

TEXAS SACRED HARP NEWSLETTER

August – December, 2004

East Texas Musical Convention: The First Fifty Years

by Robert Vaughn



Monnie Ross, at the 2002 East Texas Convention in Henderson

Almost 150 years ago, The East Texas Musical Convention was organized by a group of people we cannot identify in a place that is unknown to us. Its beginnings reach into the first century of our nation's existence, to a time when people were still living who had walked with our founding fathers, a time before the great divide of the War Between the States, and a time when Texas was still very much a frontier. *The Sacred Harp* was in its second edition, and singers were singing from only 366 pages. When the Convention was organized in 1855, *The Sacred Harp* book was eleven years old; the Southern Musical Convention was ten years old; and the Chattahoochee Convention only three. *(continued on page 4)*

Upcoming Texas Singings

The following singings are scheduled for August through November 2004. Maps are available online at www.fasola.org/maps/ or from Cheryl Foreman (call 214-497-9911). Details, including location, directions, and contact information, are listed on pages two through three of this newsletter. Every effort has been made to present accurate information in this newsletter, but **please call the contact person** before making travel arrangements to make sure nothing has changed.

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August 7 - 8 138th Annual East Texas Convention

Location and Directions

Henderson Community Center, Henderson, TX
From E. Main Street in downtown Henderson, drive south on S. High St. The community center is at the corner of S. High and Fair Park.

Other Information

The singing is from the Cooper book. On Saturday, the singing is from 9:30 until 3:00, and on Sunday from 9:30 until 2:30. Call John and Emmie Morris for additional information at (903) 898-2510.

Lodging

In Henderson, Holiday Inn Express, (903) 657-8789 or Best Western Inn, (903) 657-1195. In Kilgore, Holiday Inn Express (903) 986-3533 or Best Western Inn of Kilgore (903) 9861-195.

September 11 Crosbyton Singing

Location and Directions

Mt. Blanco Fossil Museum, Crosbyton, TX (35 miles east of Lubbock on highway 62/82). We will meet downtown in the auditorium of the Mt. Blanco Fossil Museum, 124 W. Main.

Other Information

The singing is from the Denson book from 10:00 until 4:00, with a two-hour break for lunch. Singers and listeners are all welcome to attend. Everyone will be on their own for supper and we will meet again in the auditorium from 6:30-8:00 and sing from the new Primitive Baptist Hymnals.

For more information, call Tom Taylor 806-263-4363 or Kathy Taylor 806-789-2493, e-mail soupscoop@yahoo.com.

October 2 Smyrna Baptist Church Singing

Location and Directions

Smyrna Baptist Church, Mt. Enterprise, TX
On US Highway 259 drive south out of Henderson. Just before entering Mount Enterprise, turn right, west, on Farm-to-Market Rd #2496. The church is on the right, about 5 miles from Mount Enterprise.

Other Information

The singing is from the Cooper book; it will begin at 10:00 and end at 3:00. Call Robert Vaughn for additional information at (903) 863-5379.

Lodging

In Henderson, Holiday Inn Express, (903) 657-8789 or Best Western Inn, (903) 657-1195. In Kilgore, Holiday Inn Express (903) 986-3533 or Best Western Inn of Kilgore (903) 986-1195.

October 30 – 31 Southwest Texas Convention

Location and Directions

Community Center in San Gabriel Park, Georgetown, TX

Coming from the north on I-35, take the Lake Georgetown/Andice (Williams Dr.) exit and go left on Williams Drive to Austin Avenue. Turn left and go a couple of blocks to Stadium Drive, and turn right (not a controlled intersection). Take to first left through the park and watch for a sign that will point to the community center off to the left.

Coming from the south on I-35, take the same exit, go right on Williams Drive, and follow the same instructions.

Other Information

The singing is from the Cooper book. On Saturday, the singing is from 9:30 until 3:00, and on Sunday from 9:30 until 2:30. Call Gaylon Powell for additional information at (512) 258-7080.

