

APPROACHING 150:

A BRIEF HISTORY

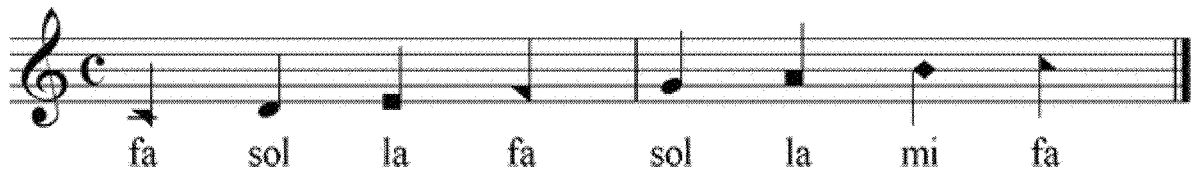
OF THE

EAST TEXAS

MUSICAL CONVENTION

AND SACRED HARP

IN EAST TEXAS



APPROACHING 150:
A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE
EAST TEXAS
MUSICAL CONVENTION
AND SACRED HARP
IN EAST TEXAS

COMPILED BY
R. L. VAUGHN

Waymark Publications 2005
Mount Enterprise, Texas



ROBERT L. VAUGHN
3528 COUNTY ROAD 3168 WEST
MOUNT ENTERPRISE TX 75681

© 2005

All rights reserved
Printed in the U. S. A.
By Instantpublishers.com

Dewey Decimal Classification: 782
Subject Heading: Music

Cataloging Data

Approaching 150: A Brief History of the East Texas Musical Convention
and Sacred Harp in East Texas/ R. L. Vaughn

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index

ISBN: 1-59872-040-6 \$11.99

1. Shape Note Singing – History
2. Church music – Southern States
3. Hymns, English – History
4. Sacred Songs – United States – History

782.270975

ML 3188

CONTENTS

Foreword	-	-	i
Acknowledgements	-	-	ii
Dedication	-	-	ii
Introduction	-	-	1
I. Its Minutes	-	-	4
II. Its Origin	-	-	6
Oral tradition	-	-	6
Pauline Cathey's introduction	-	-	7
William R. Adams' letter	-	-	7
Another letter from W. R. Adams	-	-	8
Who Started the Convention?	-	-	9
Who was here in 1855?	-	-	10
A student of B. F. White	-	-	11
M. S. Steger's statement	-	-	11
Lota Spell's find	-	-	12
Frank Manuel's membership	-	-	12
T. D. H. Sammon's book	-	-	13
Some corrections	-	-	13
Summary	-	-	14
III. Its Textbook	-	-	15
IV. Its People	-	-	18
V. Its Places	-	-	36
VI. Its Name, Offices, and Meeting Dates	-	-	43
VII. Final Thoughts	-	-	49
VIII. Part 2 – Reminiscences	-	-	60
IX. Appendices	-	-	64
A. Constitution	-	-	64
B. Sacred Harp singings in East Texas	-	-	65
C. Mary Crowder (Hunter) Hall	-	-	65
D. Excerpts from the Minutes	-	-	66
E. Other Texas Sacred Harp Conventions	-	-	67
F. Members list from Book 3	-	-	67
G. Sacred Harp periodicals in Texas	-	-	69
H. Historical Marker project	-	-	69
I. ETMC Trivia	-	-	70
Bibliography	-	-	71
Index	-	-	75

Foreword

In her introduction to "Sacred Harp Traditions in Texas", Lisa Hardaway wrote, "The Sacred Harp tradition is largely undocumented in Texas." Its geographical distance from the Sacred Harp "heartland" and, perhaps, other factors might have led to an unconscious dismissal of the probable importance of Texas and Texas singers to the historical development of the Sacred Harp songbook and the Sacred Harp tradition. Yet the East Texas Musical Convention will celebrate its sesquicentennial just three years after the oldest existing Sacred Harp Convention, the Chattahoochee Musical Convention of Georgia, celebrated 150 years in 2002.

