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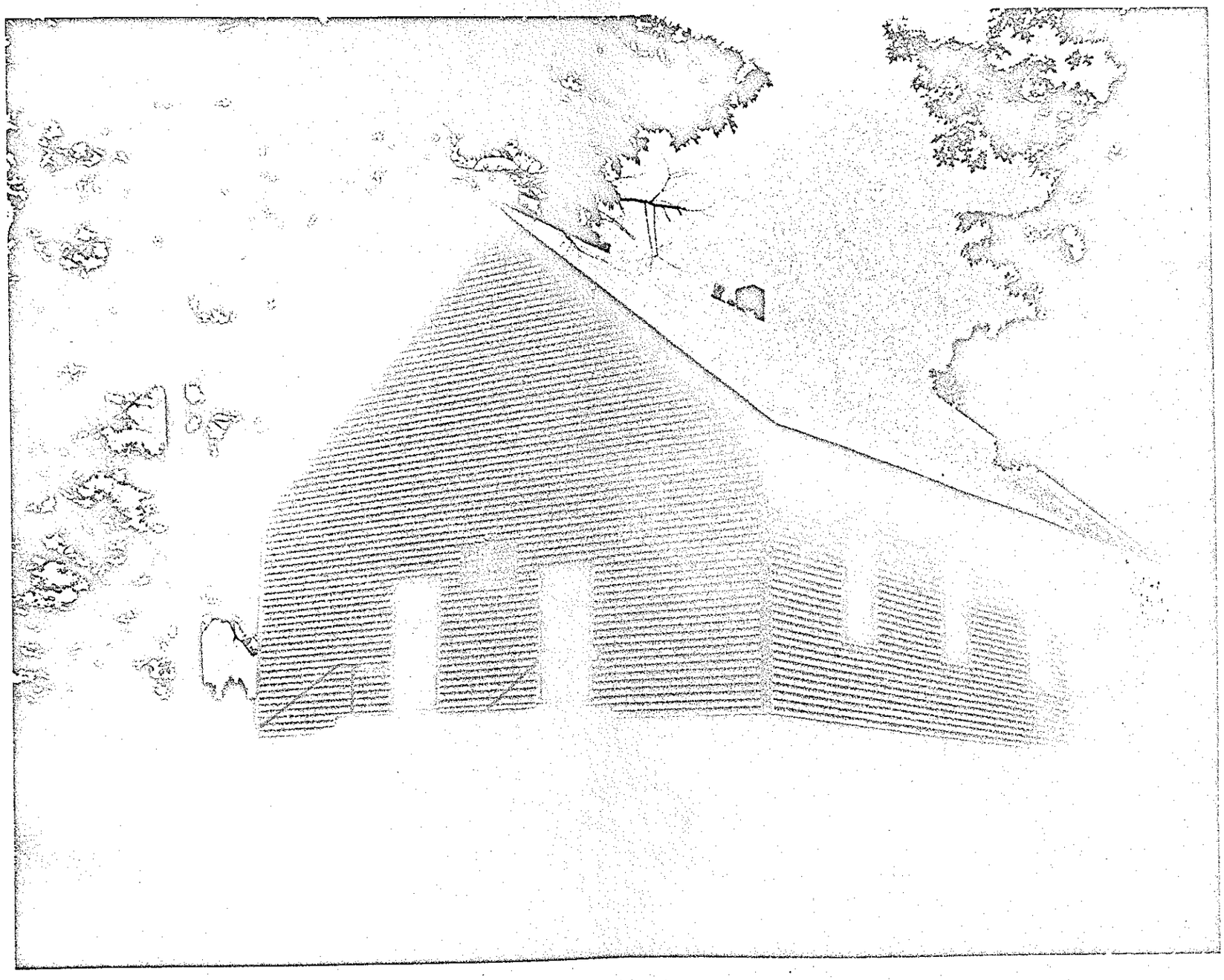
Primitive Baptist Hymns of the Blue Ridge

Recorded by Brett Sutton and Pete Hartman



American Folklore Recordings

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In Primitive Baptist churches scattered throughout the Blue Ridge region of Virginia and North Carolina, you can still hear a style of sacred singing practiced by American colonists. Brett Sutton spent nine months in those church communities, collecting hymns and examining their cultural environments. The product is a valuable selection of recordings and an accompanying book that discusses with authority not only musicological but ethnographic issues.

Sutton's study reveals the importance of the music's presence in the community, the spiritual values that the music conveys, and why and how the music has survived. The unaccompanied, unharmonized hymnody of Primitive Baptist singers is related to the better-known music of the southern shape-note tunebooks, but the Primitive Baptists take their tunes from memory rather than books. These recordings of their songs offer a fresh perspective on a well-known musical tradition.

Until the 1890s, black and white Primitive Baptists in the Blue Ridge attended the same churches and their singing today reflects their common history. Sutton presents singing of black as well as white singers, examining not only what their styles have in common but how they are unique.

Brett Sutton is a doctoral candidate in the University of North Carolina anthropology department, and he helps produce a traditional music program for public radio. He has received the Society for Ethnomusicology's Charles Seeger Prize.

This series presents well-documented recordings of traditional American verbal and musical performances. The general editor for the series is Daniel W. Patterson, chairman of the Curriculum in Folklore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Also available:
Powerhouse for God
Sacred Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church
by Jeff Todd Titon

Side 1

1. *Dunlap*, "Dark was the night and cold the ground." Hylton Thessalonia Primitive Baptist Church, Patrick County, Virginia. 25 January 1976 (4:05).
2. *Dunlap*, "My God the spring of all my joys." Staunton River Association, union meeting, Danville Primitive Baptist Church, Danville, Virginia. 29 February 1976 (3:30).
3. *Devotion*, "Poor and afflicted, Lord are thine." Union Primitive Baptist Church, Floyd County, Virginia. 25 April 1976 (5:41).
4. *Devotion*, "'Twas on that dark, that doleful night." Shady Grove Primitive Baptist Church, Floyd County, Virginia. 6 June 1976 (6:15).
5. *Pilgrim*, "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand." Elder Bennie and Edrie Clifton, Patrick County, Virginia. 5 March 1976 (3:43).
6. *Jesus Is a Rock*. Ephesus Primitive Baptist Church, Henry County, Virginia. 9 May 1976 (4:03).

Side 2

1. *Pisgah*, "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord." Old Republican Primitive Baptist Church, Franklin County, Virginia. 18 April 1976 (2:42).
2. *Pisgah*, "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound." Tatum Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church, Patrick County, Virginia. 8 February 1976 (5:01).
3. *Wayfaring Stranger*, "Come thou long-expected Jesus." Old Republican Primitive Baptist Church, Franklin County, Virginia. 18 April 1976 (2:30).
4. *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*, "I heard the voice of Jesus say." Hylton Thessalonia Primitive Baptist Church, Patrick County, Virginia. 28 March 1976 (7:57).
5. *Condescension*, "Firmly I stand on Zion's hill." Carolina Springs Primitive Baptist Church, Franklin County, Virginia. 2 May 1976 (3:32).
6. *Long Sought Home*. Ephesus Primitive Baptist Church, Henry County, Virginia. 9 May 1976 (5:10).

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Front cover: Old Republican Primitive Baptist Church Photograph by Brett Sutton

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Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. —Colossians 3:16

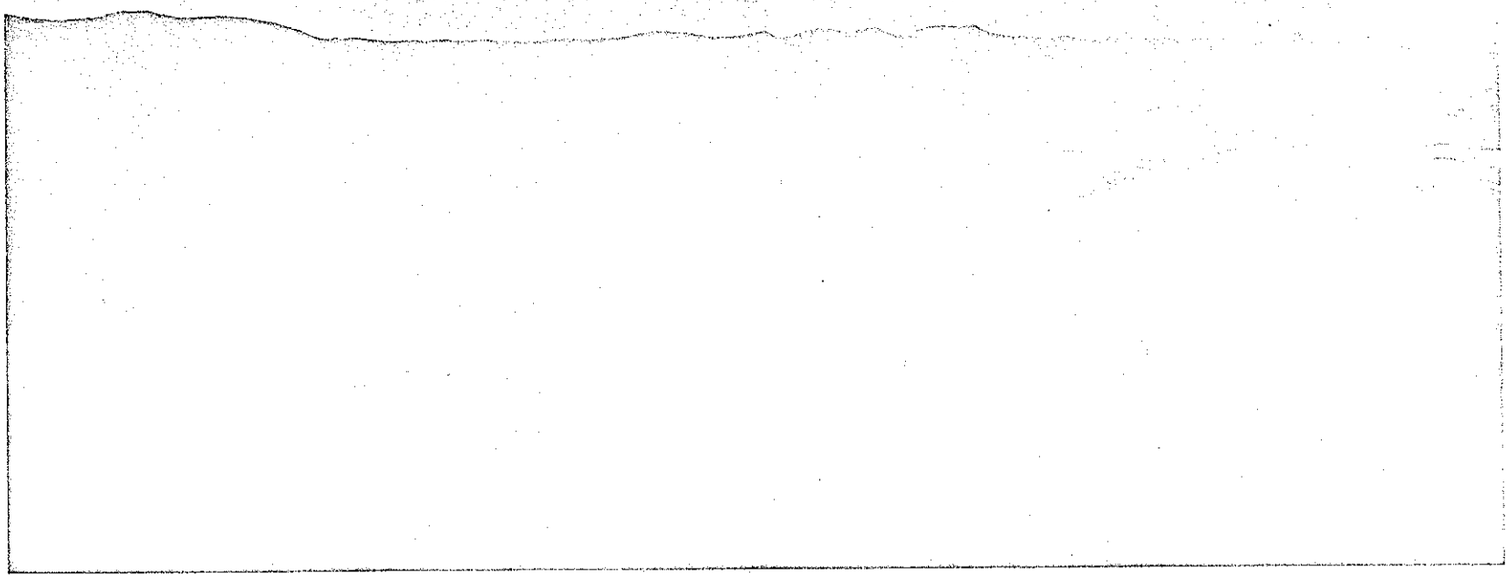
If the Lord give you a spirit to sing, that singing is just as good as preaching. It fills you up all over. You get just like a new person in there.—deacon, Primitive Baptist Church

The songs in this collection are unlike either the familiar Baptist and Methodist hymns sung by many Southerners or the widely popular gospel songs in either their spirited or sentimental forms. There are no accompanying instruments here, and not much singing in parts, just the loose blend of the singers' voices carrying the tune along at an unhurried pace. In many ways these are simple hymns, at least in comparison to some modern forms of sacred singing. But in other ways they are only deceptively simple, for their plainness conceals an underlying musical complexity. The singers are members of Primitive Baptist churches scattered along the eastern escarpment of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and North Carolina, one of the regions where this old hymnody is still in common use. This anthology includes performances by both black and white congregations; these groups have slightly different styles, but they share the same faith and the same historical tradition, and both have managed to protect the old singing from the pressures of modernization.

Indeed, no American singing tradition has survived longer or has resisted so many challenges. The English Puritans, who were among the first Europeans to settle on this continent, arrived with singing habits not very different from those of the modern Primitive Baptists, and their emphasis on congregational participation in singing was itself based on principles established during the Protestant Reformation. Yet, the pressures of change on the old singing tradition have been continuous since the colonial period. Some developments were consequences of American innovations in folk hymnody, such as those accompanying the frontier camp meetings of the 1800s. Many more were products of modernization and, occasionally, the efforts of reformers to bring American sacred singing up to the standards of "correct" music: the replacement of metrical Psalms by composed hymns, the institution of singing schools and musical literacy, an increased reliance on part singing, the displacement of folk hymns by gospel hymns, an increased use of pianos and organs in the churches, the rise of professional religious musical entertainers, and the growing influence first of print and then of electronic media. Sacred singing in modern America is a product of the interplay of a number of forces. Yet the old hymnody persists, even though its popularity has waned. Today the tradition is mainly under the protection of those conservative churches, particularly the Primitive Baptists, whose theological perspective carries with it a commitment to the old hymns. It also survives among some of the more conservative groups descended from the Anabaptists of Europe, such as the German Baptist Brethren, and in many black church communities, where ties to the older singing styles are strong.

Straddling as it does a formal written tradition of devotional poetry on one hand and an oral musical tradition on the other, old American hymnody is of particular interest to students of the American folk song. Just as congregations during the Reformation looked to their own musical traditions for appropriate tunes to use with the Psalms, and later the early hymns, rural Americans frequently drew hymn tunes from the stock of secular folk music with which they were already familiar. Thus certain melodic and stylistic aspects of the secular vernacular singing tradition found their way into the protective circle of the church, where they were sheltered from the forces that have seriously diluted their secular counterparts. Today that sacred tradition offers folklorists remarkably well preserved examples of early American singing.

The significance of these recordings lies not only in the lineage of their tunes but also in the unusual clarity with which they document the differences in black and white musical styles. Good recordings of both black and white hymn singing are available (see discography), but the performances were recorded at many different times and places and thus pose difficult problems of comparison. Those problems are not a factor in this study, because these singers are neighbors with a common, or at least highly intertwined, religious history. Until the end of the Civil War blacks and whites in the Blue Ridge area attended the same churches and sang and occasionally preached together. Toward the end of Reconstruction the old unity gave way, as blacks in the Primitive Baptist churches, like black members of other southern denominations, sought to establish their own autonomous churches and associations. But the separation was not the result of, nor did it entail, radical differences in religious belief; the members of the two newly divided branches remained committed to Primitive Baptist traditions, including the musical tradition. The fact that both sides retained the singing tradition that they had once shared provides us an excellent opportunity to observe the current differences in singing



Looking north along the Blue Ridge in Patrick County, Virginia. The Blue Ridge plateau lies to the left, the Piedmont to the right. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

and learn something of the shaping influences of cultural patterns on musical change. Black and white congregations still draw on the same basic tune repertory, use the same hymnbooks, and conduct services in similar ways. But they show important differences as well in the contexts in which singing occurs, in the ornamental devices used, and even in the structure of the tunes.