November 6 Little Hope Singing

Location and Directions

Little Hope Primitive Baptist Church, Huntington, TX
Drive east of Lufkin on US Highway 69. Exit US 69 onto Farm-to-Market Rd #1669 at Huntington, and go north. In Huntington this road is also called Main St. The church is 4 miles from this junction, on Rd #1669, on the right.

Other Information

The singing is from the Cooper book; it will begin at 10:00 and end at 3:00. Call Burl Russell for additional information at (409) 624-2173.

Lodging

In Lufkin, Holiday Inn at 4306 Highway 59 South or La Quinta Inn at 2119 South First.

November 13 Dallas County Singing

Location and Directions

First Primitive Baptist Church, Dallas, TX
From Interstate 30 (going east or west) on the east side of Dallas, take Loop 12 exit, also called Buckner Blvd, and drive north. Stay in the right lane and at the second traffic light exit right onto Peavy Rd. At the first traffic light turn right onto Gross Rd. The church is almost immediately on the right: 1920 Gross Road.

Other Information

The singing is from the Denson book; it will begin at 9:30 and end at 3:00. For additional information, call Bruce and Beverly Coates at (972) 476-9937, or Gary and Vivian Rogan at (817) 220-5147.

Lodging

Call Cheryl Foreman at (214) 497-9911 for information.

Monthly Texas Singings

- **Dallas (third Saturday of each month 1:00 – 3:00)**

Held at the First Primitive Baptist Church at 1920 Gross Road in Dallas, Texas (east Dallas). Denson revision used, loaner books and new books available. Directions: From I-30 on the east side of Dallas, take Loop 12/Buckner Blvd. Exit and go north. Continue north to the second light, and turn right onto Peavy Rd. Go to the first light, then turn right onto Gross Road. The church is on the right.

Contact: Bruce and Beverly Coates at 972-476-9937 or Cheryl Foreman at 214-497-9911, e-mail cf91@yahoo.com.

- **Houston (third Sunday of each month 3:00 – 5:00)**

Held at the University of Houston (entrance 16 off Cullen Blvd.) Moores School of Music, Choral Recital Hall; Cooper and Denson books used (loaners available). Contact: Crystal Visco at 713-910-7855, e-mail cdvisco@yahoo.com, web site <http://home.houston.rr.com/visco/SacredHarp.htm>

- **Austin Area (various times and locations)**

First, Third, and Fifth Wednesday evenings: Fellowship Hall, Hyde Park Christian Church, 610 E. 45th St., Austin, Texas, 7 - 9 p.m. Contact: Alexa Gilmore, (512) 220-2884. (1991 Revision)

Fourth Saturday morning: Trinity United Methodist Church, 600 E. 50th St., Austin, Texas, 10:30 - 12:30. Contact: Morris Nelms, (512) 395-8397. (Cooper Revision)

- **East Texas Area (various times and locations)**

Contact Robert Vaughn at (903) 863-5379, e-mail rl_vaughn@yahoo.com.

Web Resources

<http://www.texasfasola.org> Information about Sacred Harp singing in Texas, including schedules and maps to the singings.

<http://www.fasola.org> Information about Sacred Harp singing nationwide, including schedules, maps and directions, and links to other shape-note sites.

Questions?

Like to subscribe? Have information to share or a suggestion for the newsletter? Contact Cheryl Foreman at (214) 922-5905 or (214) 497-9911; e-mail cf91@yahoo.com.

East Texas Musical Convention: The First Fifty Years *(continued from page 1)*

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. By tradition and available records, we can begin to understand some of its earliest history.

Two Letters by W. R. Adams

Some important bits of information concerning the East Texas Musical Convention come to us from letters written by W. R. Adams to Aldine S. Kieffer (editor of the Musical Million). Next follows those letters in full.

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 STAR from which several lessons of music were sung. I carried SHARON'S DEWY ROSE and 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

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 some extent to Southern voices, were hard to surpass. I had the honor of the chair, and must say harmony and a much-felt religious feeling prevailed during the whole time.

