

**SONGS BEFORE  
UNKNOWN  
A  
COMPANION  
TO  
*THE SACRED HARP*  
REVISED COOPER  
EDITION  
2012**

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Waymark Publications  
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Printed in the U. S. A.

Cover design by Karen E. Willard

Dewey Decimal Classification: 782

Subject Heading: Vocal Music

### Cataloging Data

Songs Before Unknown: a Companion to *The Sacred Harp*,  
*Revised Cooper Edition, 2012*/ R. L. Vaughn

p.        cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index

ISBN: 978-0-692-52247-9        \$15.00

1. Sacred Harp. 2. Shape note singing. 3. Church music—  
Southern States. 4. Hymns, English—Southern States.

782.2

ML3111

## PREFACE

### Songs Before Unknown

*Behold the glories of the Lamb Amidst His Father's throne,  
Prepare new honors for His name, And songs before unknown.*

Isaac Watts in D. P. White's SONG TO THE LAMB (138a)

This book is a companion to *The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition, 2012*, and also a sort of “sequel” to *The Makers of The Sacred Harp* by David Warren Steel, with Richard Hulan. Read the latter work for biographies of older Sacred Harp composers in *The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition* who are also in *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition*.

*The Sacred Harp* was first produced in 1844 by Georgians Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha J. King. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, three prominent Sacred Harp singers produced revisions of this song book – W. M. Cooper, J. L. White and J. S. James. The latest revision of the James stream – *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition* – was the subject of the work by Steel and Hulan.

The early Sacred Harp history found herein is condensed, since much of it is available elsewhere. Because of the common history of these books, most early composers have tunes found in all three competing Sacred Harp books. This work will supply information about composers that *The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition, 2012* and *The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition* do not share in common. I add some details about composers mentioned in *The Makers of The Sacred Harp* for whom we have discovered new information. I also provide information in an appendix on a few poets, as well as others, including individuals whose work once appeared in the Cooper Revisions but are not found in the 2012 edition.

R. L. Vaughn  
Mt. Enterprise, Texas  
September 24, 2015

## **Acknowledgements and Explanations**

A young Baptist preacher at an associational meeting took his text from Ezekiel 47:3–5, the vision of the waters from the temple becoming a river. He divided his subject into four parts: ankle-deep, knee-deep, loin-deep, deep enough for swimming. For about an hour he developed his first two points. Ankle-deep was repentance from sin. Knee-deep was assurance of salvation.

Pioneer Kentucky Baptist preacher John Taylor (1752–1836) and other preachers – as was common in that day – were sitting behind him on the stand. Finishing his second division, the young preacher said, “Thirdly, we go a little deeper – where the waters reached the loins.” At this point John Taylor straightened up, pointed his finger, and spoke up, “Young man, come ashore. You are deep enough, deep enough.”<sup>1</sup>

A project of this nature and scope becomes an unending search for and interpretation of the facts. That fortunate young man had a Taylor to warn him to come back before he got in too deep. Unfortunately, with this project I was in over my head before I realized it. Nobody warned me! The data, the depth and the diligence required were more than enough to drown in. Despite frequent frustration, I am glad to have tried – and enjoyed it immensely. I hope that this effort will lay groundwork for future progress in Sacred Harp research. Without the help and encouragement of the Sacred Harp community, I could never have brought this work to fruition.

I would like to recognize and thank everyone who contributed to make this work possible, including John Bealle, Clarissa Fetrow, Wayne Jones, Sarah Kahre, Jesse Pearlman Karlsberg, Wade Kotter, John Plunkett, Rebecca Over, Gaylon Powell, Thomas Vaughn, the Sacred Harp Book Company – and especially Stanley Smith, for freely sharing his knowledge of and helping with singers and singings in southeast Alabama; Karen Willard, for general help, for the cover design, and for sharing details about her typesetting work on the 2000, 2006 and 2012 editions of the Cooper Book; and Warren Steel, who very graciously

overlooked my sincere form of flattery (imitation) and volunteered his assistance with this project. In addition, the members of the online Fasola Discussion group are always ready and willing to share the knowledge they possess and aided immensely. Gaylon Powell's "*The Sacred Harp, Revised Cooper Edition Online Index*" and "*The Sacred Harp Poetry Index*" were extremely helpful in preparing for this book, and correspondence with Gaylon and Wade Kotter resulted in digging up more information on poets. I express special appreciation to Gloria Kessler, who supplied a picture of her great-grandparents, R. D. and Anna Blackshear, for inclusion in this publication; and Linda Carroll, for pictures of the T. J. Allen family.