Materials for this history have been gleaned from the East Texas (Sacred Harp) Musical Convention minutes, autobiographies, church histories, county histories, family histories, interviews, newspaper articles, periodicals, and oral tradition. Much secondary material has been researched due to a lack of primary material. Because of time constraints, some of these materials have been taken at face value without further research. For example, if a family history states that a person descended through a particular line or performed a particular feat, I have generally accepted the information as accurate rather than taking time to verify it. The short "biographies" of convention officers help add substance to a period into which we only see through a glass darkly. More comprehensive research of periodicals, such as local newspapers, the *Sacred Harp Journal*, A. S. Kieffer's *Musical Million*, B. F. White's *The Organ*, and M. W. Miracle's *Sacred Harp Monitor* might reveal more correspondence that would contribute to a fuller understanding of the East Texas Convention. For a brief history, the amount of footnotes may seem excessive, but I hope to lay a foundation for others who will build on this yet very incomplete knowledge of our history. In an age in which information becomes more and more accessible, perhaps we will witness an unlocking of the mysteries that surround the formation of the East Texas Musical Convention.

Most of the Convention's early history still remains to be discovered. It is with deep regret that more has not been achieved. Yet it is my hope that this manuscript will incite interest in Sacred Harp and Sacred Harp history; that it will contribute to the overall recognition of the importance of Sacred Harp in Texas and Texas in Sacred Harp; that it will help further *the cause*; and that it will honor the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the East Texas Musical Convention.

In this manuscript I have tried to relate some of the history of the Convention through its minutes, its people, its places, its traditions, and memories of living participants. I regret any errors, misprints, or other misinformations that may be found in this work and take full responsibility for them. I could not finish, I just had to quit. I heartily solicit any advice, additions or corrections.

R. L. Vaughn
3528 CR 3158 W
Mt. Enterprise, TX
June 24, 2005

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my wife, who photographed, proofread, and put up with many hours of distraction due to this research; to librarian Lois B. Bowman and volunteer Catherine Longenecker of Eastern Mennonite University, who went over and above the “call of duty”; to Donald Stephen Clarke and Mike White, for their help with White family genealogy; to Mrs. Mary Frank Dunn, for help researching Zion Hill church minutes; to the East Texas Historical Association, for supplying a program and video of their Sacred Harp Preservation Symposium; to Jo Freeman, for proofreading the manuscript; to Judy Hauff and Larry Olszewski, for supplying issues of the 1987 National Sacred Harp Newsletter which reprinted the first issue of the *Sacred Harp Journal*; to Harold Hill, for supplying a copy of the Lone Star Convention minutes; to Mary Lee Knight, for answering numerous questions about Panola County & its people; to Carolyn Miracle, for supplying two issues of *The Sacred Harp Monitor*; to Tom Mitchell, for his 2004 recording of the Convention, and for giving permission to use his photographs of the 2001 Convention; to Barbara Moore, for supplying missing issues of *Away Here in Texas*; to John Morris, Emmie Morris, Sam Craig, and Marion Grant for their help and especially for their dedication as present officers of the Convention; to John Plunkett, for his recommendations, research on Sacred Harp composers, and help with historical perspective from the Georgia-Alabama viewpoint; to Gaylon Powell, for research on Sacred Harp composers, and for memorializing Texas singers on the world wide web; to Donald Ross, for his recommendations, proofreading and help with historical perspective from the East Texas viewpoint; to Terre Schill, for her research into periodicals; to Mr. & Mrs. Paul Standley, for supplying a copy of the Trinity County Convention minutes; to Warren Steel, for sharing his research on Sacred Harp composers; to Tom Vaughn, for his research into Federal censuses; to Susan Weaver, for her work promoting the Convention and toward obtaining an historical marker; to Karen Willard, for supplying information on W. M. Cooper; to all those who answered questionnaires and submitted information; to others too many to remember and name who have contributed to the formation and completion of this book. I appreciate the work of Lisa Hardaway, Margaret Rounsavall, and Michael Donald Williams, whose theses pave the way for a work such as this. I would also like to acknowledge many depositories of information and their kind assistance: East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas; Fondren Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas; Henderson County Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library, Athens, Texas; James G. Gee Library, Texas A & M at Commerce, Commerce, Texas; Kellar Library, Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary, Jacksonville, Texas; Kurth Memorial Library, Lufkin, Texas; Longview Public Library, Longview, Texas; Lorenzo De Zavala State Archives & Library Building, Austin, Texas; Perry-Casteñada Library, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; Rusk County Library System, Henderson, Texas; Sadie A. Hartzler Library, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia; Tyler Public Library, Tyler, Texas.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the members of the East Texas Sacred Harp Convention, past and present; and especially to those unsung heroes who carried Sacred Harp in East Texas through the “lean” years (after World War II and before the revival of interest in shape-note music), helping preserve its legacy to this modern generation of singers.

