



OLD HARP

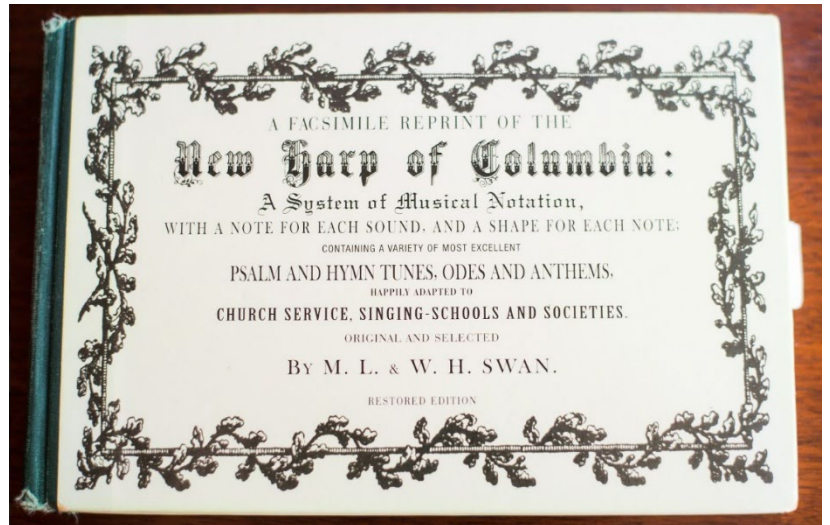
Number 53
2026

The *New Harp of Columbia*
Newsletter

New Books on the Way!

By: Andrew Whaley

Many of you will be familiar with our recent endeavors to obtain another reprint of songbooks by the University of Tennessee press. The last printing was over a decade ago and the supply of books for sale has been running exceedingly thin.



On a more positive note, the popularity and demand for the book has increased. This is a good problem to have! I'm happy to say, thanks to the arduous work of Joe Sarten, we have reached an agreement to begin the reprint and hope to have books for sale within the year. In the meantime, if you need to purchase a book or have any questions contact Joe Sarten, Andrew Whaley or Claudia Dean.



(Left) Judy Mincey and (Right) Eddie Mash lead an outstanding class at the Sunday session of the 2025 Wear's Valley Convention at Headrick's Chapel (Photos courtesy of Sara Melton)

Remembering Virginia Douglas

By: Claudia Dean

Virginia Douglas, who sang alto with the Epworth Old Harp singers in Knoxville for many years, died in Vermont on October 13, 2025. She had moved to Bristol, Vermont several years before her death to be with family.

I realized I didn't know much factual about Virginia when I started to write a remembrance of her. While driving us on to North Carolina or Alabama sings I learned that she had two daughters, had been married twice, had worked in food service, antique dealing and property management and her sister drove an 18 wheeler for a living. Some of what follows comes from other singers' recollections.

Virginia grew up in Utah and studied at Utah State University's Quinney College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. She moved to Tennessee from the northeast (New Jersey?) to be with family in Oak Ridge. Virginia heard shape note singing and other old-time music at the Laurel Theater and was hooked. She was a valued volunteer at concerts at the Laurel and started singing Old Harp with the Knoxville people who sang at Helen Hutchinson's home before the group coalesced into the Epworth singers.



Longtime Epworth Old Harp alto Virginia Douglas



Luggage tag bequeathed to Sara Baskin by Virginia

Virginia was singing Old Harp when I started singing in 2003. She had strong ideas about the right way to sing which were influenced by her friendship and admiration of Sacred Harp singers on Sand Mountain in Alabama. Virginia travelled to both Sacred Harp conventions and Christian Harmony singings.

Virginia was very particular about our potlucks. She scavenged and donated all our current serving pieces and insisted that food be cut into portions before putting it out for dinner. Robin Goddard, our dinner on the grounds maven, was coached by Virginia. In Robin's words "I helped her for many years with the potlucks and she told me what to do and I did it!"

Everyone who responded to my request for information about Virginia emphasized the same thing—Virginia had strong opinions and did not hesitate to state them. She wanted to see things DONE RIGHT, and that included shape note singing!

"There is nothing refined about Old Harp Singing. Anyone can just go out there and sing, get up and lead a song of their choice, or ask another to lead one for them. It will not get you elected to politics, put the bacon on the table, or get your kids through college. The only thing it will do is uplift your spirit with those around you, letting you and your maker know where you are in preparation for the next world. That is why we are here, isn't it?"

- Larry Olszewski



Larry Olszewski "Larry O" leading at Headrick's Chapel in the early 2000s



The Clabo family leads at Headrick's Chapel



*Cade's Cove Primitive Baptist Church
Photo courtesy of Brennan LeQuire*

If you haven't signed up for the Old Harp e-mail distribution list, please reach out to Claudia Dean or Andrew Whaley and we will get you taken care of. All major announcements for annual and monthly singings are e-mailed regularly. Another great way to keep up to date with the singing community is to join our Facebook group Old Harp Singing in East Tennessee.

Don't forget the website as well: oldharp.org to find all sorts of valuable singing schedules, links and resources.

Name:	Do	Ra	Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Si	Do	Do	Si	La	Sol	Fa	Mi	Ra	Do
Pronounced:	Do	Ray	Mee	Faw	Sole	Law	See	Do	Do	See	Law	Sole	Faw	Mee	Ray	Do

Old Harp Newsletter- ISSN No. 1546-038X

Founder: Larry Olszewski

Publisher: Friends of The New Harp of Columbia

Editor: Andrew Whaley