

Singing schools and shaped-note music

By Lloyd Bailey

Music and song have been a part of religious worship almost everywhere since the beginning of recorded history. This should be familiar to readers of the Old Testament where the book of Psalms is a collection of personal and communal prayers and hymns.

Some of them even have a designated tune (e.g., numbers 22, 45, 46) and suggested accompanying instruments (e.g., numbers 4, 5, 6).

Formal worship was carried out at sanctuaries where music and singing were usually provided by professional personnel. Thus the biblical Book of Psalms will often begin with the heading, "To the leader" (e.g., 5, 8, 11) and then give instructions as to instrument and tune. Elsewhere, the Levitical "Sons of Asaph" are mentioned as a guild of musicians and singers (I Chronicles 15:17; 16:5; 25:1-2).

While brief music and singing are widely attested in the early Old Testament for secular occasions in daily life (popular singing), the participation of ordinary persons in formal worship at a sanctuary is not well attested.

For those occasions, apparently, a professional class was organized at least by the post-exilic period (e.g., by the sixth century, B.C.). After all, the ordinary person was illiterate and in some societies those persons who could read and write were so proud and happy about the accomplishment that they called attention to it.

Furthermore, singing in biblical temple worship was so rigidly defined as to correctness that the training of a Levitical singer is said to have taken at least five years to master.

In the early years of Christianity, persecution by the Romans was widely practiced. Worship was carried out in secret, often in the home. It also took place in underground catacombs, with singing in the darkness amidst the corpses of the dead. It was thus necessary to begin freeing religious singing from formal times (liturgical calendar celebrations), places (sanctuaries), and trained personnel.

By and large, while music remained mostly under the formal control of the Church staff, congregational singing was sporadically practiced, especially under the influence of St. Ambrose of Milan (around A.D. 340-397).

However, by the late Middle Ages, trained choirs had resumed control of the singing of hymns. This control was broken by the Lutheran Church following the Protestant Reformation, followed by Moravians, Calvinism, and English and Scottish Protestants (such as Presbyterians and Methodists).

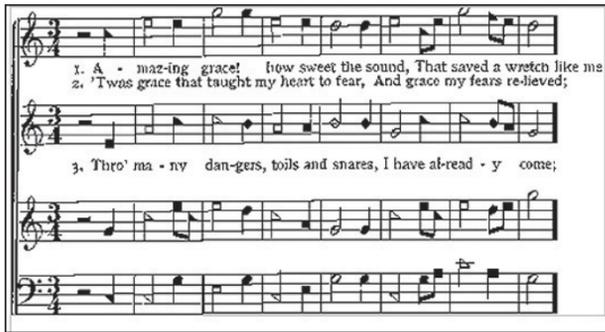
The Church of England, however, refrained from congregational hymn singing until A.D., 1820.

It was the expansion of European Civilization to the "New World" (the Americas) that really freed congregational singing from ecclesiastical control. As one well known musicologist has put it:

"...throughout the rest of the 18th Century, singing gradually released itself from the hegemony of the churches and became the possession of the people, churchman and outsider alike. Presently it became, in the eyes of religious conservatives, quite worldly indeed, for even though the songs themselves were still normally 'sacred,' the whole environment of their learning and fostering was what some might call delightfully secular."

It was in the Southern Protestant Colonies, and especially in connection with the "Western Movement" toward the newly opened frontiers, that finally broke the usual connection of hymns with church buildings and even the expression of them primarily at special times. People on the frontier were strongly attracted to occasions that allowed socialization and this included youth who welcomed the opportunity to find new prospects for matrimony.

For this and other reasons, "singing schools" that had been held in Protestant New England since the early 1700's but had begun to fade in popularity (in the mid-1800's), sprang to life



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in the south and west where people hungered for "something to do."

The transition from a congregation (or other group) listening to formally trained clergy or musicians...to singing by the group itself, was not an easy one. Many of the individuals in the congregation could not read, and in any case ordinarily even the church itself would not have hymnals. Even those that were available would contain words only without musical notation.

The Puritans of New England (at Massachusetts Bay, 1630) produced the first printed book in the "New World" (the Bay Psalm Book, 1640). Each of the 150 psalms was to be sung to one of thirteen tunes, and thus the appropriate tune for each could be memorized and thus congregational singing was possible.

One of those tunes, called "Old 100th" (because it was to be used with biblical psalm 100) still survives in modern hymnals. For example, in The United Methodist Hymnal (1989), it is no. 75 ("All people that on earth do dwell.") The tune is also used for no. 95, with more familiar words ("Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow").

The 9th edition thereof (1698) was the first to provide musical notation.

Initially, the leader (or a circuit-riding preacher who met groups of people standing in the yard of a pioneer log cabin) would "line out" (sometimes called "giving it out") the words of a hymn.

This practice actually began in England in the 1600s and was brought to the American Colonies. In England and in New England it began to fade out in the early 1700s. It now survives primarily in the southern Appalachians among Primitive Baptists, Old Order Regular Baptist, Old Order Mennonites, some African American choirs, and a few others.