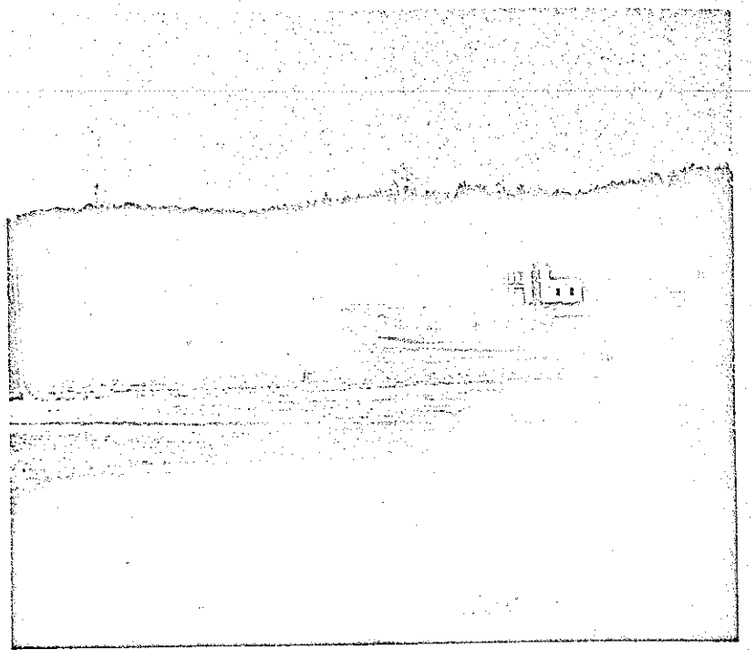
Church, Community, and the Singing Tradition

Southwestern Virginia and the adjacent part of North Carolina is a region of rolling hills cut diagonally by the Blue Ridge, the steep eastern wall of the Appalachians that, even today, is a natural barrier that affects transportation, distribution of communities, and cultural patterns. To the northwest of the ridge lies a high plateau, scattered with hardwood forests, laurel thickets, and broad expanses of open land given over to pasture and cultivated fields, where grains and a few other crops, particularly cabbage, which thrives in the cool climate, are grown. To the southeast is a more populous and less isolated country, considerably lower in elevation. The milder winters, hotter summers, and longer growing season of this area suit it for the cultivation of a variety of crops. Here the emphasis is on livestock, grains, apples and peaches, timber, and, most important in the east, tobacco.

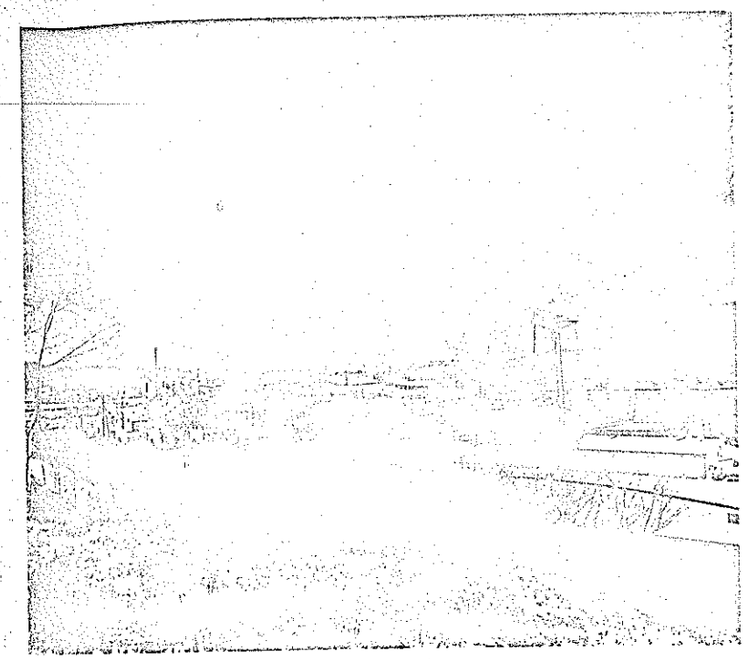
Since this section of the Blue Ridge has for much of its history been devoted to farming with a strong element of subsistence agriculture, local dependence on a cash-based economy has been relatively low. Events of the last forty years, however, have brought a number of changes. Light industries, particularly textile mills, have come to the small towns, which previously served mainly as trade centers for the rural population, and have offered increased wage-earning and buying power to the local residents. Another trend, one that has accompanied the disappearance of the family farm, is a shift in population: young people seeking better jobs and better educational opportunities than the area can offer have moved in growing numbers to distant urban areas. The result has been a dispersal of families and a gradual but regular increase in the median age of the local population.

Because of these factors, and because of the increasing economic hazards of small-scale farming, the number of people engaged in full-time agriculture has dropped drastically—by over 50 percent since 1960 in some sections. Many of those who still maintain active farming operations do so only on a part-time basis and depend on outside jobs for their primary incomes. Others have given up on farming altogether and taken jobs either in local plants or in factories located in cities some distance from their homes. More residents than ever before now work as small businessmen, clerks, mill workers, truck drivers, mechanics, and skilled tradesmen, and they have become increasingly dependent on the automobile to reach the urban areas, which have become the main places both to earn and to spend money. Some of the land, especially that in the mountains near the Blue Ridge Parkway, has attracted individuals seeking vacation and retirement homesites and developers who recognize the potential of the tourist industry. Today tourism and recreational development make up a relatively small part of the local economy, though the potential influence of such development is great.

Despite these important shifts in the economy, however, the region remains largely rural in character. The manufacturing plants, though increasingly numerous and of great economic importance, are concentrated in a few settings and do not dominate the physical landscape. Nor has development generated much significant population growth. The



A typical Blue Ridge farm. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)



Textile and wood products mills in Stuart, Virginia. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

census figures for one representative county indicate that the population count has not changed significantly since the turn of the century. Most local people are well satisfied with this situation and, in spite of their commitments elsewhere, remain bound to their close-knit local communities. Some residents prefer, in fact, to sacrifice convenience and live near relatives on family land, rather than move closer to jobs. The spirit of subsistence agriculture also survives, even among wage earners who no longer depend on it. The typical family still maintains a large vegetable garden, and many keep some livestock for personal use. Canning, drying, salting, and smoking remain popular methods of food preservation. These, along with freezing, ensure for many an abundant supply of homegrown food.

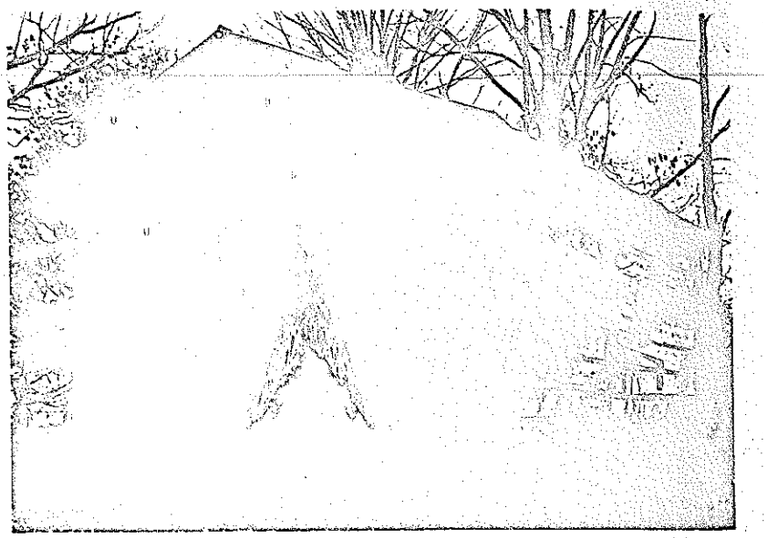
The foregoing summary holds generally for both black and white residents of the region. Blacks here, as elsewhere, have suffered from prejudice and a disproportionate degree of poverty, and social segregation is still widespread, but conditions for blacks have been better here than in many places. The percentage of blacks in the population varies considerably, from virtually zero in the high country in rural areas west of the Blue Ridge to 20 percent and more in the tobacco country of the Piedmont. But clear-cut patterns of segregation by residence are less common than one might expect, at least in rural sections. A number of black families have been landowners for several generations, and the small, extended-family rural communities clustered on these holdings are usually dispersed randomly among white communities. Since slavery was not practiced here on a large scale and blacks and whites have lived and worked in close proximity to one another, cultural and economic polarization has been moderate. It is significant that the region has not suffered the large-scale, violent racial explosions that have afflicted other communities in recent years. The transition to the age of affirmative action is never easy, but it seems to have been less rough here than elsewhere.

Primitive Baptist churches are a common feature of the landscape in this region. Only a few of the original buildings, many of which were constructed of logs, are still standing, and those that survive no longer serve as meeting houses. The buildings that have replaced them are graceful, modest structures of white weatherboard, brick, or concrete block, and stand for the most part on the original grounds, tucked like their predecessors into mountain hollows or set along back roads among quiet groves of pine and oak. The expansion of towns and improvement of roads have altered some of the settings, but with a few exceptions the churches remain largely rural.

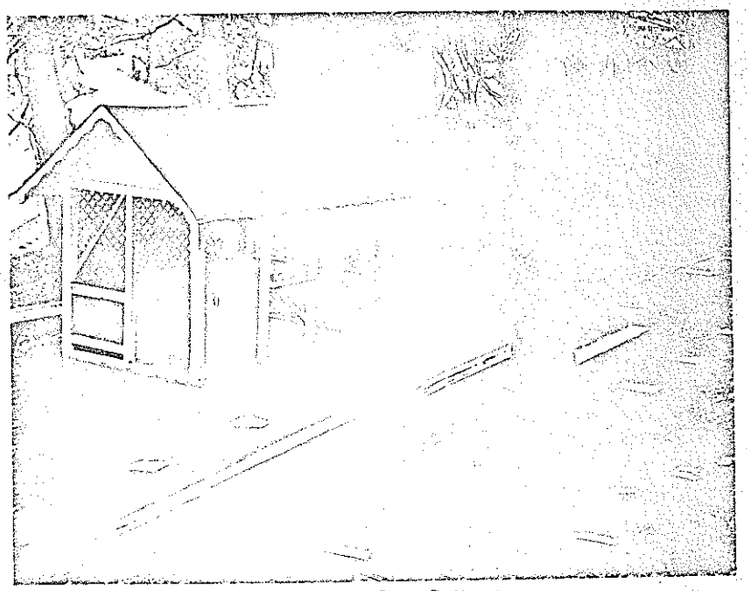
Primitive Baptist belief holds that a church house should not strive to be a showplace: thus, architectural simplicity is the rule. Most meeting houses have no steeple, church bell, or stained glass, and only a comfortable minimum of interior decoration. A typical church is small, consisting of a single room, several walk-in closets, and perhaps a small anteroom. A raised platform with benches or chairs for visiting elders and a pulpit at the center stands in the front. Since the only music is unaccompanied congregational singing, the church has neither piano, organ, nor special seating for a choir. Many of the more recently built churches have basements in which potluck dinners are served; other churches make do with long tables placed under the trees in the churchyard. For large summer meetings when the attendance exceeds the limited capacities of the buildings, a few church sites have outdoor facilities with covered preaching stands facing an open area for benches and chairs. The newest churches are modern in some respects—central heating instead of wood, coal, or oil space heaters and running water with indoor restrooms—but the simplicity of design has not been lost.

In theology as in church architecture, conservatism is the rule. The Primitive Baptists hold tenaciously to practices and principles that more progressive churches have left behind. In the sense that the church believes the Bible to be a literal and infallible guide to the Christian life, it is fundamentalist, but its fundamentalism actually runs deeper than a belief in biblical inerrancy. The church views itself as a lineal descendant of the original apostolic Church, a "primitive" church not in the sense of "plain" or "crude" but in the sense of "first." The goal of preserving the church exactly as Christ established it has led Primitive Baptists to reject many of the contributions of modern Christian thought, including modernizations in singing.

As a denominational entity, the church is the product of complex religious conflicts of the early nineteenth century. Rapid migration into the frontier after the American Revolution created a religious vacuum which was filled suddenly and explosively by the revivals at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, and elsewhere, the catalytic events of an era of religious renewal which came to be known as the Second Great Awakening. The early revivals were fired by a spontaneity and energy which compensated for their lack of formal organization, and each camp meeting



This old log building used to serve as a school as well as a church. Primitive Baptist churches built today are not radically different in their basic design. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)



An outdoor preaching stand. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

brought many new converts to Christ. But as happens so often in the life cycle of a social movement, the heat of the early years dissipated, and the enthusiasm was channeled into increasingly formal religious institutions. As the movement matured, evangelical organizations with surer organizational footings took over the task of bringing in converts. The trend was toward "free will" theology, which placed increasing confidence in organized aids to salvation and religious education, and particularly in the missionary societies that gave the movement a name.