Introduction

Sacred Harp is “a mighty, full-bodied, abundantly sou’fu’, often quite rough choral attack that confronts you then sweeps you along like an unstoppable tide, swelling and breaking with incredibly powerful momentum.” *Sacred Harp* is a colloquial expression used to describe a type of Southern religious folk music.² The name derives from one of at least four song books published in the 19th century, bearing the title *The Sacred Harp*.³ The first book with this title was compiled by John Hoyt Hickok and printed in Lewistown, Pennsylvania in 1832. The second was compiled by Lowell and Timothy Vason and printed in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1834. The third was compiled by Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha J. King and printed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1844. B. F. White (1800-1879), of Harris County, Georgia, and E. J. King (ca. 1821-1844), of Talbot County, Georgia, collaborated to compile, transcribe, compose tunes, and publish a book of over 250 hymn and folk tunes. White and King’s *Sacred Harp* was rooted in the four-shape shape note singing school tradition and incorporated the four shapes originally used in a book called *The Easy Instructor* by William Smith and William Little. “Fa” is represented as a triangle ▲, “sol” as a circle or oval ○, “la” as a square or rectangle □, and “mi” as a diamond ◆.

E. J. King died soon after the book was published, and White was left to guide its growth. He was responsible for organizing singing schools and singing conventions in which *The Sacred Harp* was used as the textbook. During his lifetime, the book went through three revisions – in 1850, 1859, and 1869. The first two new editions simply added appendices of new songs to the back of the book. In 1869 a more extensive revision was undertaken, removing some of the less popular songs, and adding new ones in their places. From the original 262 pages, the book was expanded to 477 pages by 1869. *The Sacred Harp* of White and King is the book that grew into a Southern religious tradition. It is the singing from this book of which people speak when they refer to singing “Sacred Harp”.

Three revisions of the Sacred Harp are currently in use at “Sacred Harp” singing conventions: *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Revision*; *The B. F. White Sacred Harp: Revised Cooper Edition*; and *The Sacred Harp, Fourth Edition, with Supplement*. The 1991 Revision is the most widely used, followed by the Cooper Edition. The Fourth Edition with Supplement has limited use, but a reprinting scheduled for 2005 should bring renewed interest. A companion tune-book, *The Colored Sacred Harp*, by Judge Jackson, is used by black singers in South Alabama and Florida. The greatest strength of the “Sacred Harp” conventions has traditionally been found in the southern United States, with Alabama being the leading region. Sacred Harp remained a mostly Southern institution until around 1976, the year of America’s celebration of her Bicentennial. It was discovered north of the Mason-Dixon Line, and now there are

¹ David Kidman in a review of the CD *Sacred Harp Singing in Western Massachusetts, 2000-2001* for NetRhythms.co.uk. <http://netrhythms.co.uk/reviewss.html#sacred> [Accessed Sun Aug 22, 3:31:26 pm US/Central 2004]

² Many Sacred Harp singers object to their songs being called “folk music”. Nevertheless, this is how it is categorized by musicologists. I use the term “folk music” as something that our music falls under by a long and intimate connection with “folks” outside the professional music field. For the most part, that is the way Sacred Harp has been carried on and preserved.