The music book question was before the Convention as usual. I mean the preparation of a new book for use in our Convention. It has been in contemplation for quite a while, but I think has rather played out; not that the talent is wanting, but the money to carry out its publication. E. T. Pound's book was before the Convention and examined, but it would not take. Nothing but the old Sacred Harp will answer, it seems, and if the advent of the New Sacred Harp does away with the old, I don't know what our Convention will do after their old books wear out.

I have not seen the New Sacred Harp, but will send for some copies soon, as I love to keep up with all late music. The musical interest in this section has taken a back seat, but I believe if a live teacher would come along he could make it count. Ruebush, Kieffer & Co.'s publications are chiefly used here, Temple Star in the lead. It stands next in merit to our Convention text-book. Wishing you great success, I am Yours truly,

W. R. ADAMS

Adams' letters are an important window into the early East Texas Musical Convention. They indicate that:

1. The Convention was established in 1855.
2. *The Sacred Harp* was the initial book adopted the East Texas Convention, and had remained so into the 1880s, despite some attempts to change.
3. The Convention failed to meet several years due to the "Civil" War.
4. The gaps in the East Texas Musical Convention records for 1878 and 1879 must be due to a failure to record the meeting rather than a failure to meet.
5. By the 1880 even some leaders within the Convention seem to favor changing from four to seven shaped notes.
6. The Convention joined other singers across the South in concern about *The Sacred Harp* possibly becoming unavailable.
7. The membership and sessions of the Convention was spread over about six East Texas counties. It has met in at least the following counties: Gregg, Harrison, Panola, Rusk, Smith, and Upshur.

If W. R. Adams' facts are correct (and there is no reason to suppose they are not), then in 2005 the East Texas Musical Convention (now called East Texas Sacred Harp Convention) will reach its 150th year of existence. It does not reflect this in its counting of annual sessions, since the convention was in abeyance for a few years during the War between the Northern Union and the Southern Confederacy. Adams himself served during the war, so it is not surprising that he doesn't know exactly how many years it did not meet, but rather gives an estimate. Nevertheless, we can be fairly certain that the East Texas Musical Convention has met in session about 145 times.

The age of the convention is surprising in that it is only 3 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.

Who Was Here in 1855?

Several leading lights of Sacred Harp and the Southern and Chattahoochee Musical Conventions moved to East Texas – including Oliver Bradfield, M. Mark Wynn, David P. White, and Jesse M. Moseley - but apparently none of them were there in 1855 when the East Texas Musical Convention was organized. Currently there are no extant records to direct us to those bold souls who in 1855 organized the East Texas Musical Convention. We may have to hope against hope and wait on Him who brings the secret things to light, and only have our hope satisfied when He does bring these things to light. Of those earliest persons known to be involved in the East Texas Musical

Convention, whom do we know was in East Texas in 1855? – John T. Holloway (age 35), William R. Adams (age 23), W. W. Crawford (age 22), Thomas Myrick (age 13). We also know that two brothers of B. F. White, Stephen Elias, were in Texas before 1855, but a clear connection has not been established between them and participation in the Sacred Harp.

A Student of B. F. White

Another person not mentioned in the minutes, but known to be here in 1855 was Mary Crowder (Hunter) Hall. She was born May 12, 1815 in Coweta County, Georgia, and, with her husband, James Bolling Hall, and five children, arrived at Jamestown in Smith County, Texas from Warrior Stand, Alabama in December of 1854. According to Mary's son, Dr. Thomas Hunt Hall, she "had a very musical voice and was said to have known by heart all the old Methodist Hymn Book, and was a student of the immortal B. F. White, author of *The Sacred Harp*..." Her husband was a Methodist minister, and he also served as postmaster of Berrien (changed to Jamestown in 1856) for about three years.