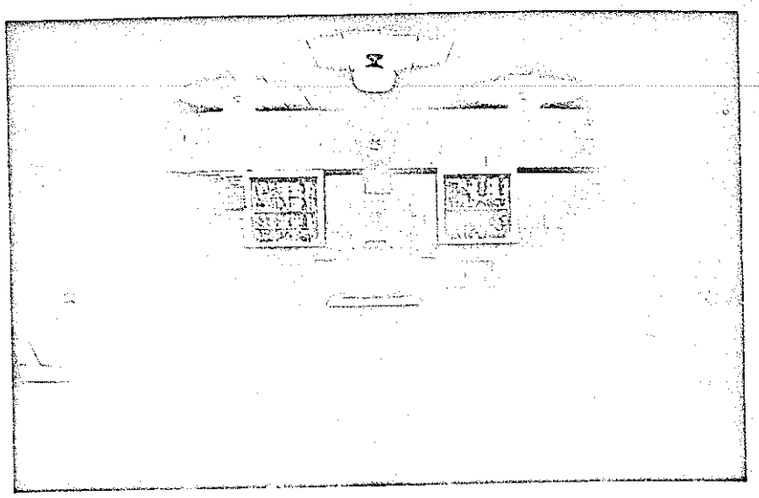
Objections to the new evangelicalism arose early among the Baptists, who saw in its man-made devices a threat to fundamental Christian principle, a dangerous opening of the church to people who had not been elected by God, and a potential for abuse of authority, since the number of human mediators between sinner and God was increasing. In the 1820s and 1830s the debate over the issues finally peaked in several Baptist associations, including the Kehukee Association, the mother association of many of the congregations in the Blue Ridge region. Though the debate was many sided, the fundamental issues were whether the new tools of proselytism were in fact sanctioned by Scripture, whether man's newly asserted authority was legitimate, and, ultimately, whether man had any influence over who would be saved and who would be lost. In the fall of 1827 the Kehukee Association adopted a resolution in the negative, which read, in part, as follows:

After an interchange of sentiments among the members of this body, it was agreed that we discard all Missionary Societies, Bible Societies and Theological Seminaries, and the practices heretofore resorted to for their support, in begging money from the public; and if any persons should be among us, as agents of any said societies, we hereafter discountenance them in those practices; and if under a character of a minister of the gospel, we will not invite them into our pulpits; believing these societies and institutions to be the inventions of men, and not warranted from the word of God. [1]

Other associations reached similar conclusions, and some suffered schisms when the advocates of the "old school" and the promoters of missions were unable to resolve their differences. The sometimes bitter factionalism gave way in time to a more peaceful coexistence, as the innovators, taking the name Missionary, or Free-Will, Baptists, established their own associations. The conservatives, calling themselves the Old School Baptists and, later, Primitive Baptists, upheld the stern Calvinistic doctrines of limited atonement, election, and predestination. The position of the Primitive Baptists was one of uncompromising (or, as an early nickname goes, hard-shelled) traditionalism. Believing that God does not require human assistance to achieve his goal and rejecting any elaborations of creed or church structure beyond what is described in the New Testament, the Primitive Baptists went on record against missionary movements, tract societies, revivals, infant baptism, Sunday schools, church choirs, musical instruments in church, open communion, national church governing boards, seminaries, the salaried professional ministry, and excessively ornamented church buildings. Most contemporary Primitive Baptists remain committed to these proscriptions.[2]

Like many other American denominations, the Primitive Baptist church did not remain a cohesive, homogeneous group, but suffered successive divisions in its own ranks. Because of the firmness of their commitment to New Testament fundamentals, Primitive Baptists are particularly sensitive to nuances of doctrine, and even today churches using the name are not in total agreement on every issue. Nearly a dozen associations and a number of independent churches are active in the area where these recordings were made. Black and white, progressive and conservative, these congregations represent a range of beliefs and styles of worship. Their differences are relatively minor, and visiting across associational lines at an informal level is not uncommon, but universal correspondence among all the Primitive Baptists of the area is impossible because of various theological and stylistic points of disagreement. Hymn singing, too, varies among the churches. The purpose of this collection is to document the singing of the more conservative churches, where the older style of singing still predominates, but other styles are used with great success by local churches.

The black and white Primitive Baptist churches of the Blue Ridge region have common beginnings. Most of the white associations were established in the first half of the nineteenth century during the years of debate among Baptists over foreign missions and related issues, and a few, having avoided schisms during that tumultuous period, go back further still. Until the Civil War black slaves were active members in many of these churches. The black presence is verified by entries in church and association minutes from those years, such as this one from the 1838 minutes of New Hope Primitive Baptist Church (Carroll County, Virginia): "Also on Sunday received Nancy a Coloured woman belonging to the Esteate of Peter Huff."[3] Church rolls entered in the back pages of minutes during this period frequently include lists of black members, identified by their owners' names: "Duggan's Primus," "Shade's Molley," and so forth. Some



(Photo by Brett Sutton.)

membership lists reveal that nearly a third of the members were black, although the actual percentage of black membership no doubt varied widely.

The extent of participation of blacks in white services probably varied as well, but the evidence suggests that blacks made their presence well known, and that they were particularly fond of hymn singing. Although the Primitive Baptist documents make no specific mention of hymn singing, other than the book numbers of hymns chosen during certain services, it has been well documented elsewhere that the hymns were popular among blacks even before the Revolution. The psalms and hymns of Isaac Watts and others were, of course, a staple in the religious song repertory of white Christians in the colonial period; these would naturally have dominated the sacred singing of newly converted slaves. A much-cited letter written by the Presbyterian evangelist Samuel Davies of Hanover, Virginia, in the middle eighteenth century refers to the popularity of Watts's hymns among the slaves: "The books were all *very acceptable*; but none more so than the *Psalms* and Hymns, which enabled them to gratify their peculiar taste for Psalmody. Sundry of them have lodged all night in my kitchen; and, sometimes, when I have awakened about two or three a-clock in the morning, a torrent of sacred harmony poured into my chamber."[4] Another report from colonial Virginia comes from a minister in Cumberland County: "My Landlord tells me . . . they heard the *Slaves* at worship in their lodge, singing Psalms and Hymns in the evening, and again in the morning, long before break of day. They are excellent singers, and long to get some of Dr. *Watt's Psalms* and *Hymns*."[5]

After the great frontier revivals of the early 1800s rural Americans, both black and white, began to sing spirituals along with the older hymns. The spirituals thrived among the blacks (modern spirituals are, in fact, popular in black Primitive Baptist services today), yet the old "Dr. Watts" style of hymn singing did not disappear. Slave narratives from Virginia indicate that in spite of the reputation of the spirituals, the old hymns retained popularity, possibly because they were more appropriate in racially mixed services, but also no doubt because they had become part of the black cultural tradition. This report of a native of Nottoway County born in 1850 refers to the practice of lining out, which was often used with the hymns: "In church we sat in de gallery. De white man preached all de sermons. But we could jine in de singin'. De white folks word off de hymns an' we follow 'long."[6] Judging from the robust singing in the black churches today, one suspects that the slaves did more than just "follow along." A woman from Norfolk who was born in 1840 told interviewers: "Sundays were days of early hustle and bustle to git de white folks off to church. After dey had gone and de house cleared up, de slaves could go to their church, a little log cabin in edge of woods, whar a white preacher would be to oversee. Here we would pray and sing in our own feelings and expressions singin' in long and common meters soundin' high over de hills."[7] Long meter and common meter were the most frequently used metrical patterns in the old hymn texts.

The wreckage of the Civil War, the tensions of Reconstruction, and the new social relationships of whites and blacks changed the character of black membership in most southern churches, and the churches began moving toward separation. Independent black churches before the war were not unknown, but beginning around 1870 black Christians in large numbers began to establish churches with some degree of independence from white authority. Most black Primitive Baptist associations in the Southeast were established slightly later, in the 1880s and 1890s. It is risky to generalize about attitudes in those years. Certainly some black members would have preferred to stay on in white-controlled congregations. But many others, especially younger people, realized that it would never be possible to exercise full autonomy as long as their church affiliations fell within white jurisdiction. Church records from this period show signs of growing restiveness among black members. The entry for June 1871 in the minutes of Prospect Hill Church (Caswell County, North Carolina) contains this note on the licensing of a black member to preach: "Pryor Warren col [colored] license was given him as he requested it to sing pray and exort among his collor [color] if necessary subject to the supervision of the church."[8]

The black associations were not wholly autonomous at first. Rather, it seems that black members moved gradually out of the white churches and into the black ones, and lines of communication between the two groups remained open. The duty of setting up properly organized black associations fell at least in part to the white parent churches, which lent their own constitutions and articles of faith as models to the black groups and granted official letters of dismissal to any black members who wished to transfer their memberships. They also seem to have acted on occasion in an advisory capacity, as this excerpt from the minutes of one white association's annual meeting illustrates: "As some of the colored members of the different churches had obtained letters of dismission to join the colored churches; and as a report had become current that these colored churches were in disorder, the association appointed a committee to visit the colored association, and impart such instruction to them in behalf of this association as it might find necessary."[9]

But the organization of black associations was not, in every case, directly the work of the white associations, and black members were not, in every case, dependent on white guidance. According to local oral history, the oldest black group in this area, the Sandy Ridge Association, was established on the initiative of members of the black community rather than by the authority of any white organization. There is no evidence, however, that it was done without white cooperation or out of a spirit of rebellion. Relations between black and white churches in these years seem to have been rather cordial, officially at least, and the division was supported by both sides as an idea whose time had come.

Black and white church people still maintain some communication, but not as much as they did in the early years of this century. Some of the older preachers recall when blacks and whites attended one another's churches and elders of different races shared the same pulpit, especially at the large summertime association meetings. These visits were less than reciprocal—more whites attended black meetings than blacks attended white meetings—and such exchanges are rare now. But although the trend has been toward separation, the two groups have never had a complete parting, perhaps because like-minded Primitive Baptists customarily maintain strong communal ties. Occasionally, whites still visit black churches, and elders of the two branches sometimes find opportunities to visit informally during the week.

One thing the conservative Primitive Baptists of both branches have in common is an unshakable belief in the democracy of congregational hymn singing. Primitive Baptist services have no performers, no choirs or soloists, and no audience. The hymns used in any particular meeting are neither chosen by someone in a position of authority nor selected in advance, but are in most cases called out spontaneously by any member who feels so inspired. The most conservative Primitive Baptists also reject instrumental musical accompaniment in the services, since the New Testament makes no mention of musical instruments. Furthermore, none of these churches uses hymnbooks containing written music. The hymnals are pocket-sized collections of religious poems, which the singers set

to tunes drawn from a large memorized stock. The singing is rooted in the traditional preferences of each congregation and is relatively immune to the professionalism and standardization that have changed, and sometimes weakened, congregational singing elsewhere.

Most Primitive Baptist churches hold regular meetings only once a month, on a designated Sunday, continuing the custom of the last century when travel was difficult for both preachers and members. Individual churches today, as then, do not normally conduct special midweek services, such as song services or prayer meetings, nor are secular social events held in the church building. For the average church member a hundred years ago the opportunities for worship and singing were few—he attended his home church on the appointed Sunday and stayed home for the rest of the month. But today good roads and automobiles mean that when there is no service at home, members can visit sister churches within the association and meet friends and hear the preaching of elders of several churches. Thus, although the actual membership of a particular church may be quite small, the attendance at most services is very good. The result is a strong religious community which transcends the boundaries of the individual congregations.

Hymn singing is a valued part of all Primitive Baptist services, including regular Sunday meetings, the business meetings held monthly on the preceding Saturday, union meetings or ministers' and deacons' meetings held in months containing a fifth Sunday, and the annual association meetings attended by members, families, and visitors from other associations. The pattern of singing in each branch of the church, however, is different. In the white churches an informal song service, which begins as soon as there are enough members present, precedes the main preaching service. One of the better singers may act as song leader, setting the pitch and tempo, but any member may choose a hymn. If several tunes are appropriate for a given hymn, the member who selected it may specify one in particular, but more often the song leader simply turns to the designated page in the book, calls out the hymn number, perhaps recites the opening lines or verse, gathers his thoughts for a moment, and proceeds, using a tune of his own choice. The other members of the congregation join in, reading the words from their hymnbooks if the text is unfamiliar. The singing is tentative at first as the tune gathers steam, but is proceeding with strength by the end of the first verse. The hymn texts can run to half a dozen verses or more, some of which may be omitted if the hymn is particularly long.

The song service in the white church may begin as much as thirty or forty-five minutes before the appointed hour for preaching. The atmosphere during the singing is sober but congenial, and the singing blends with the sounds of the arrival of members and friends, casual conversation, and the exchange of greetings. When the time for the service finally arrives, the pastor moves toward the pulpit, visiting elders take their places behind him on the stand, and the formal service begins with an opening hymn, followed by prayer, scripture, and sermons by the pastor and visiting preachers. The beginning of the formal part of the service brings a shift in attention to the speaker in the pulpit, and a change to a mood of restrained piety, expressed sometimes by silence, sometimes by tears. The formal preaching service includes fewer hymns, usually only an opening hymn, an invitational hymn at the close of preaching, and a closing hymn accompanied by a parting handshake all around. During particularly long services an elder may lead a few verses of a favorite hymn to give the congregation a chance to stand and stretch. The average length of the white service, including the informal singing, is a little less than two hours.

The general organization of the service in the black church is similar to that of the white service, but with an important difference. Instead of being concentrated in a special song service before preaching begins, the bulk of the singing is scattered evenly throughout the entire meeting. Some of the early arrivals may sing informally, but this singing is more casual and fewer members participate here than during the formal service. Hymns almost always follow the opening prayer and each sermon. An elder may also choose to lead a hymn from the pulpit during the course of his sermon, and the invitation and the taking up of the collection provide further opportunities for singing. As in the white churches, members take turns picking out the hymns. A person suggesting a hymn from the floor makes no formal announcement of title or its number in the hymnbook as in the white church, and gives no pitch or tempo. The leader, who is usually the one who picked the hymn, simply begins, and others gradually join in. Few members have hymnbooks at hand or bother to open them, both because most singers already know the words by heart and because the leader, who is usually using a book himself, nearly always lines it out (see section on lining out below).