³ In *Hymns of Our Faith*, William J. Reynolds identifies a fourth book, *The Sacred Harp* by J. M. D. Cates, published in 1867 in Nashville, TN. (*Hymns*, Reynolds, p. xxiv, Broadman, 1964)

Sacred Harp singings throughout the United States and even in Canada, England, and Australia. For a detailed picture of the music and its traditions, see *The Sacred Harp, A Tradition and Its Music*, by Bruce E. Cobb, Jr.

The East Texas Musical Convention, now commonly called the East Texas Sacred Harp Convention, was founded in 1855. The East Texas Convention was apparently modeled after the older (now defunct) Southern Musical Convention, established in Georgia in 1845 by B. F. White and others. During its history the body convened annually in the following East Texas counties: Gregg, Harrison, Panola, Rusk, Smith and Upshur.⁴ For the location of these counties within the state and region, see Figure 1: *Texas, East Texas, and the East Texas Musical Convention Area*. *The Sacred Harp*, by B. F. White, was the first textbook of the Convention. *The B. F. White Sacred Harp (2000 Revision)* by W. M. Cooper is the current book of the Convention.



Kelly Beard and his son, Neil, at the 2001 East Texas Convention

⁴ These counties comprise a north central portion of what is considered East Texas as a region, which "may be separated from the rest of Texas roughly by a line extending from the Red River in north central Lamar County southwestward to east central Limestone County and then southeastward to Galveston Bay."

See, e.g. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/EE/rye1.html> [Accessed Sun Aug 29, 8:47:20 pm, US/Central 2004] East Texas geography is composed mainly of the "Pineywoods", a mixed forest of deciduous and conifer flora which is a westward prolongation of the Gulf timber belt.