T. D. H. Sammon's Book

Mr. Murry Alewine of Pittsburg, Texas has in his possession a Sacred Harp song book that belonged to his great-great uncle, Thomas David Hale Sammon (1837-ca.1913). The inscription in the book indicates the possibility that in 1856 the East Texas Musical Convention met in Rusk County. The oral tradition passed down in his family is that the book was purchased at a singing convention. The date inscribed in the book is 1856. Mr. Alewine states, "I have no proof that it was bought at the 1856 Convention, but family stories have told that it was purchased at that Singing in Rusk County in 1856. The person who bought the book was Thomas David Hale Sammon. He wrote in the book (and the writing is still legible) - - - 'T. D. H. Sammon's Song Book. Purchased Anno Domini 1856 in Rusk County Texas'."

Short Biographies of Convention Officers

Adams, William Russell (1832-1889) – President: 1874, 1884, & 1885; Secretary: 1873. William R. Adams was the son of Lemuel A. Adams and Elizabeth (Brewer) Adams of Virginia. The Adams came to Texas around 1834. William was born in Blount County, Tennessee on May 3, 1832 and died March 9, 1889. He is buried at Peatown in Gregg County, Texas. Adams' correspondence to the editor of *The Musical Million* preserves the greatest amount of extant knowledge about the early East Texas Musical Convention other than the minutes themselves. Adams was a "Civil" War veteran, having served as a 1st Sergeant in Company H 18th Regiment Texas Infantry.

Allison, T. J. (1850-1938) – Secretary: 1874 & 1875. T. J. Allison was born in Maplesville, Bibb County, Alabama, July 29th 1850. He established a private school in the Pleasant Hill community of Upshur County in the 1880s. He later sold out in Pleasant Hill and entered the medical profession. "I enjoyed the association of Uncle Jack and his family for they seemed to take great interest in me and the whole family were singers. I had attended a couple of singings schools during mother's life-time and had learned to sing by note. There was only one note-book in general use at that time. (*The Sacred Harp*.) There were, I suppose, three or four hundred songs in the book and Uncle Jack could probably sing the bass, I was the soprano and Aunt Julia the tenor to every one of them from memory. The children, also, could sing many of them. This gave us a sort of prominence in the community and created a kindly feeling between the family and myself which might not otherwise have existed." "During the fall of 1881, I taught several singing schools."

Crawford, W. W. (1833-1895) - President: 1883, 1887-1889, 1891-1894. William W. Crawford was born January 1, 1833 in Pike County, Georgia, the son of James Crawford and Dolly M. Scott. James and Dolly came to Panola County in 1854, settling at Sugar Hill. W. W. married Lucinda Caroline Roquemore in 1865 in Panola County. He died December 26, 1895 and is buried in the Conner Cemetery in Beckville (Panola County). He was a double 1st cousin to Andrew J. Crawford, who served as convention president in 1896 and several later years.

Gamage, D. G. (1824-1894) – President: 1886. This is probably Davis Yancey Gamage, who was born to Alsay and Mourning Gamage in Jones County, Georgia on February 12, 1824. He married Louisa Ann Davis in 1855 in Clay County, Georgia. They moved from Alabama to Texas in 1871, settling in the Van Swearingen Community near Gary in Panola County. D. Y. Gamage and Louisa Ann joined the Mt. Bethel Baptist Church in June of 1871, and he served as a deacon there before they moved to Carthage around 1881. He served as postmaster of Murvual around 1875-76, as a Justice of the Peace, and four terms as a county Tax Assessor-Collector. "According to tradition and told to me by my

mother the youngest child of D. Y.'s, Her father was a fine singer and taught singing schools all over the area; also he was a teacher and taught school in the Mt. Bethel church during the week."

Holloway, James P. (1818-1884) – President: 1870, 1872, 1875 & 1880. James P. Holloway was the son of David and Mary (Hardigree) Holloway, and a brother of John T. Holloway. He was born 1818 in Georgia, died July 9, 1884 and is buried at Peatown in Gregg County, Texas. He married Sarah Elder in Clarke County, Georgia in 1842, and eight of their nine children were born in Georgia. James was the last of his family to come to Texas, arriving in 1859. James served as an elder in the Christian Church in Oconee County, Georgia, at the Christian Union Church in Rusk County, and with his wife and two children, was a charter member of the First Christian Church in Longview in 1875. He is remembered as their first pastor. James and Sarah's son, William Carroll Holloway (1844-1898), was also a minister.