A singing school was ordinarily a brief period of training in the sight-reading of vocal music. Such singing was ordinarily done "a Capella" (that is, without instruments) and often at gatherings outside of church services. Nonetheless, their focus might be primarily upon traditional hymns.

Such schools ordinarily lasted daily for two weeks, sometimes longer, and were usually held at mid-winter when farm chores were less demanding. They might be taught by a local person, although often there were traveling singing masters who journeyed from place to place. Sometimes nearly everyone in a small town might attend and others would come from many miles away. Announcement of an impending school might spread through flyer or newspaper advertisement as well as by word of mouth.

With the passage of time, some spontaneous schools were replaced with an annual school that was offered by a central organization (such as the Stamps-Baxter School of Music). They might be offered by various denominations such as Baptists, Methodists, and Church of God. Of course, formally trained musicians tended to "look down" on such instruction.

One of my distant cousins, Everett Bailey, born in 1898 in Fannin County, Georgia, with no formal musical training, relates his life of teaching such schools in a rural area. He speaks of one school of ten days duration, held from 8 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. Entire families came, bring their lunch. "When the last song was sung and the school dismissed, they seemed reluctant to leave

the building. Some were crying and hugging one another and shaking hands and saying goodbye. ...that class could sing and...they almost tore the roof off that church building [with their enthusiastic singing]. It was wonderful. That was the most rewarding experience of my life."

To cite but a few records of "singing schools" in Yancey, as reported in the local newspaper:

1912: at the Presbyterian Church near Celo (Burnsville Eagle).

4/21/1916: at the Pensacola Free Will Baptist Church (Burnsville Eagle).

6/6/1940: at the Double Island Baptist Church (Yancey Record).

5/14/1942: at the Cane River Baptist Church (Yancey Record).

3/2/1950: at the Patterson Branch Church (Yancey Record).

2/17/1972: at the Jacks Creek Baptist Church, "each Sunday night for a while" (Yancey Record).

The purpose of such schools was to teach beginners to read music. The tradition of "lining out" created a problem for many in the congregation because it was sometimes a struggle to remember both the tune and the words that were tossed out so quickly and with no chance of a second hearing.

However, the traditional system (by "round" or "roundhead" notes) was very complex. Thus, a new and simplified system would be helpful if not necessary. That system came to be called "shape" (or "shaped") notes. Note heads were printed in distinct shapes (initially four)"to indicate their scale degree and solmization syllable" (that is, "to help singers find pitches within the major and minor scales"). This is called the fa-so-la system).

As for details of what this means, even after much reading I do not feel adequate to explain how this system worked. Nothing that I have read really helped. Apparently, it really does require a teacher and a few weeks of class. I feel as did my cousin Everett Bailey (mentioned above) when he wrote a preface to a little autobiographical sketch. He admitted that it undoubtedly contained little grammatical mistakes, and then added that "readers who are as ignorant as I am won't know the difference!"

The shapes were: a right triangle for fa, an oval for so [originally sol], a rectangle for la, and a diamond for mi. See the accompanying illustration for how a later adaptation of the system appeared for the well-known song "Amazing Grace."

Singers would first sing the tune using only the names of the signs and then, having learned the tune, sing the words.

In a singing school, beginning students were typed by voice and then seated facing each other in a hollow square with the teacher or conductor in the middle. Tenors and alto singers faced each other, as did bass and treble (soprano) on the other two sides.

Anyone who would like to hear examples of such singing should consult the internet website: youtube.com/watch?v=9SXneg5WPx4 (and the attached sites; DO IT!). Singing in this style seems to generate happiness, enthusiasm, fellowship, and considerable volume! One person has spoken of her first encounter as follows:

"I sat down on the right-hand side on the third bench from the back and got hit by

LEGAL NOTICE
THE GREAT STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
IN THE COUNTY OF YANCEY
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE
SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION, BEFORE THE CLERK
21 E 29

In the Matter of the Estate of HENRIETTA TOMBERLIN, Deceased

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
HAVING QUALIFIED as Executrix of the Estate of HENRIETTA TOMBERLIN, deceased, of Yancey County, NC, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to present them to the undersigned on or before 25 May, 2021, or this notice will be pled in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to the said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 24th day of February, 2021.

PEGGY C. HOWELL
750 Sam Greene Road
Burnsville, NC 28714
DONNY J. LAWS
Attorney at Law
PO Box 397
Burnsville, NC 28714
Published: February 24, March 3, 10, 17, 2021

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE, YANCEY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of Lucille Hunter of Yancey County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons and corporations having claims against the Estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before the 2nd day of June, 2021 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 3rd day of March, 2021.

Alma Ree Wood
422 County Road 775
Riceville, TN 37370
Published March 3, 10, 17, 24, 2021

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE, YANCEY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

#21 E 70
Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of Jewel T. Bennett of Yancey County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons and corporations having claims against the Estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before the 10th day of June, 2021 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 10th day of March, 2021.