Primitive Baptists in both branches of the church believe that the inspiration to sing, like the inspiration to preach or lead prayer, is a gift to be shared for the good of the group. But the looser structure of the black service allows for greater musical flexibility: Since one must always strive to follow the bidding of the Spirit, anyone moved to lead a hymn at an appropriate point in the service is being spiritually disobedient in an important sense if he does not. The resulting spontaneity and spirit of musical improvisation contrasts with the white services, where the preached word dominates the service. Services in the black church generally include more singing (spirituals as well as hymns), and the level of physical participation on the part of the congregation is more intense. The black service also runs longer, usually well over two hours, sometimes three.

With one exception, all the songs on this collection were recorded during services. There is no question that the traditional hymn survives today because of the protective environment of the church, which is effectively isolated from secular influences. But however important a part of the service the hymn may be, perhaps a more telling measure of its significance is its survival in the community outside the church. In the rural regions where the Primitive Baptist church has thrived, the boundary lines between church and community are not cleanly drawn, and neither hymn singing nor worship itself is restricted to the church. Elders occasionally visit the homes of members to hold small services for those unable for reasons of health to get out to the church, and singing is usually a component. In the past, prayer meetings were convened regularly in members' homes on weekday evenings, again with hymn singing, and although that practice is not as common as it once was, the desire to pray and sing informally remains.

Primitive Baptists are acutely aware that their church is vulnerable to contamination by "the world" and take a number of precautions against it, such as maintaining an unpaid ministry and limiting the involvement of the church in secular community affairs. But in another way the sacred and the secular worlds of church members are very much intertwined. Primitive Baptists are characteristically attentive to their own inner spiritual senses, to those secret flashes of inspiration and communication that only a true child of God feels, and they believe that Christians are never out of range of grace. God may speak anytime and anywhere, and one must be receptive. Likewise, the desire to sing a hymn outside the context of the church is more than just an aesthetic impulse—it is also a function of religious inspiration. Sacred music in secular contexts can be an important aspect of a member's spiritual experience. One elder, for example, remarked in a sermon that one day at work he heard the tune for "Amazing Grace" in the machine he was operating, and found himself uplifted and grateful. Another member told of a desire to sing that came over her as she drove home from work and after describing the experience added, "Yes sir, I was having church all by myself, going down the highway in my car!" Another recalled that his father was accustomed to singing hymns as he worked alone in the fields, his strong voice audible for long distances in the stillness.

In some cases, however, these moments of religious communication are considerably more explicit than an impulse to sing or speak a few words of prayer. At times they take the form of dramatic visionary encounters with the Spirit. These personal experiences range from divine revelations of spiritual knowledge to messages of peace and encouragement. Some contain special commands concerning singing. One elderly member related the following incident:

I'd been somewhere and was way in the night coming back. I was coming, and the moon was shining so bright, it was mighty nigh, you could pick up a pin almost. I was coming along ridge and wood, leaves and things all off. I was walking and singing. I never will forget, the song I was singing was "Blue Moon of Kentucky." The moon was shining so bright, that just struck

me, you know, in my mind. And don't you know, as clear as it was, something got over the moon. A dark cloud just overshadowed it, and I couldn't see nowhere. And a voice spoke to me out of that cloud. You know what it said? Called me by name, said, "You quit singing that song. The song for you to sing"—he pointed it out to me—"is 'The time is swiftly rolling on, when you must faint and die.'" And that scared me. That frightened me. I didn't sing no more of that other song. But I'm glad he took it away from me. I ain't got no more charm for them kind of songs.

Such "gift" songs are not usually new creations—they are hymns and tunes already familiar in the local tradition—but they take on new meaning when personally delivered by the Spirit, and a member favored by such an experience will probably come to lead that hymn more than any other in future services. In some cases the experience carries with it the skill to sing a tune that up to that time had been beyond the abilities of the singer. In general, a hymn bestowed with such awesome spiritual clarity is a rare blessing and becomes from that point on part of the lasting testimony of the member who received it. It becomes, in a way, his own personal property. The unique significance of the spiritually dedicated hymn may even survive its "owner," as others in the church continue to sing it in his name after his death.

Hymn singing in the community has a recreational as well as devotional aspect. Informal singings in the homes of church members are still popular, especially in white communities, and as a form of recreation probably resemble, in spirit at least, the early American singing schools. Many of the occasions that have fostered secular folksinging in the rural South serve as contexts for hymn singing as well. Informal social gatherings such as bean stringings, apple peelings, long trips by automobile, or simple porch-sitting sessions are likely times for the singing of the old hymns. In one elder's family singing was a part of the daily routine:

Most of the music in the home was just singing. Dad would sing in them old hymnbooks. Many, many mornings in the wintertime we'd get up before day, he woke me up singing some old hymn. Just about every morning, he would get up and get the fire started, and sing a hymn or two before breakfast. And then, during the day or during the night, he'd take a notion—and he'd have us children to help him at night sometimes—we'd gather around a little table with the oil lamp, and we'd all try to help. And that singing wasn't just in the house. We had neighbors who lived half a mile away, lived on a farm, and you could hear people singing sometimes, I guess, for a mile. The ladies'd be out sometimes about their work, and the men, and you could just hear that singing just echo from one hill to the other.

The strict conventions concerning musical performance, which are so important in the church service, are not as closely observed in the informal hymn singings in the community. For example, the rule against using musical instruments in the churches, what the members call "music" as opposed to singing, has not been so carefully applied in the community. This was particularly true several generations ago, when local performers provided more live music, both sacred and secular, than do so in these days of stereos and cassette recorders. Certainly, many church members objected to the styles of music and the worldly contexts associated with secular string bands, country frolics, and so forth, and that general disapproval sometimes extended to specific instruments. One elderly deacon said that he used to play guitar and banjo, but that the Lord took it away from him. For some church people, however, to reject behavior associated with instruments and to reject frivolous songs was not necessarily to reject the instruments which played them. More than a few good church members, perhaps mindful of Psalm 150, have not found it inconsistent to play religious songs on stringed instruments outside the church. One member's defense of the guitar was short and direct: "You can play hymns on it." Old-time hymns accompanied by stringed instruments appear occasionally on early 78-rpm recordings. In the 1930s, Golden Harris, of Floyd County, Virginia, recorded several tunes still popular today among Primitive Baptists, including *Dunlap*, singing and accompanying himself on fiddle.[10]

Hymn singing has been part of the cultural background here, and as such has touched people in the community not formally affiliated with the church. The children of church members are not enlisted in the church—for that they must await their own call by God—but they nevertheless attend regularly and are exposed constantly to the hymns, both in and out of church. Should the Spirit call them into the fellowship, they come already prepared with the musical skills of the Primitive Baptist singing tradition. If not, they may at least retain a love for old-time hymn singing. Almost everyone in the community can name ancestors who were Primitive Baptists, and even those who are now members of other churches nevertheless take pride in their roots; one woman told me that she had been "rocked in a Primitive Baptist cradle." One does not have to be a Primitive Baptist to feel a special closeness to the hymns.

The Hymns

What really makes these performances traditional are the tunes and the singing style, not the words. But there can be no meaning, no performance, without text. The history of the Primitive Baptist hymn texts begins with issues that emerged during the formative years of the Protestant church. One of the goals of the Reformation was to build a church free of coercive ecclesiastical hierarchy, one in which the members served as participants, not merely as observers. Toward this end, many Reformation leaders in sixteenth-century Europe gave their qualified support to the singing of devotional poetry in the vernacular language of the church members. John Calvin, writing in the early sixteenth century, was one of the first: "Hence it is moreover clearly evident, that neither voice nor singing, if used in prayer, has any validity, or produces the least benefit with God, unless it proceed from the inmost desire of the heart. . . . Nor do we here condemn the use of the voice, or singing, but rather highly recommend them, provided they accompany the affection of the heart. For they exercise the mind in Divine meditation, and fix the attention of the heart."[11] The Primitive Baptists' attitudes about congregational singing are true to Scripture, but they derive historically from the dissenting churches of England, which were themselves founded on these and other Calvinist principles. Many of the Primitive Baptist texts, in fact, date back to eighteenth-century Britain.

One feature of early Protestant singing was an emphasis on the text: again, in Calvin's words, "Yet great caution is necessary, that the ears be not more attentive to the modulation of the notes, than the mind to the spiritual import of the words."[12] Church authorities found appropriate tunes where they could, but the tunes were only vehicles for the texts, which articulated doctrine and therefore had to be strictly orthodox. For modern Primitive Baptists, too, the words of the hymns are central. Compared to other popular types of sacred song, such as the simple and repetitive spirituals or the lighter and often sentimental gospel songs, the Primitive Baptist hymns are long, densely worded, and theologically complex. Primitive Baptist hymnbooks contain words only, no music. The singers, in fact, do not generally have special names for the tunes they use, nor do they give them much thought independent of texts. Most members use the term *hymn* in the old sense, to refer to the text alone. Those who call for a certain hymn, explain how a special hymn has been given to them in the spirit, or complain that a particular hymn is contrary to Primitive Baptist doctrine are usually talking about the words, rather than the melody or a particular combination of words and music. Hymns are typically identified by their first lines, which is how they are listed in the indexes of the hymnbooks.

The crucial importance of the hymn text is evident in the early history of the development of the English hymn, both in England and the New World. Many English dissenters, including many who eventually came to America, were extraordinarily cautious when it came to public worship. Church authorities, if they permitted congregational singing at all, forbade the use of poetry of human contrivance and allowed only the singing of the Psalms, words which were written down by man but inspired by God and which were originally intended for singing. However, the Psalms needed revision to fit them into the standard poetic meters of British tradition so that they could be sung to tunes already familiar to the church members. The editors who did the work were churchmen, not poets, and thus took great care to produce metrical paraphrases of the Psalms that were as

true as possible to the original Hebrew that God had given David.

English-speaking Christians used various metrical translations of the Psalms for many years in England and the colonies, but for all their fidelity to the original, the paraphrases were less than successful as song lyrics. Most of the poems suffered from being forced into metrical verse without any attention to poetic grace, and their cluttered syntax compared poorly with the elegant lyricism of the King James Bible. A good example is Psalm 117, the shortest of the Psalms: "O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great towards us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord." Two separate metrical versions of those lines appeared in the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), a psalter prepared by Puritan authorities for their congregations, and the first book printed in North America. Here is one of them:

All nations, prayse the Lord; all folk
prayse him. For his mercee
is great to us; & the Lords truth
aye lasts. the Lord prayse yee. [13]

The church fathers did not, of course, intend for the texts to achieve poetical excellence; their concern was for a faithful presentation of God's inspired word. But it is not difficult to see how the awkward verse would have interfered with the spiritual joys of singing and the comprehension of the words; labored grammatical constructions frequently jumbled sentence elements and stretched ideas across lines and even stanzas. These problems were exacerbated by the slow tempo of the singing and the frequent use of lining out.

Reform arrived in the 1720s, at the beginning of a century of religious renewal, when a group of English divines began to reshape congregational singing. The leader of this movement was Isaac Watts (1674–1748), whose system of devotional song included less literal but more singable versions of the Psalms, song texts based on other parts of the Bible, and, most radical of all, hymns of his own composing. His goals were several: to free singers from awkward verse and thus direct their minds to God, to provide song texts with a Christian orientation (that is, based on New Testament scripture), and to make available a wider range of devotional expression than had been available in the past. Watts's flexible and lyrical approach to translation is evident in all three of his versions of Psalm 117. This one, in long meter, appears today in Primitive Baptist hymnbooks:

From all that dwell below the skies
Let the Creator's praise arise;
Let the Redeemer's name be sung
Through every land, by every tongue.

Eternal are thy mercies, Lord;
Eternal truth attends thy word;
Thy praise shall sound from shore to
shore,
'Till suns shall rise and set no more. [14]

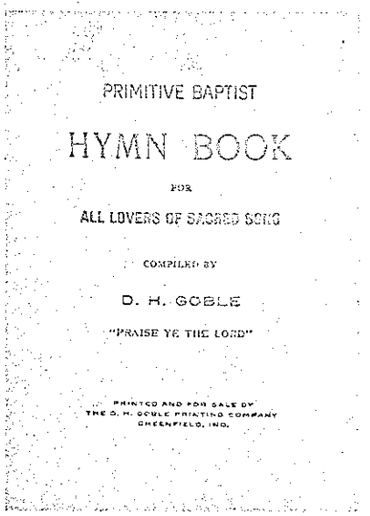
The transition from psalmody to hymnody, under the leadership of Watts and others, was an important moment in the development of sacred singing. Not only did the new texts encourage singing, but the door was opened for the creation of new hymns. A measure of Watts's success is that dozens of his hymns are still in regular use today in various musical settings in English-speaking churches around the world.

Hymns written by English authors in the eighteenth century continue to be the most popular in Primitive Baptist congregations. The writers include, in addition to Watts, John Cennick (1718–55), William Cowper (1731–1800), Philip Doddridge (1702–51), John Newton (1725–1807), and Samuel Stennett (1727–95). Most of these were associated with the dissenting churches of England, whose beliefs were not very different from those of today's Primitive Baptists. Another Englishman whose work appears with some frequency is Charles Wesley (1707–88). This is a fact of some irony, since Charles and his brother John were instrumental in founding the Methodist church, whose doctrines of free will are radically in conflict with Primitive Baptist predestinarianism. None of the Wesleyan texts anthologized for the Primitive Baptists, however, contains what Primitive Baptist historian C. B. Hassell calls "false theology,"[15] and some are among the most popular.