Holloway, John T. (1820-1877) – President: 1868, 1869, 1873, & 1876. John T. Holloway was the son of David and Mary (Hardigree) Holloway, and a brother of James P. Holloway. He was born August 17, 1820 in Georgia and died April 1, 1877 in Upshur County, Texas. "On December 24, 1865, John T. Holloway and Ed E. Elder came from Rusk County and established a church and a school at Pleasant Hill...John T. Holloway was a minister of the gospel and a music teacher. These early settlers were fond of music and the first Sunday in each month was devoted to singing with a public lunch spread at noon." Holloway was an evangelist and minister of the Christian Church. He married Mary Gartrell in Georgia. After her death, he married Mary Read Ballard. They moved to Upshur County in 1864. John T. and his brother William Burton Holloway were the first of the Holloway family to come to Texas. Their glowing reports convinced other family members to follow. "They had even written a poem, which was published in a song book telling of their love for Texas." He and Mary (Read) are buried at Pleasant Hill Cemetery, Pritchett Community, Upshur County. Mary (Gartrell) is buried at the old (abandoned) Christian Union cemetery near Camden (Gregg/Rusk County).

Mangham, C. A. (1839-1906) – Secretary: 1882-1894, 1897, 1899-1901. Charles Absalem "Nat" Mangham was the son of James Pendleton Mangham of Pike County, Georgia. He and his brother, Will, served with the "Confederate Guards," Company A, 13th Georgia Infantry. Nat was wounded at Sharpsburg and was at the surrender at Appomattox. Sometime after the war he settled in Panola County, Texas. Brothers include John Willis (buried in Upson County) and William Decatur (buried in Pike County) Robert Jackson (Pike County) and Wiley James (Pike County). Though a memorial marker is placed in the Walton Cemetery, C. A. Mangham is buried at Rose Hill in Kaufman County.

Myrick, Thomas L. (1842-1906) – Secretary: 1868. Thomas L. Myrick was the son of Howel Myrick of Georgia, and was born January 14, 1842 in Alabama. He had come with his father to Texas sometime in the early 1850s. He was enrolled in school in Starrville (Smith County) in 1854. At the time of his death he was living in Tyler, having previously resided in Garden Valley for 29 years. Myrick was buried at the Cemetery in Garden Valley, Smith County, Texas.

Wynn, M. Mark (b. unk. -d. unk) – Secretary: 1869 & 1871. Sacred Harp composer M. Mark Wynn is probably the only person to serve as secretary of the three oldest Sacred Harp singing conventions – East Texas, Southern (org. 1845), and the Chattahoochee (org. 1852). According to Chattahoochee Convention minutes, Wynn was secretary in 1865 & 1866, and according to J. S. James, he was also secretary of the Southern Musical Convention for those same years. Wynn is author of the following songs in *The Sacred Harp* 1869 edition: 118 "Stockwood," 224 "Save, Lord, or We Perish," 303 "Zynder-zee," 450 "Elder," and 463 "Doddridge." His last three songs first appeared in the 1869 edition, after Wynn had moved to Texas. Mark Wynn wrote the Constitution of the Chattahoochee Musical Convention. He probably lived around Upshur County, but no one has found any record of him after 1871.

The East Texas Musical Convention has a long and glorious history. About one-fourth of the first fifty years of the East Texas Convention are presently hidden from view; of the other three-fourths, our extant minutes only record officers and time and place of meeting. Other records, such as periodicals and family histories, must be tapped in order to peer through the glass darkly.

Sources Include:

Autobiography of T. J. Allison, Md.

East Texas Musical Convention minutes

E-mail from Murry Alewine

History of Panola County 1819-1978, Hazel McCandless, Page 204, Leila B. LaGrone, editor; Panola County Historical Commission, 1979.

The Autobiography of Thomas Hunt Hall, MD, 1914

The Musical Million and Fireside Friend, Dayton, VA; Aldine S. Kieffer, editor; 1880, page 135, 1884, pages 140-141.