TEXAS, EAST TEXAS AND THE EAST TEXAS MUSICAL CONVENTION AREA

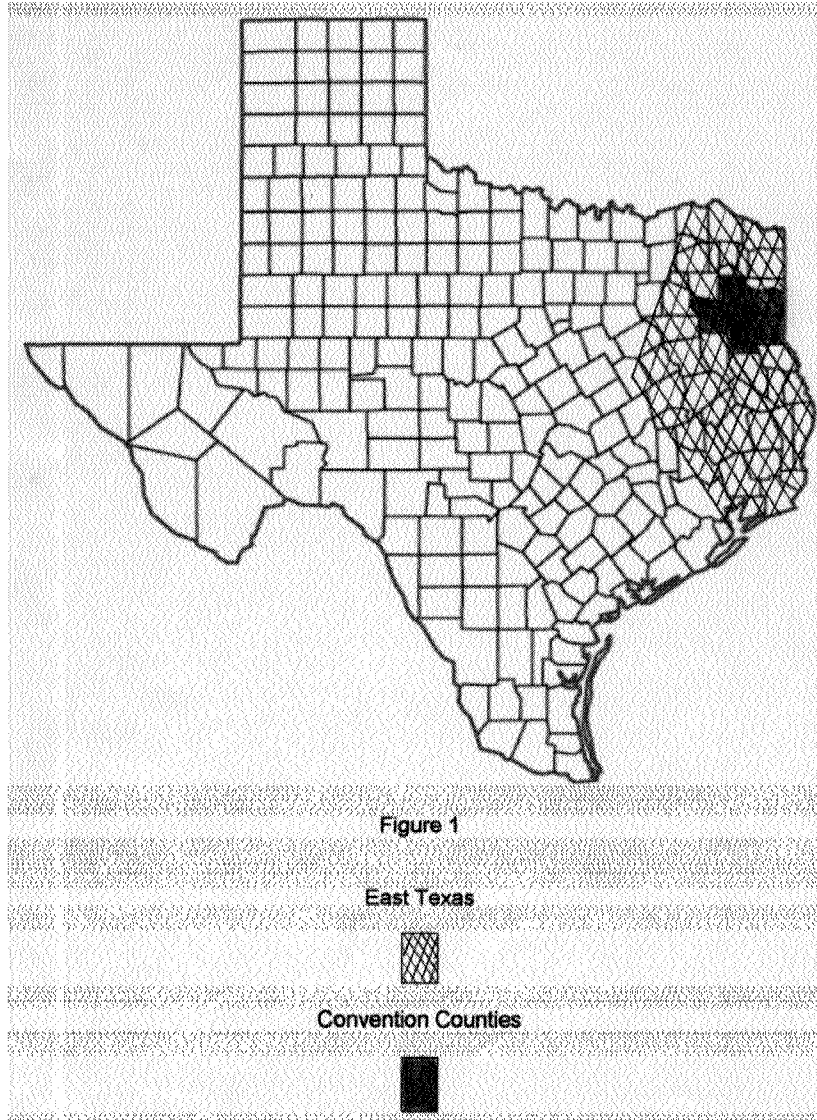


Figure 1

Counties of the East Texas Musical Convention
Compared to the East Texas region and the State

Its Minutes

The Convention has in its possession three minute books⁵ and a fourth minute book is deposited at the Texas State Library. This author is positing that there may be as many as six books of minutes:

(1) An original copy of East Texas Musical Convention minutes from 1855 until the convention temporarily quit meeting during the Civil War – Such a copy is not known to exist. The fact that a brief of these was not included in Book No. 3 (see below) suggests that these minutes, if they existed, were not in Book No. 2.

(2) An original copy of minutes from 1868 to circa 1906 – Such a copy is not known to exist. The motion of July 24, 1907 (see below) indicates that such a book did exist.

(3) An original minute book with meeting dates from 1868 and minutes from 1907 until 1974⁶ – This copy is deposited at the Texas State Library and is evidently the copy begun by C. C. Price. The minutes of 1907 indicate a previous minute book from which the clerk was to transcribe the by-laws and Constitution: “Motion carried to buy a new record book. \$1.20 was contributed and turned over to C. C. Price and he was instructed to purchase a book. On motion Bro. C. C. Price was requested to transcribe the by-laws and Constitution.”⁷ The new book also shows that he must have decided to transcribe the meetings and officers from the old book as well. That information is inserted after the by-laws and Constitution. This book contains about 280 pages plus loose pages inserted within those pages.⁸

(4) A handwritten copy of “Minute Book No. 3” (from 1868-1958) – A ledger type book, this copy contains 300 pages and is in the possession of the Convention secretary. “The Sing Class made up \$61.35 for Mrs. Pauline Cathy to buy the book, things she need (sic) to prepare a new book of the old book, to preserve the old record.”⁹ Mrs. Cathy added some information from loose items in Book 3. The back of this book contains some (evidently incomplete) lists of members enrolled from 1922-1956 copied from the old book. Since this is a handwritten copy rather than a photocopy, there are some variations from “Book 3”.

(5) An original minute book from 1961 until 1992 – A ledger type book, this copy contains 286 pages is in the possession of the Convention secretary.

(6) An original minute book from 1993 until the present – A loose-leaf notebook, consisting of typewritten minutes, memorial committee reports and financial reports, this copy is in possession of the Convention secretary. Records of these singings (as well as 1978-1992) appear in the publication *Directory and Minutes of Annual Sacred Harp Singings Throughout the United States of America*.¹⁰

This author, until someone or something proves or disproves it, is operating under the assumption that the Convention did keep full minutes from its inception in 1855 and that such minutes may have been lost, destroyed, or they could possibly be held by some private party. Keeping such minutes would be consistent with the general practice of other conventions of the day. If such is the case, six separate books have existed.