The Wikipedia article on W. M. Cooper (which I helped edit) was the initial model for my biography here on W. M. Cooper.<sup>2</sup>

Researching people who are long forgotten introduces numerous problems achieving accuracy. Free and widespread access to genealogical information is a true boon, but is also problematic because of the number of discrepancies in online genealogical data. I have done my best to sort through the maze. Future research will find inaccuracies in some of the identifications and other biographical information in this work. I welcome all such corrections. I relied heavily on newspaper reports, and hope to have interpreted them wisely.

In cases when I was unable to decide the correct birth or death date or spelling of a name, I have defaulted to usually choosing the dates and spellings found on tombstones.

For "page-view" sake, especially in the biographical section, I have used endnotes rather than footnotes (though I much prefer the latter). I have used "a" and "b" for song page sections rather than the more common "t" and "b" for top and bottom. When song titles are listed in a series, commas in the titles have been removed to prevent confusion.

# CONTENTS

Preface	1
Contents	4
Chapter 1. O for a shout of sacred joy: <i>The Sacred Harp</i>	5
Chapter 2. It inspires my heart: W. M. Cooper and the “Cooper Book”	11
Chapter 3. With harps tuned celestial: The composers of <i>The Sacred Harp, 2012</i>	51
Chapter 4. An angel’s song can do no more: The songs of <i>The Sacred Harp, 2012</i>	141
Appendix A: Sketches of Poets and Others	235
Appendix B: “Cooper Book” Revision Committees	243
Appendix C: Bios not in <i>Songs Before Unknown</i>	246
Appendix D: Unpublished songs of T. W. Loftin	254
Appendix E: Songs added in 1902	257
Appendix F: J. L. White book composers	260
Appendix G: Obituaries	261
Bibliographic Resources	265
Sources for Biographical Sketches	273
Endnotes	293
Index	316

**O FOR A SHOUT OF SACRED JOY:  
*THE SACRED HARP***

In 1844 two Georgia residents – one in his youth and the other in his middle age – collaborated to produce one of the most popular, successful and enduring nineteenth-century tunebooks, *The Sacred Harp*. The younger, Elisha James King (see Steel, p. 129) died before he could enjoy the fruit of his labor. The elder, Benjamin Franklin White (see Steel, p. 164) lived to guide the book through three more successful editions.

E. J. King died August 31, 1844, two months before the *Columbus Enquirer* on October 23, 1844 reported *The Sacred Harp* was “just published”.<sup>3</sup> After King died, his share in *The Sacred Harp* and 700 copies of the first edition were purchased by his brother-in-law Henry Snellings.<sup>4</sup> Snellings was the husband of Mary King, sister of Elisha and daughter of John King and Elizabeth DuBose. Elisha's brother Joel King is listed on the title page of the 1844 book as a co-proprietor.<sup>5</sup>

In 1845 B. F. White organized the Southern Musical Convention. This wide-ranging institution worked with White to produce three more editions of the tunebook. White, with committees elected by the Convention, selected new music for appendices added to the book in 1850 and 1860. For the 1870 fourth edition of *The Sacred Harp*, White and the committee not only added songs, but also removed and replaced songs that were no longer commonly sung. The first edition of *The Sacred Harp* contained 242 songs. 102 songs were added in 1850 as an appendix, expanding the book to 344 songs. Another appendix was added in 1860 with 74 songs, bringing the total to 418. By 1870 the book had swelled to 498 songs. B. F. White and the Revision Committee removed 49 songs and added 129 other songs.<sup>6</sup>

Possibly Snellings and Joel King sold their interest, or part of it, to John Massengale before 1850. Massengale is listed as a proprietor with White for the 1850 and 1860 editions of *The Sacred Harp*. The 1870 edition copyright was entered by B. F. White and D. P. White (B. F. White's son).

The following editions were produced under the guidance of B. F. White:

1844: “Published by T. K. and P. G. Collins...For the proprietors, B. F. White & E. J. King, Hamilton, Ga...Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1844, by B. F. White & E. J. King...”

1850: “Published by T. K. Collins, Jr., and T. K. and P. G. Collins...For the proprietors, White, Massengale & Co., Hamilton, Ga...Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1844, by B. F. White & E. J. King...”<sup>7</sup>

1860: “Published by S. C. Collins...For the proprietors, White, Massengale & Co., Hamilton, Ga...Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1860, by B. F. White & E. J. King...”

1870: “S. C. Collins, Publisher...” the copyright was “Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1870, by B. F. White & D. P. White...”

### *Types of Music in The Sacred Harp*

The types of music that were and are in *The Sacred Harp* – and what types should be – is often the fodder of extended musical, historical and polemical discussion. These discussions link to decisions made in each successive edition and revision of the book.