Some of the hymns in the Primitive Baptist collections were composed by Americans, the best known of whom include John Leland (1754–1841), a Baptist, and Samuel Davies (1732–61), a Presbyterian. Other, less well known authors include Primitive Baptists writing for members of their own faith. Their work includes hymns dealing with points of doctrine central to the Primitive Baptist church and hymns for special ordinances practiced mainly by Primitive Baptists, such as foot washing. Other hymns are of unknown authorship and might in some cases be described as "folk" in origin, in that they grew out of local religious traditions and that the writers' identities have been lost. The Primitive Baptist hymn collections also reflect a few of the nineteenth-century modernizations in sacred singing. Some hymns are printed with refrain lines or choruses, innovations that were popularized after the camp meetings of the early 1800s, and a few hymns come from the postbellum gospel hymn era, such as Joseph Scriven's "What a friend we have in Jesus."

The older hymns, however, bear most of the burden in Primitive Baptist services. Some of these early classics, of course, have become standards and appear with sophisticated musical settings in hymnbooks of the major denominations. But a number of the favorite hymns among the Primitive Baptists have been abandoned by the more progressive denominations, probably because the texts are inconsistent with the optimistic evangelicalism that came to dominate nineteenth-century religious thought. Still popular, for example, are such texts as "Dark is the road that leads to death," "Lord, what a wretched land is this," and "When sorrows encompass me round." Church members acknowledge that their hymns are "lonesome and sad," but take a measure of satisfaction in this fact. Not all Primitive Baptist hymns are full of despair, of course. The hymns cover a broad emotional spectrum, expressing both the ecstasy of grace and the anguish of gracelessness, the warmth of communion with Jesus and the fear of God.

Primitive Baptists have used a variety of hymn collections over the years, many of which have passed out of use and out of print. The two books still in regular use in the Blue Ridge area are Benjamin Lloyd's *Primitive Hymns* (1841) and D. H. Goble's *Primitive Baptist Hymn Book* (1887), both of which are still in print.[16] Both books are known to both white and black branches of the church, but white congregations favor the Goble collection, which is the smaller of the two and contains a larger number of more recently composed hymns, while the black churches generally use Lloyd's collection. There is some overlap between the two books: Lloyd's contains 705 hymns, Goble's has 321, and 175 appear in both. All congregations tend to sing from a group of favorites and omit others; no group we visited made full use of the entire selection in either book. The most frequently sung hymns in each branch, with their metric headings and the number of times they were used during the collecting period, are as follows: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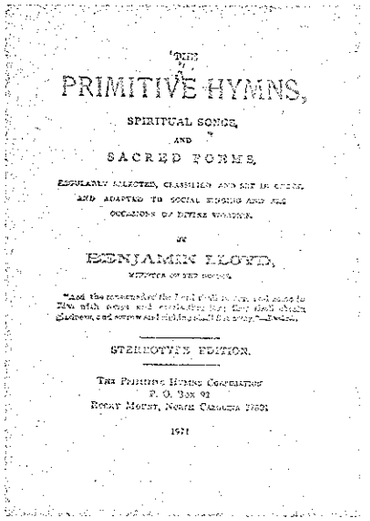
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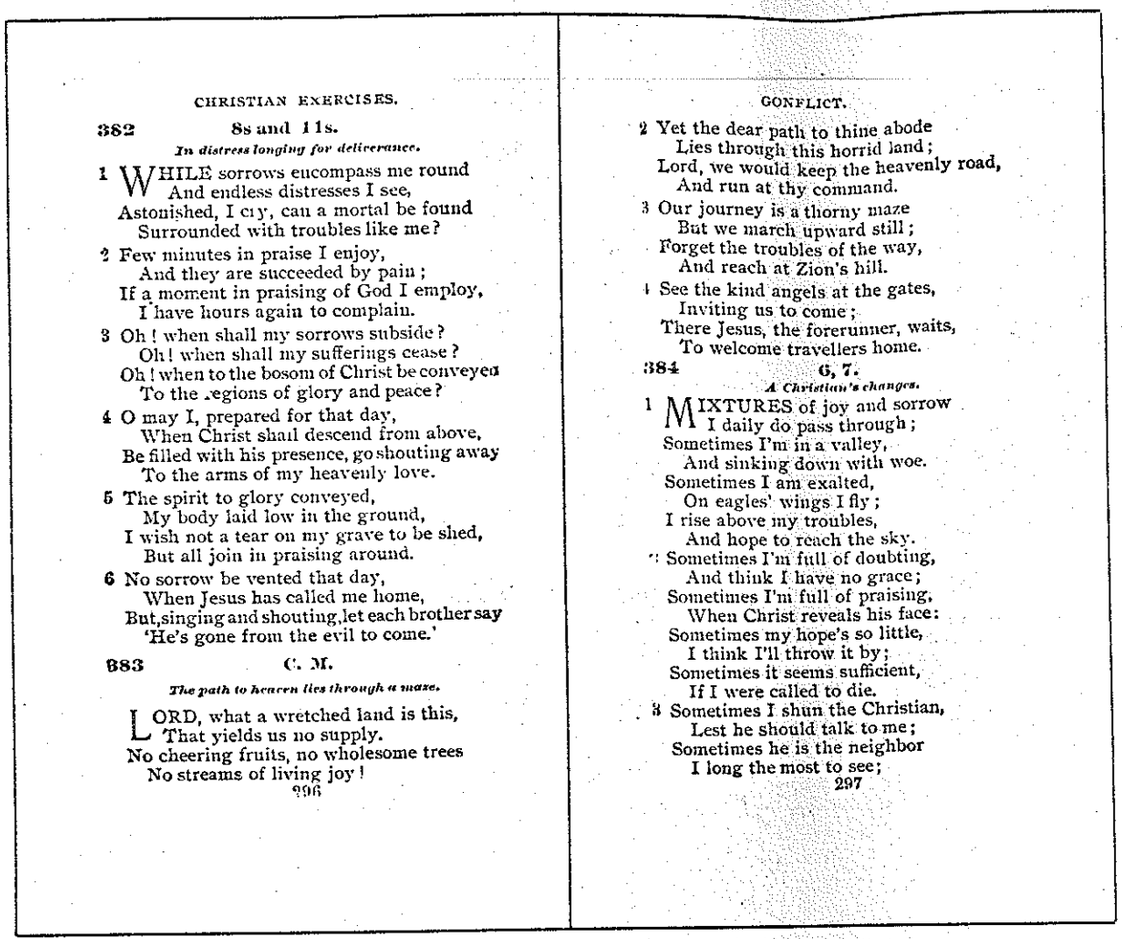


CHRISTIAN EXERCISES.

382 8s and 11s.

In distress longing for deliverance.

1 WHILE sorrows encompass me round
And endless distresses I see,
Astonished, I cry, can a mortal be found
Surrounded with troubles like me?

2 Few minutes in praise I enjoy,
And they are succeeded by pain;
If a moment in praising of God I employ,
I have hours again to complain.

3 Oh! when shall my sorrows subside?
Oh! when shall my sufferings cease?
Oh! when to the bosom of Christ be conveyed
To the regions of glory and peace?

4 O may I, prepared for that day,
When Christ shall descend from above,
Be filled with his presence, go shouting away
To the arms of my heavenly love.

5 The spirit to glory conveyed,
My body laid low in the ground,
I wish not a tear on my grave to be shed,
But all join in praising around.

6 No sorrow be vented that day,
When Jesus has called me home,
But, singing and shouting, let each brother say
'He's gone from the evil to come.'

883 C. M.

The path to heaven lies through a maze.

LORD, what a wretched land is this,
That yields us no supply.
No cheering fruits, no wholesome trees
No streams of living joy!

296

CONFLICT.

2 Yet the dear path to thine abode
Lies through this horrid land;
Lord, we would keep the heavenly road,
And run at thy command.

3 Our journey is a thorny maze
But we march upward still;
Forget the troubles of the way,
And reach at Zion's hill.

4 See the kind angels at the gates,
Inviting us to come;
There Jesus, the forerunner, waits,
To welcome travellers home.

384 6, 7.

A Christian's changes.

1 MIXTURES of joy and sorrow
I daily do pass through;
Sometimes I'm in a valley,
And sinking down with woe.
Sometimes I am exalted,
On eagles' wings I fly;
I rise above my troubles,
And hope to reach the sky.

2 Sometimes I'm full of doubting,
And think I have no grace;
Sometimes I'm full of praising,
When Christ reveals his face:
Sometimes my hope's so little,
I think I'll throw it by;
Sometimes it seems sufficient,
If I were called to die.

3 Sometimes I shun the Christian,
Lest he should talk to me;
Sometimes he is the neighbor
I long the most to see;

297

Hymn texts without tunes, from Lloyd's Primitive Hymns.

White churches
- "Amazing grace how sweet the sound," C.M. (13 examples)
- "There is a house not made with hands," C.M. (12)
- "O land of rest for thee I sigh," C.M. (11)
- "Rock of ages, cleft for me," 7s (9)
- "Gentle shepherd, gently lead us," 8s,7s (8)
- "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah," 8s,7s (8)
- "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord," 11s (8)
- "How tedious and tasteless the hours," P.M. or 8s (8)
- "When the day of life is brightest," 8s,7s (8)

Black churches
- "Amazing grace how sweet the sound," C.M. (15)
- "We seek a rest beyond the skies," C.M. (8)
- "Dark was the night and cold the ground," C.M. (7)
- "Lord what a wretched land is this," C.M. (6)
- "Come we that love the Lord," S.M. (5)
- "Firmly I stand on Zion's hill," C.M. (5)
- "When (while) sorrows encompass me round," 8s,11s (5)
- "Did Christ the great example lead," C.M. (4)
- "Hungry and faint and poor," S.M. (4)

During the research period the white groups used 131 different hymn texts, while the black groups used 74. The lower number for the black congregations is accounted for partly by the larger number of spirituals sung in those churches in addition to the old hymns.

During congregational singing hymns are simply set to tunes that everyone knows by heart. The relationship between text and tune is unstable, and with some exceptions, each has an existence independent of the other. For example, the most popular text in the churches that we visited was Newton's "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound," and one of the most popular tunes used with it was *New Britain*, the tune by which it is best known elsewhere and the one generally found in standard hymnals. But not every performance of that text used *New Britain*, nor was every use of that tune set with the "Amazing grace" text. One may well ask how the singers keep the two repertories straight in their minds, especially since most singers, even song leaders, have a knowledge of tunes which is more instinctive than self-conscious. The key to tune-text pairing is actually very simple: every hymn in the book has a metrical heading which indicates the structure of the stanzas, and the leader simply matches that text to one of the tunes that he knows to be appropriate for that meter. The majority of the hymns are marked C.M., for common meter, which is widely used in Anglo-American folk music, particularly the ballads (hence its nickname, "ballad meter"). Common-meter stanzas contain four lines of iambic verse in alternating lengths of eight and six syllables (or, expressed in numbers, 8-6-8-6). The lines are almost always end-stopped, and each stanza expresses a complete idea.

The other metric patterns in general use also have counterparts in secular folksinging. The most frequently used patterns have descriptive names: long meter (L.M.) is iambic verse in the pattern 8-8-8-8; short meter (S.M.), which is also iambic, has line lengths of 6-6-8-6. Other patterns have numerical designations: 8s, 7s, (8-7-8-7); 7s,6s (7-6-7-6); 11s (11-11-11-11); 7s (7-7-7-7); 8s,11s (8-8-11-8); and a number of others that are rarely used. One class of hymns is marked P.M., for particular meter (some singers call it plain meter or peculiar meter); this group includes an assortment of texts of different types which, for one reason or another, are not normally compatible with the regular stock of tunes and must be paired with a particular tune.

In practice the pairing of tune and text is not totally free. Some hymns are so often associated with a particular tune, such as "Rock of ages, cleft for me" and the tune *Toplady*, that they are virtually inseparable. Also, different congregations establish their own preferred tunes for certain texts. But in theory both text and tune are free-floating, and as long as the tune is familiar and the metric fit is correct, the leader may match them as he desires. If the leader mistakenly uses an incompatible tune, the performance will jerk along like a badly timed engine and will more often than not come to a grinding halt.

This system brings a large measure of flexibility to congregational singing. The leader, for example, usually has a choice of several tunes in different musical modes, and he can choose the one that best suits the emotions of the text or the prevailing mood. The flexibility of the system even allows for some bending of the metrical rules. For example, one stanza pattern used frequently is marked in the books 8s,7s,4s, and has lines in the

pattern 8-7-8-7-4-7, a structure for which the Primitive Baptists have no tune. However, with the simple adjustment of singing the fifth line twice and repeating the last two lines, the text becomes 8s,7s, for which tunes are plentiful. Likewise, certain hymns marked P.M. are made more regular, and thus singable, by simply omitting a troublesome refrain line or chorus. Other problem stanzas are dealt with by exploiting the innate flexibility of melody. One popular hymn, "When sorrows encompass me round," has a metric structure of 8s,11s (8-8-11-8). However, it requires only slight juggling of the tune—the insertion of a few pick-up notes and the occasional singing of two syllables in the place of one—to permit the text to be used with any short-meter tune (6-6-8-6). The metric details of the two stanza structures are different, but the similarity in the stress patterns and in the relative lengths of the lines is close enough that reconciliation is easy. Similarly, the minor adjustment of tying together two notes in each line allows the adaptation of tunes in 8s,7s to texts in 7s,6s.