⁵ The minutes are held by the Convention secretary.

⁶ In book to 1958, with various loose pages up to 1974

⁷ Minutes, “Book 4” (1868-1958), East Texas Musical Convention, Friday, July 26, 1907, p. 16

⁸ Because the old book is so fragile, I chose to do most research from a photocopy at the State Archives, and the handwritten copy of Pauline Cathy.

⁹ Minutes “Book 5” (1961-1992), East Texas Musical Convention, Sunday August 8, 1976, p. 129

¹⁰ Because of their accessibility, I have often chosen to reference these directories for minutes after 1978.

Perhaps future research will bring the missing copies to light. Based on this theory, the books are described as “Book 1” (1855-??), “Book 2” (1886-1906), “Book 3” (1868-1974), “Book 4” (1868-1958), “Book 5” (1961-1992) and “Book 6” (1993-present). Since “Book 6” is in use, its last year remains to be determined.

Missing Years and the 1880 Discrepancy

Presently, there are no official records of the years before 1868. A few records after that date are missing: – 1878-79; 1902; 1904-1906; 1951; 1960. These are probably best explained by a change in secretaries and the subsequent failure to transfer initial minutes to the record book, though it is possible that the Convention did not meet in some of these years.

W. R. Adams, in a letter to the *Musical Million* in August of 1880 (see p. 7), confirms that the convention did meet in the years of 1878 and 1879 when he states that the Convention “has held its annual sessions regularly except three or four years during the war”. The 1906 meeting is confirmed through an advertisement in the *Panola Watchman* newspaper.¹¹

Pauline Cathey’s notations in Book 3 confirm that loose minutes were kept, and that sometimes they did not get written into the book. She found minutes for 1950 and 1952 and included them.¹² The author’s search of Book 3 at the State Archives also turned up part of the minutes for 1959.

There is a discrepancy between the 1880 minute record location and the location referenced in the letter by W. R. Adams to the *Million* that same year. Adams wrote, “Its last session was held at Carthage, Panola County. Its next session will be held at Pea Town, Gregg county, commencing Thursday before the fourth Sunday in July, 1881.” The minute book 3 records that the Convention met in Pea Town in 1880 and only that it met in 1881. It is unlikely that Adams, an officer and active participant, would be incorrect about the meeting location when writing only a month after the meeting had taken place. He wrote the *Musical Million* again on August 1, 1881 and mentioned the Convention had just met at Pea Town.¹³ What is likely is that a secretary failed to record the minutes from 1878-1880 and that another secretary later remembered and included the 1880 meeting incorrectly.

¹¹ *The Panola Watchman*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4, Wednesday, July 18, 1906

¹² Minutes, “Book 3” (1868-1974), East Texas Musical Convention pp. 237, 240

¹³ *The Musical Million and Fireside Friend*, Dayton, VA; Aldine S. Kieffer, editor; 12:9 (September, 1881), p. 135

Its Origin

Oral Tradition

Most of the earliest history of the Convention is hidden from our view. Oral tradition passed on by Sacred Harp singers down to the present day has maintained that the Convention started before the Civil War. Convention records only reach to its sessions after the War. One version further tells us that it was organized in Smith County. Another version of this tradition specifies that it began in the then-thriving town of Starrville. If so, Starrville itself was only three years old when the East Texas Musical Convention was organized in its boundaries. The idea that the Convention started in Smith County or Starrville may be an incorrect “extrapolation” based on the Starrville entry being the first entry brought over in Book 3 and that entry not being dated.¹⁴ A comparison of the date (Oct. 1) with the day the Convention convened (Thursday before the 1st Sunday in October) and a “perpetual calendar” shows that entry would not have been for 1855 and would be correct for the year 1868.¹⁵ M. S. Steger believed the convention started in Panola County (see p. 11).