On his website Warren Steel answers the question, “What kind of songs are in *The Sacred Harp*?” He asserts that “*The Sacred Harp* is an eclectic tunebook, containing examples of several different forms, genres, and styles.” These include:

- (1) psalm tunes from English and European sources, 1550-1850;
- (2) tunes by the first American composers, mainly New Englanders, 1770-1810;
- (3) tunes composed or arranged by Southern composers, 1810-1900, including many adaptations of popular or traditional songs, marches, dance tunes, and camp-meeting spiritual songs;
- (4) tunes composed by twentieth-century composers in styles closely related to



the earlier repertories.<sup>8</sup>

In “The Sacred Harp as Experimental Composition,” Neely Bruce identifies what he calls “six 'pure strains'.”<sup>9</sup>

- psalm tunes and other plain tunes
- the work of New England composers 1770 to 1820
- folk hymns
- camp meeting songs
- anthems, odes, set pieces, and long songs
- reformed hymnody

Identifying “pure strains” is an important “first step in orienting oneself in a bewildering profusion...of music composed over a period of two and a half centuries.”<sup>10</sup> An important follow-up, though, is to recognize words such as “eclectic,” “hybrid quality,” “variant style,” and so forth. Some tunes are not neatly categorized and leave room for subjectivity, difference of opinion and debate – both before and after the early twentieth century revisions. One discussion is the use of late nineteenth-century “gospel song” in the pages of *The Sacred Harp*.

*The Sacred Harp* was and is a living document. It has grown and changed with its revisions. New and original compositions have always been a part of the Sacred Harp tradition. Every edition published by B. F. White contained songs written by members of the Sacred Harp community.<sup>11</sup> The 1870 book, while remaining firmly within its orbit, reflects some changes from the original compilation. For example, there was a spike in the composition of tunes with 4-part harmony (treble, counter/alto, tenor, bass) by the friends of B. F. White (as opposed to only treble, tenor and bass). In 1870 the Sacred Harp revision committee removed 47 tunes, of which 41 (87%) were 3-part. They added 126 tunes, of which 90 (only 71%) were 3-part. They removed 3-part tunes in a greater proportion than they added them. In 1850, the associates of B. F. White added only two 4-part tunes to the book. In 1860, they added three 4-part tunes to the book. But in 1870 the associates of B. F. White were responsible for 35 four-part tunes! One other, a song by Lowell Mason, had four parts,

for a total of 36 four-part tunes added to the Fourth Edition of *The Sacred Harp*.<sup>12</sup> Further, in the 1870 edition 34 percent of the songs removed by White and the committee were minor tunes, while minor tunes were added at a rate of only 17 percent. This reflects the late nineteenth century trend favoring major mood tunes. Songs like LOVING JESUS and LET US SING prefigure the call and response of some gospel songs.<sup>13</sup> LET US SING is in fact an arrangement of the gospel song LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT in *The Sabbath-School Bell*, compiled by Horace Waters, 1859 (Arr. by Augustus Cull; the original did not have the call and response, which was added by W. F. Moore).

In addition to the 1870 spike in composition of tunes with 4-part harmony by the friends of B. F. White, there was a precedent of the Sacred Harp community adding alto to existing three-part tunes.<sup>14</sup> About two dozen songs which appeared in *The Sacred Harp* without alto parts appear in *The New Sacred Harp* by sons J. L. White and B. F. White, Jr. with alto parts added (as well as other changes). These things demonstrate a movement in favor of 4-part tunes – which the early twentieth century revisions of *The Sacred Harp* would also highlight, though approaching it in different ways. About a dozen members of the Sacred Harp community, including Absalom Ogletree, J. P. Reese, S. M. Brown, I. M. Shell, S. M. Denson and T. J. Denson, contributed songs to *The New Sacred Harp* – all of them written in four parts.

Benjamin Franklin White died in 1879 and was laid to rest in the Oakland Cemetery of Atlanta, Georgia. One might think his song book would have been laid to rest with him. Without revision or new tunes imbuing new life, the use of it waned, giving ground to the competition. Singers wondered what would happen. William R. Adams mused: “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.”<sup>15</sup>

But die it did not. A pulse can be felt in two re-printings of the fourth edition of *The Sacred Harp* – one by White’s grandson Charles P. Byrd, a printer in Atlanta, and another by Byrd and James Landrum White, White’s son and later reviser of the book. The reprint by Byrd and White shows an 1897 date. The Byrd (only) reprint date is uncertain.<sup>16</sup>