Other forms of flexibility are most often exploited in the black church, where the looser structure of the service provides more opportunities for improvisation. Particularly when the hymn is being lined out, a leader is not bound to a single text but is free to mix verses from different hymns of the same meter. If the verses run out but emotions remain high and the congregation wants to continue singing, the quick-thinking leader, or perhaps a new leader altogether, may proceed immediately with a new hymn without disturbing the flow of the tune. In some black performances miscellaneous hymn texts serve as verses in spirituals. Another way to lengthen a short hymn is to insert choruses and refrains, whether they are printed in the book or not. Again, this is easily done; the added stanzas need only be consistent with the metrical demands of the tune. For example, common-meter hymns set to one of the usual tunes may be extended using the lines "Remember me, remember me / Oh Lord, remember me," sung twice through to fill out the four-line stanza, which is then used either as an extra verse or as a recurring chorus.

White congregations make similar use of inserted choruses, though they do this less often than black congregations. A hymn tune frequently used in white services for this purpose is W. B. Bradbury's well-known *Angel Band*. The chorus is sung as it appears in printed versions of the hymn, but the verses are taken not from the printed version but from any common-meter text.

The Tunes

Since the main concern of Protestant church leaders over the centuries has been to provide suitable hymn texts, rather than compose music for them, singers have, out of convenience, drawn hymn tunes from a wide variety of familiar sources, including popular and folk secular sources as well as those tunes long traditional in the church. The singing had to be orthodox, but orthodoxy was more easily measured in a text than in a melody. Even church leaders who sought to shield their congregations from the corrupting forces of the world did not always object (if they even knew) when a worldly tune disguised by sacred words slipped into the church. In fact, divested of its profane lyrics, its instrumental accompaniment, and its worldly performance style, a secular tune easily became something sacred when used in a sacred setting. The ease with which tunes have changed contexts not only helps explain the resemblance between the music of the Anglo-American sacred and secular traditions but also accounts for the variety of the sources of the tunes that we found among the Primitive Baptists of Virginia and North Carolina; these included a solid core of folk hymn tunes with recognized secular counterparts, newer secular tunes transformed for church use, standard composed hymns, and children's songs.

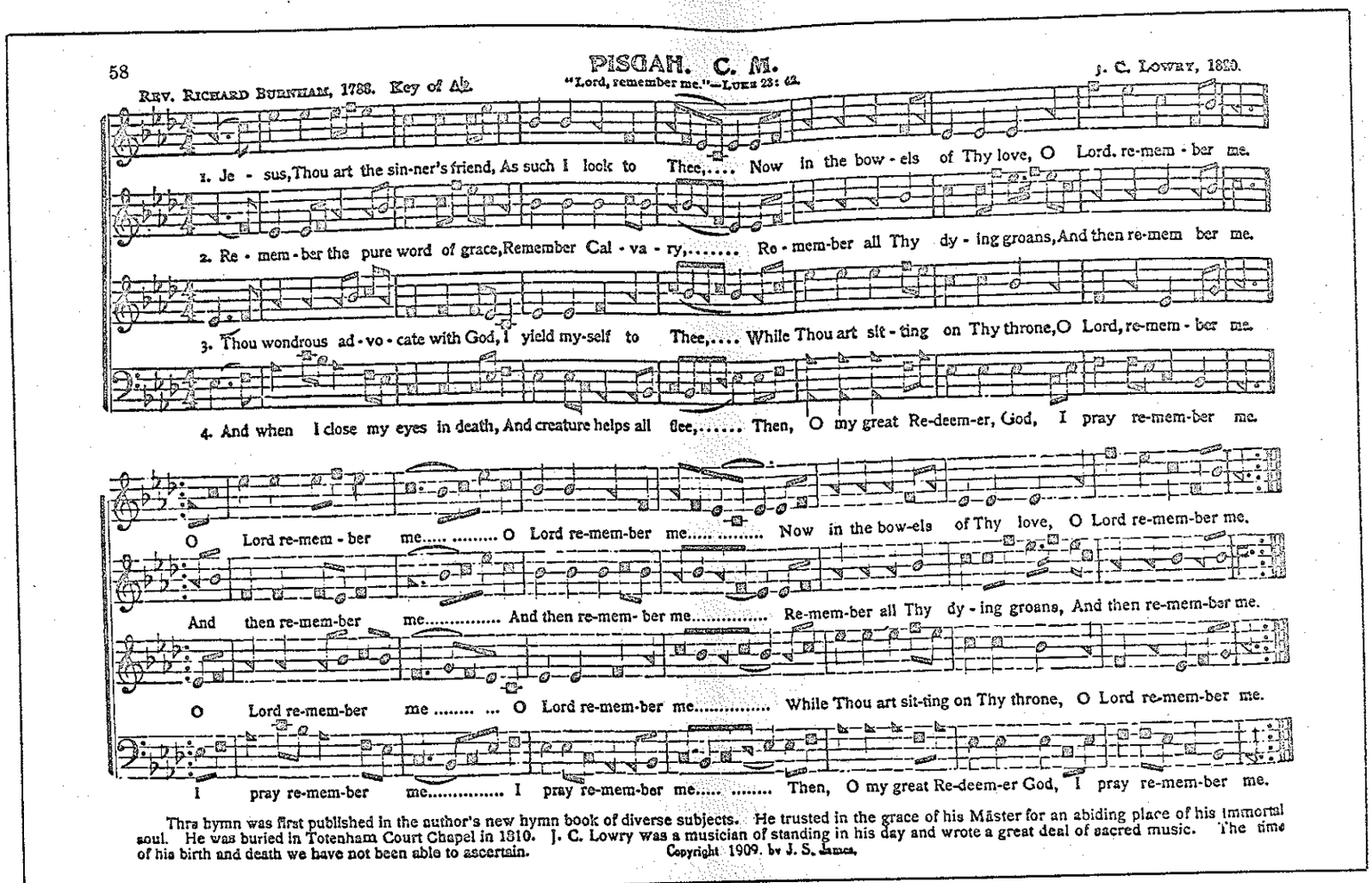
Most of the singers are able to remember the hymn tunes without the help of formal titles. Since most of the Primitive Baptist tunes have been published elsewhere with names, we have taken advantage of those recognized titles and used them here for purposes of identification, but it should be understood that these names are virtually unknown to the singers. In fact, the singers' awareness of melody seems to be largely second nature, and it is difficult to get them to discuss the tunes in isolation from texts. Most of our inquiries into purely musical topics yielded unspecific and often ambiguous comments. The singers seem to pay relatively little attention to the tunes as discrete melodic forms. That may explain the tendency for tunes to break down into fragments and recombine in ways that make them difficult to identify and name and the general blurring of boundaries between individual tunes and between classes of tunes. In any case, this is a problem for the analyst, not for the performers themselves. They are able in their singing to distinguish with surprising precision between tunes that are so closely related that they sound identical to the outsider.

The Primitive Baptist oral tradition is not purely oral. Most of the tunes that we collected are versions of tunes that have been published, some of them repeatedly, many of them in tune books that local congregations have had access to. The first books that contained tunes that are still used today in the Primitive Baptist churches began to appear just after 1800 and continued to be published for the better part of that century. These songbooks were printed in three- and four-part harmony, most of them in the easily learned four-shape system of musical notation, and in association with singing schools as well as church services. They emerged first in New England and then, as New England became musically sophisticated, drifted toward the frontier to the south and west, where they found an appreciative audience and took root in popular local singing schools, many of which met regularly and became institutionalized as singing conventions. These shape-note hymnbooks contained tunes from a variety of sources: European Psalm tunes and compositions by early American writers such as William Billings and Daniel Read, as well as an impressive range of music from the folk tradition, including traditional hymns popular by the end of the eighteenth century and, later on, spiritual songs and choruses that had emerged from the camp meetings in the early decades of the 1800s. Singing-school teachers and songbook compilers who lived within the communities where the music thrived were most responsible for harmonizing the tunes and setting them down in shape-note form.[17]

The old shape-note collections were popular in much of the settled South during the nineteenth century, including the region represented on this recording, but toward the end of that century their popularity began to shrink considerably, as the social conditions that had supported them changed. By George Pullen Jackson's estimation, the Blue Ridge area saw the last shape-note activity of the old style between 1870 and 1900.[18] Since the Primitive Baptist church had been established since the 1830s, it is reasonable to expect that the shape-note singing schools and conventions had some effect on its own developing song tradition. But to say exactly how much is difficult. We do not know what books were in use there, how much resistance there was among the conservative Primitive Baptists to singing conventions, or what the effect of disagreements between Missionary and Primitive Baptists on hymn singing might have been. Nor do we have any record of the rate of flow of tunes from conventions into church services. Recollections of the old singings have apparently not survived among the members of the churches we visited. A few people have inherited early editions of some of the old shape-note books from ancestors, for example William Walker's *Southern Harmony*, but few can read the musical notation inside.

For the better part of the nineteenth century Primitive Baptists continued to use tuneless collections. But toward the latter part of that century a new kind of singing school, using a new type of songbook, began to influence the Primitive Baptist churches of the region. The books were printed in a modernized style, using two staves rather than three or four and a seven-shape system of notation; besides the old tunes they contained a number of newly composed gospel-style songs. Because of the vigorous promotion of such books by their publishers, the organized dispatching of trained teachers into rural regions all across the South, and the broad appeal of the music, the effect of these books was large. Eventually, churches began to incorporate them into their services. Even the Primitive Baptists, who were strict traditionalists and whose hymnbooks had contained words only, were affected by the movement, and they began to publish their own collections containing tunes as well as hymns.

Of the many factors involved, it seems to have been the singing school that was most responsible for generating interest in tune books and paving the way for their introduction into the churches of the Blue Ridge region, which had not used them before. These schools were convening regularly by the end of the nineteenth century, and their popularity did not taper off until the 1920s or 1930s. Usually held



A representative selection from an old four-shape hymnbook, The Original Sacred Harp *(Denson Revision). The tune is* Pisgah, *heard in this collection in a unison version.*

in churches, they met daily for a week or ten days or on weekends only for longer periods, under the leadership of itinerant instructors or specially trained local people. Some of the local residents who attended the schools and acquired a skill and a taste for reading music and learning new tunes are still members of Primitive Baptist congregations today.

The oldest Primitive Baptist tune book currently in use in the area studied here is the *Hymn and Tune Book*, compiled by two Primitive Baptist elders, Silas H. Durand and Posey B. Lester, and first published in 1886 by the D. H. Goble Printing Company of Greenfield, Indiana, the same publisher that released Goble's hymnbook, containing text only, the following year. As in all subsequent Primitive Baptist tune books, the songs appear in four-part harmony on two staves. Interspersed among the traditional tunes that had appeared in many of the older books and that were still popular among Primitive Baptist congregations were songs written by contemporary authors.

More popular than Durand and Lester in local churches today is Elder John R. Daily's *Primitive Baptist Hymn and Tune Book* (1902),[19] which received heavy use in the local singing schools, probably because it contained thirteen pages of musical rudiments and exercises in the front. Daily explains his reasons for assembling the collection in the preface of the 1918 printing: "A crying complaint is made by the inhabitants of Zion that the old, well-tried, heart-stirring melodies are being displaced by new tunes, many of which have little else than novelty to recommend them. We have endeavored, therefore, to revive and preserve many of the old tunes, that tend to arouse emotions of love and praise in the soul, believing that the music of the Christian church and home should move the pure affections of the spiritual mind rather than gratify the fancy of the carnal taste."[20] It was a representative statement of Primitive Baptist conservatism. The "new tunes" he refers to are probably the contemporary gospel hymns, which had become widely popular after the publication of Sankey and Bliss's successful six-volume series *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs* (1875–95) and which were appearing in greater quantity, and for many, with lesser quality, with every passing year. Yet Daily's collection itself is not untouched by newer trends in sacred singing; it includes some of the early gospel classics, such as Crosby and Doane's "Near the Cross" and "Pass Me Not" and Bennett and Webster's "Sweet Bye and Bye."