Emery N. Thomas
65 Strawberry Lane
Burnsville, NC 28714
Published March 10, 17, 24, 31, 2021

lightning," she said. "This incredible unearthly harmony that just poured over you. It was just so striking, so different from anything else in modern music. It had that deep, primal, early sound that just really knocked me over."

I saw a small remnant of this system in the behavior of my father. When he was questioned about something that he did not want to answer, he would say, in a sing-song voice, "Oh, some-do."

The fa-so-la system was soon joined by a seven-shape notation system. This is sometimes called the do-re-mi system, popularized in the movie, "The Sound of Music." Therein, Julie Andrews sings, "(Do!), a deer, a female deer; (Re!), a drop of golden sun; (Mi!), me, a name I call myself; (Fa!), a long, long way to run"; and so on.

Singing schools are now no longer limited to local and

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE, YANCEY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of Larry Douglas Edwards of Yancey County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons and corporations having claims against the Estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before the 26th day of May, 2021 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 24th day of February, 2021.

Louella Deyton Edwards
722 East Main Street
Burnsville, NC 28714
Published February 24, March 3, 10, 17, 2021

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE, YANCEY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

#21 E 65
Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of Edward Shuford of Yancey County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons and corporations having claims against the Estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before the 2nd day of June, 2021 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 3rd day of March, 2021.

John Shuford
130 Poodle Drive
Burnsville, NC 28714
Published March 3, 10, 17, 24, 2021

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE, YANCEY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

#21 E 42
Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of Lois Wanda King of Yancey County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons and corporations having claims against the Estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before the 2nd day of June, 2021 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 3rd day of March, 2021.

Ronald Gary King
1211 Eastham Drive
Apex, NC 27502
Published March 3, 10, 17, 24, 2021

Meals on Wheels needs volunteers

Meals on Wheels needs volunteers to deliver meals any weekday from 10:30 to noon to Yancey County's shut-ins.

For information call the Senior Center at 682-6011.

small gatherings. This is evident from such large organizations as "The Alabama School of Gospel Music" at Snead State Junior College; "The North Georgia School of Gospel Music," Dahlonega; "Texas Normal Singing School," at Abilene; and "The Worship Leade Institute," at Tulsa, OK.

As fate would have it, on the very date that I finished this article, the Burnsville newspaper (Yancey Times Journal for 12/4/2019) contained an article with this headline: "Christian Harmony Shaped-Note Singing Dec. 7 in Marshall."

Lloyd Bailey, a prolific collector and publisher of local history, is a Yancey County native and retired professor of religion at Duke University. He can be contacted at 4122 Deepwood Circle, Durham, NC 27707; 919-489-8731; lloyd@alumni.duke.edu.

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE, YANCEY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of Donna Jean Deyer of Yancey County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons and corporations having claims against the Estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before the 18 day of May, 2021 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 8th day of April, 2020.

Robin Dreyer
940 Grindstaff Road
Burnsville, NC 28714
Published February 17, 24, March 3, 10, 2021

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE, YANCEY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Co-Executors of the Estate of William O. Riddle of Yancey County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons and corporations having claims against the Estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before the 19th day of May, 2021 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate please make immediate payment.

This the 17th day of February, 2021.

Phillip Riddle
Johnny Riddle
26 Bakers Creek Road
Burnsville, NC 28714
Published February 17, 24, March 3, 10, 2021

LEGAL NOTICE
BURNSVILLE TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARING

The Town of Burnsville is seeking to closeout its Community Development Block Grant Infrastructure Program #17-I-2957 sewer line rehabilitation along Indian Trail and Meadow Road. The project included installation of 3,695 linear feet of new sewer line and 210 linear feet service lines benefiting 117 residents, 77.6 % of whom are low and moderate income individuals. The total CDBG-I expenditure for the project was approximately \$1,307,315.

A public hearing will be held on, April 1, 2021 at 6:00 pm at the Burnsville Town Center located at 6 South Main Street, Burnsville, NC to obtain citizen input regarding the project's closeout.

All interested citizens are encouraged to attend the public hearing and will be given the opportunity to provide oral and written comment on the project. Citizens may also make written comment via email publiccomment@townofburnsville.org that will be read at the public hearing.

If additional information is needed, please contact the Town of Burnsville at (828) 682-2420.

Persons with disabilities or who otherwise need assistance should contact Chad Fox at (828) 682-2420 or clerk@townofburnsville.org (Relay North Carolina #711) by March 19, 2021. Accommodations will be made for all who request assistance with participating in the public hearing.

This information is available in Spanish or any other language upon request. Please contact Chad Fox at (828) 682-2420 or at 2 Town Square, Burnsville, NC 28714 for accommodations for this request.

Esta información está disponible en español o en cualquier otro idioma bajo petición. Por favor, póngase en contacto con Chad Fox at (828) 682-2420 o en 2 Town Square., Burnsville, NC 28714 de alojamiento para esta solicitud.

Published March 10, 2021