When the DeKalb and Fulton County Sacred Harp Singing Association held its quarterly singing at Forrest Station (about thirteen miles from Atlanta, Ga.) in August 1901, it was attended by an estimated 700 or 800 people: “All of the selections being from the old Sacred Harp song book.” Apparently there were both *books* and *life* in 1901!<sup>17</sup>

### *Stirrings for change*

In 1899 – only two years after J. L. White and C. P. Byrd reprinted the fourth edition of *The Sacred Harp* – the Chattahoochee Musical Convention appointed a committee of five (including J. P. Reese)<sup>18</sup> to confer with the “controllers of the Sacred Harp and see if they will allow the book to be enlarged – add to it a third appendix.” After Reese died, the next year the convention appointed his son J. T. Reese in his place. After a year the committee was still in place but had not accomplished its goal.<sup>19</sup>

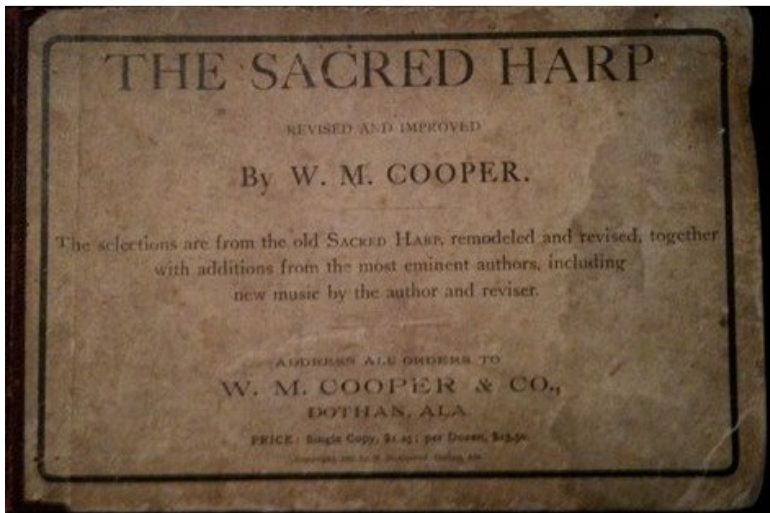
In the initial session of the Douglasville Sacred Harp Convention in 1902, they passed a resolution “to urge immediate revision of that work” in order to “bring it up-to-date”. In this they advised “that the less important tunes be left out (which we believe can be done without detriment to the present book, and that other songs be substituted in their place,) calling attention to and requesting the searching through of other song books and selecting therefrom the most suitable tunes to be found, as well as add new music suitable to church and Sunday-School songs, and other like gatherings, and in this way bring the Sacred Harp right up-to-date in the selection of the best music the country affords.” They also suggested that if such a revision was “too

large” that there could be two volumes, one especially “for Sunday-School work and for like occasions.”<sup>20</sup>

A mere reprinting of the fourth edition of *The Sacred Harp* did not satisfy these conventions. The Chattahoochee wanted it enlarged. Douglasville wanted it brought “up-to-date” – whatever that entails, but at the least adding songs previously published in other books as well as newly written music.

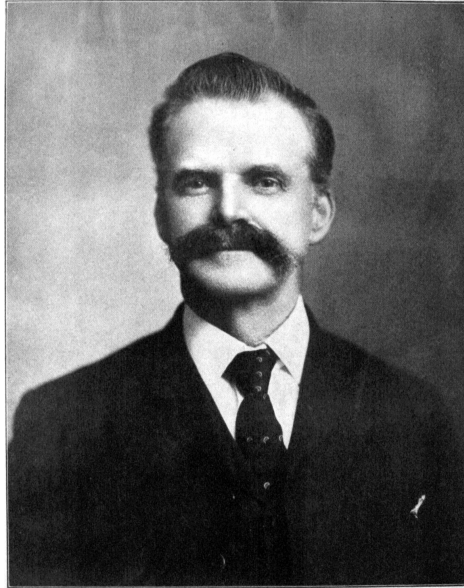
While other conventions elected committees and passed resolutions, a currently unidentified convention or group of singers not only elected a committee but also produced a revision of the song book.<sup>21</sup>

To that song book we turn (See cover below, Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** This is a scan of the cover of the 1902 songbook. W. M. Cooper revised the book, based on the 1870 edition of *The Sacred Harp*, copyrighted it in 1902, and had it published in 1903. There were seven more editions of the book released under his editorship.