Resistance to modernization was lower in the *Old School Hymnal*, another tune book compiled by and for Primitive Baptists. It is actually a series of collections, beginning with a 1920 edition assembled by Elder Lee Hanks and followed by various revisions under other editors, including elders J. A. Monsees and R. H. Pittman.[21] Each new edition eliminated songs that had become less popular and added new ones. The fourth and fifth

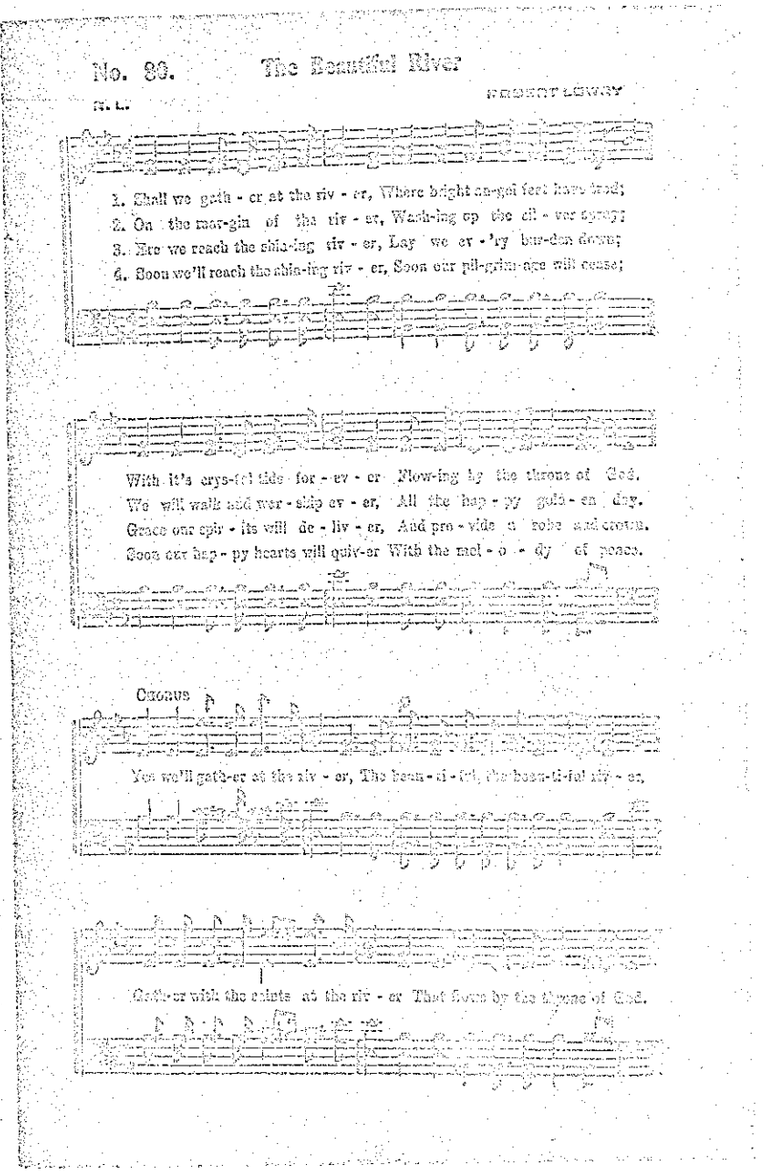
editions seem to have been among the first to be actually used in Primitive Baptist services in the Blue Ridge area, and editions most frequently used by today's congregations are the ninth (1953) and the tenth (1964). Of the editions that I have seen firsthand, the seventh (1937) was the last to contain musical rudiments, a good sign that interest in singing schools had declined.

Taken together, the various revisions of the *Old School Hymnal* in use in the Blue Ridge area outnumber all the other tune books and have probably been the most significant agent of musical modernization in hymnody there. Their influence has spread not only in the more progressive Primitive Baptist churches that use them in services but, indirectly, even in those churches that retain the tuneless hymnbooks, where popular tunes going around in the community may eventually end up. The popularity of this series is probably best explained by the editors' willingness to publish new revisions in an effort to keep up with changes in popular taste, precisely what earlier compilers wished to avoid. While most of the older Primitive Baptist tune-book editors had a plainly conservative, if not reactionary, selection policy, the editors of the *Old School Hymnal* frankly accepted the notion of progress. The foreword to the most recent edition includes this comment: "Much searching has been done to collect a large number of hymns and songs that will fill the needs of all phases of worship, both public and private. The scope of this edition ranges from the most stately and conservative worship hymns to class songs of liberal and youthful appeal. This collection includes compositions dating back to and before the birth of our nation as well as songs written by men and women who are yet living."[22] This statement, quite the contrast to Daily's, represents the general orientation of the more progressive Primitive Baptists. The conservative branches of the church continue to have little use for "songs of liberal and youthful appeal," at least during worship services.

One encounters a number of difficulties in trying to interpret this tangled history of contiguous oral and printed music traditions and their relative influence on the churches whose singing is presented on this collection, which continue to repudiate hymnbooks containing music. One of the few points that stand out with any clarity is that the tune books exerted a direct influence almost exclusively in the white church. Black congregations, separated by their own choice from the whites and increasingly drawn to characteristically black musical patterns, were less exposed to singing schools and accompanying modernizations. This fact probably goes far to account for the smaller number of hymn tunes used in black churches and the only moderate overlap in the black and white repertories.

Theories concerning the influence of printed tunes on white congregations vary widely, but two extremes can be identified: one position holds that the Primitive Baptists are the protectors of a continuous oral tradition in music that antedates even the earliest shape-note publications; the opposing viewpoint maintains that the presence of the numerous shape-note printings of the hymns accounts sufficiently for their continued use in the churches today. However, the facts do not fully support either explanation. Both the strength of tradition and the tyranny of print have helped shape Primitive Baptist singing, but a statement of the question that treats these forces as opposites, pulling in two different directions, is an oversimplification. It is closer to the truth to state that there has been a predisposition toward the folk hymns among both the people who carried them in the oral tradition and those who took the tunes and set them down in print. In fact, they were, in a broad sense, the same people. For singers with a strong tradition in music to accept printed versions of traditional tunes was for them to accept what was already theirs, but in a new form, one which altered the way the hymn was transmitted, but which was not much of an innovation otherwise.[23]

Several factors worked to reduce the initial effect of the tune books on the oral tradition. For one thing, much of the material in the tune books was probably already familiar to the singers. And many of what seemed to be new additions to the repertory were only variants of tunes that had been popular for years. Of course, a large number of tunes were available for the first time, but it is unlikely that many of the members attending singing schools actually became skilled enough at sight reading shape notes to generate a sudden expansion of the tune repertory. The fact that in Durand and Lester's collection only a third of the texts are placed in musical settings suggests that even the tune books may have served at times simply as sources for lyrics to be set to familiar tunes in the manner of the tuneless books. Many people, preferring the familiar to the unfamiliar, were probably more attentive to their own well-stocked memories than to the shapes before them on the page.



One of the gospel hymns appearing in the Old School Hymnal No. 7 *(1937).*

Moreover, it is a mistake to overestimate the extent to which even new music sounded "new" when performed by congregations steeped in oral tradition. Singing habits established over long periods of time are typically very powerful and tend to smooth out changes in repertory, in the same way that someone learning a foreign language tends to use the intonations, pacing, accompanying gestures, and even syntax and vocabulary of his native tongue. For people without extensive technical training, printed music is only a schematic guide, and no published tune can possibly codify all the stylistic subtleties that characterize an actual performance. Style, in other words,

made up as it is of deeply ingrained cultural traditions not easily perceived, much less set aside, was a force at least equal to that of the new literacy.

This collection of recordings suggests that this is true. Even though the tunes that we found have frequently appeared in print, the recorded versions are usually different, in some cases radically different, from the published versions. It is certainly true of the churches that still use tuneless hymnbooks. And even in some of the churches that have adopted tune books, those singing a harmony part tend to gravitate to the melody, those singing the melody rarely do so exactly as written, and all singers tend to add idiomatic embellishments. This suggests that the old unison style of singing has not been totally undermined by the presence of written music in the community.

The point is not that Primitive Baptist singing has not changed but that new tunes entering the working repertory have not necessarily arrived by way of print. Relative freedom from the pressures of standardization has allowed congregational singing to flow like any oral tradition, according to the preferences of its members. Unlike congregations in the nationally organized denominations that use a single standard hymnal for all their churches, Primitive Baptist congregations, with their tuneless books, have considerable freedom in their choice of tunes. Members need not wait for the next official hymnbook revision to incorporate new music into the repertory, but may at any time contribute tunes drawn purely from memory, from memory that has been jogged by a printed version in a tune book, from a newly published source, from Primitive Baptists in other parts of the country, or even from radio or phonograph records. Since musical instruments—another standardizing element—are not permitted in church, newly incorporated tunes are easily fitted out to match the performance style of a given congregation. The Primitive Baptist practice of matching available tunes to printed texts means that almost any metrically appropriate tune is a potential hymn tune if it becomes familiar enough to the singers, no matter what its immediate source. Such additions are, in fact, rare, but they are theoretically possible and, judging from the current repertory of the black and white churches, have occurred in the past.

The characteristic Primitive Baptist reluctance to set aside custom and the fact that modern singing remains firmly under local control have helped create regional styles and tune repertories in a time when mass media have blurred the boundaries between other regional musical traditions and made them almost indistinguishable. In fact, church members visiting the annual meetings of associations in other parts of the country sometimes find themselves unable to sing along with their hosts because of musical differences. The growing use of portable cassette tape recorders to collect unfamiliar tunes on such visiting trips could become, in the future, a new source of standardization, but for now, regional differences persist. Differences even on the local level are not unusual. Congregations cultivate their own favorite tunes, and the presence of one or two strong singers can affect the style and repertory of a whole group.

In the white churches modernizations in hymnody can be traced mainly to the presence of tune books. The greatest changes have taken place in those congregations that actually use them in church—such groups have experienced a dramatic shift in repertory from the older tunes toward gospel music. This change has been accompanied by a change in consciousness, suggesting that the sudden awareness of notes and harmonies has driven a wedge between the singers and unselfconscious adherence to traditional performance style. In many such congregations members tend to prefer the simpler and more easily learned new songs over the older ones still included in the books. When someone in the congregation does choose an older tune, the performance is likely to be weak. It is significant that tunes that were once sung effortlessly by members with a strong base in the oral tradition become sight-reading problems when those members begin to rely on tune books.

Tune books are virtually nonexistent in the black Primitive Baptist churches. Change there has come from other quarters. Elderly members of the churches report that in their younger days church leaders would not permit the singing of any but the old Primitive hymns, a prohibition that extended even to the spirituals, which have been expressions of black religion at least since the early nineteenth century and probably before. In recent years, however, resistance to these and other songs has diminished, and they have enjoyed increasing popularity in the black service, particularly among the women of the churches. Spirituals, of course, and gospel songs, too, have deep roots in the wider black community, especially in the Missionary Baptist and Holiness churches. Since church affiliation patterns in many black families are mixed, and even close relatives may be members of different denominations, lines of kinship serve as lines of communication between the various churches in the community and encourage diffusion of the most popular songs.

Spirituals accounted for nearly a third of the total number of songs recorded in black services, and that proportion has probably grown since 1976. The influence of the spirituals, in fact, has led to the reformulation of some of the older hymn texts (*Jesus is a Rock* and *Long Sought Home* are examples). The process is very much like that which occurred during the camp meetings of the 1800s, as enthusiastic singers mined the old hymns for their best lines and blended them with interlinear refrains and choruses of their own creation to produce the hybrids that, on one hand, found their way into early shape-note books and, on the other, became part of the oral tradition of black spirituals. In Jackson's apt phrase, they "sung them to pieces."

The actual tune repertory of the churches we visited is easily summarized. To a greater or lesser degree, most of the recorded tunes correspond to available printed versions, and to these we assigned the most frequently used names. Of the total of 118 different hymn tunes in the recorded collection, only 17 remain unidentified. At least some of the unidentified tunes probably appear in printed sources as yet undiscovered; the rest are presumably part of the oral tradition. Of these 118 tunes, 103 were in use among white congregations and 33 among black groups (who also sang 34 different spiritual songs). Sixteen hymn tunes were common to both black and white congregations, although usually in very different versions. These numbers are deceptive, however, because many of the tunes were used only once or twice during the whole research period, and a disproportionately small number of tunes dominate the bulk of the collection. These were the most popular tunes (excluding spirituals):

White churches
- *New Britain*, C.M. (25 examples)
- *Brown*, C.M. (13)
- *There Is a House Not Made with Hands*, C.M. (13)
- *Pisgah*, C.M. (11)
- *Toplady*, 7s (11)

Black churches
- *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*,[24] (30)
- *Idumea*, S.M. (20)
- *Devotion*, L.M. (17)
- *Pisgah*, C.M. (14)
- *New Britain*, C.M. (10)

Nearly a third of the 118 tunes collected were among those which appear in the old shape-note books and which have been identified by Jackson and others as having roots in the Anglo-American folk tradition. Another third could not be positively traced to traditional sources, but their modal characteristics, structures, or resemblances to identifiable tunes suggest that they are not far removed from that tradition. Even though the Primitive Baptist way of singing derives from the congregational singing of the English churches of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we found only one Old World Psalm tune, *Mear*, first published in England in 1757 and probably in use before that. *Mear* has been reprinted frequently in the American shape-note collections, which is no doubt the reason for its survival. We also found very few of the early New England compositions, which are popular in the shape-note books, possibly because many of them are fuguing tunes which are inappropriate for unison singing. (Actually, we did record one fuguing tune, *Ninety-Fifth*, but it had been divested of its polyphonic second half.)

A smaller number of tunes were songs of known authorship from the nineteenth century. One of them, William Bradbury's *Brown* (1844), was used in both black and white services, but most of the others, the most popular of which were Thomas Hastings's *Zion* (1830) and Lowell Mason's *Boyleston* (1832), appeared exclusively in the white congregations. A handful of tunes, again found mostly among the white singers, were religious settings of popular secular songs, including "O Tannenbaum" and H. R. Bishop's "Home Sweet Home."

Another small group of tunes, used in the black churches with both hymns and spirituals, includes the familiar children's songs "Polly Wolly Doodle" and "The Old

Gray Mare." Several other tunes were not used to accompany texts from the hymnbooks—and thus are not strictly part of the old hymn tradition—but were sung from memory with their original words. Most of the songs in this category are gospel hymns such as "If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again" and C. Albert Tindley's "Leave It There" (1916). The gospel hymns were actually performed more often by black singers than by the more conservative of the white groups, but they are songs that everyone in the community, white or black, is likely to know because they have had regular exposure by way of radio and phonograph records, and many of them used to be sung in the local schools during morning devotional exercises.