In an interview in 1975, long time Sacred Harp leader Dennis Jones (1888-1978) stated, “The Old East Texas Sacred Harp Singing Convention was organized before the Civil War. It was stopped during the war. In 1868, the convention was renewed. They met at a church about six miles east of Henderson.”¹⁶ Either Mr. Jones statement that it was renewed at a meeting at a church about six miles east of Henderson is incorrect, or the conclusion that the Starrville entry is for 1868 is incorrect, or perhaps there was a re-organizational meeting “east of Henderson” before the Convention was held in Starrville in October. Another possibility is that the Starrville entry is correct, but that the first post Civil War session was earlier than 1868 and was simply not recorded in the minutes. This would mean that the Convention was disrupted “three or four” years by the war and/or its aftermath earlier than the years 1864-1867 which we suppose based on assuming that 1868 was the first renewed session.

In a newspaper interview in 1991, Justice Donald R. Ross, now of Texarkana, a singer and leader in the present-day Convention, remarked, “Settlers founded the East Texas Sacred Harp Singing Society in 1855, and according to oral tradition, they disbanded for about four years during the Civil War. They reorganized in 1868 as the East Texas Sacred Harp Singing Convention.”¹⁷ This statement by Justice Ross represents one of many examples of the tradition of a pre-Civil War organization that has been passed down to singers still living and participating in the Convention.

Myrl Jones, a Sacred Harp singer of the Smith family who grew up in Smith County, confirmed that she had heard that the East Texas Convention “started before the Civil War”.¹⁸

¹⁴ It is likely that the year was recorded by Price, but that edge of the page is now worn away.

¹⁵ CalendarHome.com Perpetual Calendar <http://www.calendarhome.com/tyc/>

[Accessed Thurs July 22, 4:22:40 pm US/Central 2004]

¹⁶ “Sacred Harp II”, *Loblolly Vol. 3, No. 1, Summer 1975*, (Gary, TX: Gary High School, 1975), pp. 28, 29 [Gary School newspaper]

¹⁷ Foster, Doug, “Sacred Harp singers will convene”, *Longview News-Journal*, Friday, August 9, 1991, p. 6-A

¹⁸ Myrl Jones, Sacred Harp singer, Smith County, interview by R. L. Vaughn March 13, 2004

Pauline Cathey's Introduction

After the 1976 meeting of the Convention, Pauline Cathey purchased a book and hand-copied the old minute book of the East Texas Musical Convention. She penned the following introduction.

East Texas Musical Convention

This is a copy of the original minutes of The East Texas Musical Convention organized in Smith County before the Civil War. The original minutes are being preserved for the benefit of future generations. All of the charter members of this group have been called home to their great reward, and many of the sacred harp singers have passed on through the years. We that are left, hope there will always be sacred harp singers in Texas. As those of today pass on, may the ones of tomorrow take their place. We think this music is one of the finest in the land and truthfully tells the story of our hope in the Lord.

By Pauline Cathey¹⁹

This introduction also passes on the tradition of the Convention's existence before the Civil War. The fact that the Convention was organized in Smith County has not yet been found in any sources other than Mrs. Cathey's introduction and oral tradition.

William R. Adams' Letter²⁰

Some important light on the East Texas Musical Convention is shed by a letter written by William Russell Adams to Aldine S. Kieffer (editor of the *Musical Million*). This letter as the source of the date of organization was first cited by G. P. Jackson in his *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*²¹ and later by Buell Cobb in *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music*.²² Members of the East Texas Convention evidently were not aware of Adams' letter or Jackson's citation until late in the 20th century (after Cobb's book was released). The letter in full follows.

