, Nathan Rees and Joseph Bray. Additionally, you’ll find links to [sacredharpbremen.org](http://sacredharpbremen.org), which uses computer-generated voices (often affectionally referred to as the Bremen Robots) to sing individual and combined parts. The page scans of the songs are from either the Sacred Harp or the Christian Harmony, so the shapes are not the Swan shapes used by the New Harp of Columbia, but the composition of the songs is essentially the same. We suggest looking at the song in your harp book while listening and singing along. Obviously, singing with real singers in a real hollow square is the best method for learning, but these digital resources have proven to be valuable to those who want to learn more on their own.



*James Shipp leads at the Maryville College singing*

## Egyptology

East Tennessee's own mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century tunesmiths W. H. and M. L. Swan credited most of the tunes in their *Harp of Columbia* and *New Harp of Columbia* by surname only. Thus, there are some 43 tunes credited simply to "Swan". Most of these certainly refer to W. H. or M. L.; but how many of these refer to that more famous tunesmith of New England, Timothy Swan? Certainly 39T CHINA. It may be that only one other tune in our book has ever been credited to Timothy Swan: 150 EGYPT. Marion J. Hatchett credits Timothy Swan emphatically in his 2001 introduction to our *Restored Edition* (p. xii): "it is by Timothy and not M.L. and may be found in *The New England Harmony*." You, dear reader, are invited to open your *New Harp* to number 150 and compare it to Timothy Swan's 1801 *New England Harmony*:

*Egypt. C. M.*

He call'd for darkness darkness came, Nature his summons knew; Each stream and

*Egypt. Continued.* 83

lake transform'd to blood, The wand'ring fishes flew. In putrid floods throughout the

land, The pest of frogs were bred, From noisome fens sent up to croak, At Pharaoh's board & bed. At Pharaoh's board & bed.

A man's foibles are what make him lovable, and Dr. Hatchett changes his tune in his indispensable 2003 *Companion to The New Harp of Columbia*, where he states (p. 118) that Timothy Swan's EGYPT "has sometimes been confused with" M. L. or W. H. Swan's EGYPT. Hatchett hints that the cause for the confusion is DeWitt Wasson's 3-volume *Hymntune Index* (1998), as "[W. H.] Swan's tune is mistakenly attributed to Timothy Swan in that book".

HOBOKEN L.M.D.

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

Psalm 85:1-7

Jeremy & Elizabeth Shipp, 2022; based on a sung prayer heard in Hoboken, Ga., in 2006.

Book of Psalms, 1911

1. <sup>1</sup>Je - ho - vah, Thou hast fa - vor shown The good - ly land which is Thine own; And Ja - cob from his cap - tive state Thou brought - est back in  
 2. <sup>4</sup>O God of our sal - va - tion, turn. Let in - dig - na - tion cease to burn. <sup>5</sup>Wilt Thou for - ev - er an - gry stay? From age to age Thy  
 mer - cy great. . . . . <sup>2</sup>For - giv - en have Thy peo - ple been, And Thou hast cov - ered  
 wrath dis - play? . . . . . <sup>6</sup>Wilt Thou not quick - en us once more, Thy peo - ple's joy in  
 mer - cy great. . . . . <sup>2</sup>For - giv - en have Thy peo - ple been, And Thou hast cov - ered all their sin; . . . .  
 wrath dis - play? . . . . . <sup>6</sup>Wilt Thou not quick - en us once more, Thy peo - ple's joy in Thee re - store? . . . .  
 mer - cy great. . . . . <sup>2</sup>For - giv - en have . . . . . Thy peo - ple been, . . . . . And Thou hast cov - ered all their  
 wrath dis - play? . . . . . <sup>6</sup>Wilt Thou not quick - en us once more, . . . . . Thy peo - ple's joy . . . . . in Thee re -  
 mer - cy great. . . . . <sup>2</sup>For - giv - en have . . . . . Thy peo - ple been, And Thou hast cov - . . . . . ered all their sin; . . . .  
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HOBOKEN Concluded

Psalm 85:1-7

all their sin; . . . . . <sup>3</sup>A - way hast tak - en all Thy wrath And turn'd from Thy fierce an - ger's path. . . . .  
 Thee re - store? . . . . . <sup>7</sup>O LORD, to us Thy mer - cy show, And Thy sal - va - tion now be - stow. . . . .  
<sup>3</sup>A - way hast tak - en all Thy wrath . . . . . And turn'd from Thy fierce an - ger's path. . . . .  
<sup>7</sup>O LORD, to us Thy mer - cy show, . . . . . And Thy sal - va - tion now be - stow. . . . .  
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MAJOR SCALE.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
 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 2023

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

Date	Day	Time	Singing Location & Contact
<b>Mar. 24</b>	Friday	6:30	<b>Jubilee Festival-</b> Laurel Theater- Knoxville, TN <i>Jeremy Shipp and Mandy Askins</i>
<b>Mar. 26</b>	Sunday	*12:00	<b>Jubilee Festival-</b> Laurel Theater- Knoxville, TN <i>Tina Becker</i>
<b>Apr. 2</b>	Sunday	2:00	<b>Boogertown Singing-</b> Oldham's Creek Missionary Baptist Church- Sevier County, TN- <i>Hal Wilson</i>
<b>Apr. 8</b>	Saturday	2:00	<b>Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center-</b> Townsend, TN <i>Robin Goddard</i>
<b>Apr. 16</b>	Sunday	2:00	<b>Tuckaleechee United Methodist Church-</b> Townsend, TN <i>Tom &amp; Nan Taylor</i>
<b>May 7</b>	Sunday (1 <sup>st</sup> )	2:00	<b>Middle Creek United Methodist Church-</b> Pigeon Forge, TN <i>David Sarten</i>
<b>June 3</b>	Saturday	†10:00	<b>Franklin Singing-</b> New Bethel Cumberland Presbyterian Church- Greeneville, TN- <i>Jeff Farr</i>
<b>June 25</b>	Sunday (4 <sup>th</sup> )	2:00	<b>Caney Creek Singing-</b> Beech Grove Primitive Baptist Church- Pigeon Forge, TN- <i>Sharee Green</i>
<b>July 16</b>	Sunday (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	2:00	<b>Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse-</b> Great Smoky Mountains National Park- <i>Robin Goddard</i>
<b>Aug. 20</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. 23</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. 24</b>	Sunday (4 <sup>th</sup> )	†10:00	
<b>Oct. 22</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. 22</b>	Wednesday	*6:30	<b>Larry Olszewski Memorial-</b> Laurel Theater, Knoxville <i>Tina Becker</i>
<b>Jan. 1 (2024)</b>	Monday	†10:00	<b>New Year's All Day Singing-</b> Claxton Community Center- Anderson County, TN <i>Jeremy Shipp, Phillip Pardue, Sara Melton</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)

ATHENS, TN- 1214 Woodward Park.- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays at 5:00 PM (Cora Jones)

KNOX COUNTY, TN- Laurel Theater- Last Thursdays (except Mar., Nov. & Dec.) at 6:30 PM (Mandy Askins)

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

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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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)

Valley View Baptist Church- 2219 Little Cove Rd, Sevierville, TN 37862

Headrick's Chapel- 4317 Wears Valley Rd, Sevierville, TN 37862

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

Greeneville Cumberland Presbyterian Church- 201 N Main St, Greeneville, TN 37745

Claxton Community Center- 1071 Edgemoor Rd. Clinton, TN 37716