**IT INSPIRES MY HEART:  
W. M. COOPER AND THE “COOPER BOOK”**



**Figure 2: Only known photo of W. M. Cooper**

***Family and life***

Wilson Marion Cooper was born in Henry County, Alabama, on December 17, 1850, to Wilson S. Cooper and Elizabeth Ann Oates, youngest child of Elizabeth Shipp and Stephen Oates. Elizabeth Shipp Oates and her 13 children came to Alabama around 1842 from Sampson County, North Carolina after the death of her husband (which occurred in 1835). Wilson S. Cooper (ca. 1818–ca. 1852) also came from North Carolina, probably the son of Daniel Cooper and Zilpah Stevens of Sampson County.<sup>22</sup> Wilson S. Cooper of Abbeville was listed as an agent for William Hauser’s 1848 songbook *The Hesperian Harp*.<sup>23</sup> W. S. Cooper and Elizabeth Ann Oates married January 27, 1850 in Henry County. He is identified as a carpenter in the 1850 Henry County Federal Census – where he and his wife lived next door to Elizabeth’s mother and her brother Robert.

W. S. Cooper died circa 1852, leaving Elizabeth with a son and a daughter. After his death, Elizabeth Ann Oates Cooper<sup>24</sup> married Hopewell Wiggins in 1857. Elizabeth and Hopewell Wiggins are buried at the Fellowship Baptist Church Cemetery in Henry County.<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth was a second cousin of Alabama congressman and governor (1894–1896) William Calvin Oates.

W. M. Cooper married Mary S. Hayes about 1876. She was the daughter of George W. (1831–1907) and Nancy L. Hayes (1832–1914). George and Nancy were Carolinians as well, though the censuses are not consistent whether they were from North Carolina or South Carolina. Mary died in 1901 and is buried at the Old Tabernacle Methodist Cemetery in Coffee County, Alabama. Their children were George Hayes Cooper (1879–1929), a doctor; A. W. Cooper (1886–1911), who served as a lawyer in Dothan and Luverne; and Anna L. Cooper Blackshear (1877–1957), who assisted her father with the Sacred Harp revision. Anna's husband, Dr. Randall David Blackshear (1861–1941), is listed as owner and publisher of Cooper's revised edition of *The Sacred Harp* in 1927.

In addition to music, W. M. Cooper's activities included working as a farmer, school teacher, editor and insurance agent. He is known to have lived in at least four Alabama counties – Dale (1860), Henry (1870), Coffee (1880, 1900), and Houston (1910). He made an extended trip to Palm Beach County, Florida, where his daughter and son-in-law were living in 1916.<sup>26</sup> He ran for Houston County Superintendent of Education in 1912.<sup>27</sup>

Cooper was active in Missionary Baptist work in southeast Alabama.<sup>28</sup> In 1881 and 1882 he was a delegate from the Woodland Grove Baptist Church in Coffee County – where his uncle and aunt Elder Jesse Mercer Rowe and Margaret Oates Rowe are buried – to the Pea River Baptist Association. During the last decade of the nineteenth century he held membership at the Ebenezer Baptist Church at Haw Ridge, Alabama. Available Haw Ridge Baptist Association records show that W. M. Cooper was the clerk of the association at least in 1892, 1893 and 1895. He served on a number of the association's committees as well.

He was possibly a member of the Headland Avenue Baptist Church of Dothan at the time of his death.<sup>29</sup>

From at least 1903 to 1910, W. M. Cooper published at Dothan a monthly musical periodical titled *Zion Songster*.<sup>30</sup> It was published to promote Sacred Harp singing and the new revision of *The Sacred Harp*.

W. M. Cooper & Co, the proprietors of the “Revised Sacred Harp,” will on or about the 20 instant, have published in this city, the first issue of “Zion's Songster,” which will be in the interest of the “Revised Sacred Harp.” It will be in size about 12x18 and issued monthly, with about four pages of reading matter, and possible 12 pages in size. “The Eagle,” in advance welcomes this new publication and hopes that its harmonies may be crystalized with the symphonies of the city of God.<sup>31</sup>

The periodical had a circulation of 1200 in 1909 and 1910 (compared with the weekly *Dothan Eagle* circulation at 1460). No surviving issues of the *Zion Songster* have come to light at present.

In late 1913 Cooper sued J. S. James for an infringement of his copyright, claiming James printed a Sacred Harp book using his altos. Cooper lost. The court deemed the addition of an alto to an already existing song not significant enough to be protected by copyright. By the time the suit was dismissed in May 1914, W. M. Cooper's Sacred Harp career was nearing its end. He was the first of the three revisers to pass away, his death preceding J. L. White by nine years and J. S. James by fifteen.

Wilson Marion Cooper died of a cerebral hemorrhage<sup>32</sup> on Monday, July 17, 1916 in West Palm Beach, Florida. The Blackshears – his daughter and son-in-law – were living there at