Iron Bridge, Gregg Co., Tex., August 2, 1880

ED. MILLION: - I have just returned from attending the East Texas Musical Convention and thinking you would like to hear from this part of the country musically, I send you some of the proceedings. This is the oldest musical body in the State. It was organized in 1855, and has held its annual sessions regularly except three or four years during the war. Its organizers adopted the *Sacred Harp*, by White & King, (four shape notes) at the start and has held to it up to date. But "light is spreading," and many of the members of the old East Texas Convention are coming into the late and easy style (seven shape) and as evidence we had a great many copies of TEMPLE STAR²³ from which several lessons of music were sung. I carried SHARON'S DEWY ROSE and

¹⁹ Minutes, "Book 4" (1868-1958), East Texas Musical Convention, Introduction, p. 1

²⁰ *The Musical Million and Fireside Friend*, Dayton, VA; Aldine S. Kieffer, editor; 11:9 (September, 1880), p. 135

²¹ Jackson, George Pullen, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Songs, Singings, and 'Buckwheat Notes'*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), p. 111

²² Cobb, Buell E. Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1978), p. 139

²³ Adams' mention of the Temple Star is interesting. In the book *Appleby, The Story of an East Texas Town*, by James Vard Melton, the author remarks that the Sacred Harp singers sang from the Temple Star. Adams' correspondence reflects that book was popular among at least some Sacred Harp singers. The Temple Star was an oblong seven-shape tune book published in 1877 by Ruebush, Kieffer & Company.

SPIRIT WHISPERS and showed them around; I sung from them and all expressed themselves highly pleased with them. I carried with me the July number of THE MILLION from which was sung the specimen pages of the coming book – THE TRIBUTE. All say that you, Mr. Editor, are doing a fine work for the Character Notes, and many promised to send for THE MILLION this fall. We had some of the round headed fraternity with us, but they joined in the music like men. If they had any prejudices they kept it to themselves. I was one of three placed on the Committee on Publication. We could not make any report with so short a time, consequently we have till the next annual meeting to report, and with the light before me I am sure that Ruebush, Kieffer & Co.'s works will be highly recommended, if not adopted. You know it takes time to clear a new road of its stumps.

The East Texas musical organization is a very large body extending over five or six counties. Its last session was held at Carthage, Panola County. Its next session will be held at Pea Town, Gregg county, commencing Thursday before the fourth Sunday in July, 1881. More another time.

W. R. ADAMS

Adams' correspondence opens an important window into the early East Texas Musical Convention. It indicates that:

1. The Convention was established in 1855.
2. *The Sacred Harp* was the initial book adopted by the East Texas Convention.
3. The Convention failed to meet several years due to the Civil War.
4. The gaps in the records for 1878 and 1879 are due to a failure to record the meeting rather than a failure to meet.
5. By 1880 even some leaders within the Convention favored changing from four to seven shaped notes.

If W. R. Adams' facts are correct (and there is no reason to suppose they are not),²⁴ then in 2005 the East Texas Musical Convention (now called East Texas Sacred Harp Convention) will reach its 150th year of existence. The counting of annual sessions does not reflect this period since the Convention was in abeyance for a few years during the War between the Northern Union and the Southern Confederacy. Its age is surprising in that it is only three years younger than the Chattahoochee Convention of Georgia (oldest surviving Sacred Harp Convention). Early migrations from Georgia to Texas probably account for the second oldest surviving Sacred Harp Convention skipping all the way from Georgia to Texas.

Another Letter from W. R. Adams

Another letter from Adams to Kieffer in 1884 clearly establishes that he is the same W. R. Adams who served as Secretary (1873) and President (1874, 1884, & 1885) of the East Texas Musical Convention.

Iron Bridge, Gregg Co., Tex., July 19, 1884

ED. MILLION: - After a long silence I will give you a few musical items from this part of Texas. The labors of the East Texas Musical Convention have just closed, and to say the least it was a success – eight hundred or a thousand people in attendance on Saturday and Sunday. Excellent music, especially those old minor strains, peculiar to

²⁴ Adams served as the Secretary of the Convention in 1873 and as its President in 1874, 1884, and 1885 (and possibly earlier).