Musical Analysis

To study folk song historically means to account for both continuity and change in the tradition. The continuity of the hymn tune repertory in the Primitive Baptist church is not particularly surprising given its strong sense of tradition and resistance to change. The current differences between two repertories of song which have a common ancestor and the difference between the tunes as performed and as published are problems of more interest and difficulty. In the course of a century, black and white Primitive Baptists have shaped in complicated ways the original song tradition that they once shared. The size of our collection—almost six hundred recordings—makes it possible to identify some of the features of these diverging traditions.

One class of differences has to do with tune structure. Comparing the written versions of the tunes with the performances reveals that major structural differences are relatively uncommon, no doubt partly because the rigid metrical demands of the printed texts do not allow for drastic reorganization of melodies. But structural change that is consistent with the metrics of the hymns does occur. The simplest manifestation of such change involves the occasional omission in performance of one or more phrases of a tune, usually a chorus or refrain. In both black and white performances of *Pisgah*, for example, the choruslike repetition of the melody found in printed versions is absent. More interesting are instances in which tunes appearing in the books as eight-phrase tunes (set either to a four-line text and a chorus or to a double stanza of eight lines) are pared down to four lines by the elimination of a contrasting second half. One repetition of the tune is then required to complete an eight-line stanza of text. Similarly, but more radically, four-phrase tunes may appear in truncated two-phrase versions, with the shortened tune sung twice to complete each quatrain. We found several of these shifts among white singers: *Parting Hand* appears in both four- and eight-phrase versions, and *Zion* is performed in a reduced two-phrase version. Such structural shortening of tunes is more common, however, in the black churches, where songs are generally more loose jointed and more susceptible to variation. Black versions of *Adams* regularly contain only the first half of the written eight-phrase tune, and several other tunes appear in two-phrase rather than four-phrase versions, including *Devotion* and *Nettleton*. *Bellevue* was the most flexible of all. In its published four-phrase version it takes the melody pattern AA'BA' (each letter represents a musical phrase sung to one line of text), but it appeared in black services in several other forms, including a simple repetition of the fourth phrase (A'A'A'A'), a similar repetition of a slightly altered third phrase (B'B'B'B'), and a combination of the two (B'A'B'A').

Most of the other performed tunes resembled the published tunes in structure, contour, and cadence patterns, with only an occasional minor difference. A few could not be compared structurally, because they occurred in only one of the two branches and we were unable to locate written versions. Such tunes may be among those which were never set down in the old tune books, or, possibly, the written versions have escaped our attention. But the similarity between certain phrases of these unidentified tunes and phrases of known tunes suggests a third explanation: it may be that singers have synthesized new tunes using selected phrases of familiar melodies as building blocks. Some of these phrases, of course, are simply stock melodic figures fundamental to the broad Anglo-American musical tradition and cannot justifiably be identified with particular tunes.[25] Cadence patterns, especially, show a strong family resemblance throughout the collection. But portions of some tunes may actually have been borrowed, either consciously or unconsciously, from other tunes. Such recycling of melodic elements is quite common in religious song and occurs frequently in other branches of the Anglo-American musical tradition.

It is customary in folk music studies to analyze large collections of folk songs by scale or mode. One earmark of a folk performance in standard works on traditional music, in fact, is a "gapped" scale—one which contains fewer than seven pitches and thus does not conform to a full diatonic scale. The music we collected is indeed more modal than diatonic, as are the book versions, but there are significant differences. Occasionally, the performed versions contain seconds and sevenths that are absent in the written versions of the tunes. But more often, the performed tunes use scales that have even fewer tones than the scales of their published counterparts. For example, most of the tunes that in their written forms contain major sevenths are sung in the churches without that pitch. Also, both white and black singers minimize the effect of the fourth degree of the scale (F in the key of C), either by omitting it altogether or by using it only as a passing tone. In printed versions of *Condescension*, for example, a syllable of text in the second line is set to the fourth degree, but in Primitive Baptist performances singers tend to touch the note with only a glancing blow and quickly carry the syllable to a lower pitch more compatible with the mode (see transcription).

As is true for much traditional singing, the actual pitches in the performances do not always correspond precisely with the degrees of the modern tempered scale. Fourths are generally sharped slightly and minor sevenths are more neutral than flat. But few altered pitches in the performances were altered consistently, and it is difficult to generalize on this point. Rather, it seemed that the presence of a strong singer or the habits of a particular congregation had more to do with pitch choice than did a regional standard. Traditional pitch values may simply be inherently variable, or, possibly, traditional and modern intonation patterns have mixed but not blended, like oil and water. In any case, it complicates the analysis of scale and mode, since vague pitches in crucial positions can produce a mode that is equally vague. The largest number of tunes, both black and white, fall generally into the pentatonic patterns C-D-E-G-A and A-C-D-E-G, but because of conflicting interpretations of pitch value among some singers or because pitch value has been so twisted as to become indeterminate, it is not always possible to name with confidence the mode governing a given performance.

Most problems of uncertain pitch value and mode have to do with the third degree of the scale. In both the classic modes and modern musical theory whether the third is major or minor is a primary distinguishing factor, but in these performances, the identity of the third is problematic. In many cases, especially in those performances most reasonably classified with modes containing a minor third, the third actually tends to be neutral (falling halfway between the major and minor third), multiple (used in both major and minor versions in a single performance), sliding, or otherwise variable. In some cases, particularly in white performances, different singers choose different varieties of the third for use on the same syllable (for example, in the last phrase of *Wayfaring Stranger*), resulting in dissonance. More often, though, the congregations are surprisingly consistent, performing the third in rough unison regardless of the complications. In several white performances manipulation of the third has produced an interesting modal shift. Both *Star in the East* and *King of Peace* appear in the tune books with minor thirds and minor sevenths, but in performance the singers have urged the third upward toward the major position, thereby radically shifting the mood of the song from a dark Aeolian toward a bright but odd-sounding Mixolydian.

The flexible third is, of course, characteristic of many forms of Afro-American music, and it is no surprise to find it present in the black hymns. Thirds are frequently rendered as neutral, and even more often slurred up from below toward, but not always completely up to, the major third. More frequently than in the white performances, the exact rendering of the third varies with its melodic context, and several distinct kinds of thirds may be present in any given performance—the tune we have called *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say* is a good example. The thirds in black performances have a particular tendency to approach the major position in rising melody lines and near cadence points.

Among the various factors that influence style, ornamentation has been especially significant in descriptions of folk song performances. But such a treatment tends to relegate notes not part of the main melodic structure to the status of accessory or decorative notes. A careful listening to these recordings shows that most congregations sing the "ornamentations" in near unison much of the time, and do it consistently from one performance to another; thus, those flourishes might be better considered integral to the tune, rather than optional extras. Individuals, of course, provide some true ornamentation, but it seems best to distinguish between these personal stylizations and melodic complexity at the group level, which is perhaps better described by the term "elaboration."

Primitive Baptist singing, white and black, is traditionally in unison, or monophonic. An occasional instance of harmony, which occurs more often in white performances than in black, usually involves only one or two members of the congregation. Generally, everyone sets out to sing the same melody and comes reasonably close to doing so. But since there are always differences between individual versions of the tune, differences attributable to error, individual ornamentation, or a slight lag between the time the first and last members reach a given point in the melody, the most appropriate term is "heterophony"—many singers producing slightly different renditions of the same tune. Actually a kind of melodic freedom, heterophony is more characteristic of black congregations than of white, but it is not extreme in either.

Most of the hymns are sung in duple meter, including several which tune books print in triple time: *Evan, Spring, Long Sought Home, Idumea, Kentucky,* and *Nettleton*. Several of these occur in performance in both duple and triple versions, with the choice apparently up to the leader. Performances that make a triple-time song out of one published in duple time are rare—some white versions of *Condescension* are among the few that fall into this category. For the most part, both white and black singers seem to be most comfortable with duple meter.

An important rhythmic difference between black and white hymn singing is that black performances are carried along by a more regular, definite pulse, a strong foundation beat that is actually the product of several subtle forms of rhythmic emphasis, including patterns of stress in the singers' voices and on-the-beat foot patting, which is soft in volume but which resonates deeply on the wood floors of the churches. In black singing the blend of the individual voices is less smooth than it is among white congregations and the singers are more accustomed to singing individualized versions of the tunes; thus, the basic pulse functions as a reference point to bring them all together. Even when the singing pauses at the ends of phrases, the muted sound of feet marking the beat continues, almost with a life of its own. Hand clapping to the rhythm of the tune is rare in black hymn singing; most hand patting occurs between lines as short, rapid bursts for emotional emphasis and is not rhythmically coordinated with the singing.

In marked contrast to the written versions of the hymns, a single syllable of text in Primitive Baptist performances is generally set not to a single pitch but to clusters of notes, ranging from a simple pair to a complex melismatic phrase. In nearly every case such syllabic groups are binary in form—that is, regardless of how many notes are present in the cluster, the groups tend to break down into two parts, usually of equal duration. When the two parts of the phrase are asymmetrical, the more complex portion tends to occur in the second part (see transcriptions for examples). Tunes that are simple in their written versions may thus become quite rhythmically and melodically complicated in performance.

White singing tends to be less elaborated than black, and syllables not sung to single notes are typically voiced in phrases of only two or three notes. White singing uses elaborations in three basic ways, which may occur singly or in combination:

the insertion of a passing tone to bridge the gap in a larger interval

a movement from the main note to an adjacent note and back again

and, most common, the anticipation of the following pitch

All of these devices serve to give the line internal movement, to add complexity to the contour, and generally to make the melody line more interesting than the one found in the printed versions. Jackson once suggested that the anticipation of notes was an attempt on the part of singers to master difficult material,[26] but it seems unlikely that insecure singers would compensate for their uncertainties as consistently or in such a degree of unison as do these singers. A better explanation is perhaps that melodic elaboration occurs in natural balance to the relatively slow tempo (averaging in white performances around thirty syllables per minute) and the absence of such features as regular harmony or instrumental accompaniment; thus, it provides a sense of momentum and interest.

Elaborations in the black performances are similarly organized, but are freer, more complicated, and have a somewhat different effect. White versions have a stronger feeling of horizontal structure and forward motion, particularly when anticipation is used heavily as an elaborating device, but in black versions the focal point is not so much the linear movement of the melody as the patterns of each syllabic phrase. Several factors contribute to this shift in emphasis: the practice of lining out, which interrupts the flow of the melody; the slower tempo (averaging around twenty syllables per minute); and the more complex melodic phrasings for each syllable, some of which are actually complex enough to have contours and cadences of their own. The passing tone and movement to adjacent pitches occur in the black elaborations, and so does anticipation, although here it tends to lose its horizontal character.

The more elaborated a melody becomes, the more it loses the clarity of its contour and the more difficult it is to compare it to the leaner written versions. In the white versions picking out the main notes of the tune is relatively simple, and what might be termed the "core" melody is easily derived. But in the black versions it is not always clear which pitch in the elaborating phrase should be taken as the most important or dominant. Without a way to reduce the phrase to a note the analyst cannot automatically derive a core melody, and any pure melody derived under such difficult circumstances remains somewhat arbitrary. For the more densely elaborated tunes, in any case, extracting the skeletal melody is at best an academic exercise, the product of which the ear does not actually hear.

Another interesting feature of the performances, especially black ones, is the clustering of the melody line around the tonic. For example, in the first phrase of the published version of *Condescension* the tonic appears only once, but in the black performances, seven of the eight note clusters touch down at the tonic at least once, and sometimes twice. In the black performance of *Devotion* every cluster in the first phrase includes the tonic. The tonic (or less often, the dominant) seems to reach out and capture any phrase that wanders near it. In extreme cases, the result is, once again, a more cyclical, less linear effect. One can only speculate as to the function of this phenomenon, but a possibility is that the frequent return to the tonic and dominant adds pitch stability, counterbalancing the slow pace and meandering melody line. In the absence of accompanying instruments the singing, in effect, provides its own reference tones.

Lining Out

The use of a song leader to read or chant the lines of a Psalm during congregational singing began in the seventeenth century. At first, the practice served as a temporary expedient to singing in congregations where members did not know the words, were unable to read, or had no hymn books. It was approved in England by the Westminster Assembly of 1644 and was recognized for its utility by John Cotton in Boston in 1647: "It will be a necessary helpe, that the lines of the Psalme, be openly read before hand, line after line, or two lines together, that so they who want either books or skill to reade, may know what is to be sung, and joyne with the rest in the dutie of singing."[27] Lining out became more than useful—it became part of a singing style characterized by the use of slow tempos and individual ornamentations that changed the character of the tunes.[28] The practice also attracted the ire of musical authorities, who rejected the florid style as unruly and in bad taste and who eventually succeeded in driving it out of urban New England. The descriptions of the style by some of its early detractors suggest that the colonial manner of singing was not dissimilar to that of modern Primitive Baptists. "Our tunes," wrote the Rev. Thomas Walter, "are left to the Mercy of every unskilful Throat to chop and alter, to twist and change, according to their infinitely divers and no less Odd

Humours and Fancies."[29] What was odd to critics, of course, may have been beautiful to the singers themselves.

It is difficult for the modern reader to discriminate in these early accounts between criticisms of legitimately bad singing and complaints about a vernacular style that was simply unpalatable to certain observers, but we can appreciate, at least, some of the disadvantages of using lining out as a crutch. Not only did the intermittent reading out of the lines by the precentor interrupt the flow of the text and make the ideas more difficult to follow but the congregation appears often to have had trouble in maintaining the melodic integrity of a tune so frequently interrupted. It is perhaps not surprising that by the beginning of the eighteenth century lining out had become to its critics a sign of indifferent singing and a target for reform. Crusaders for correct singing who attacked the problem, however, were sometimes surprised to find that the temporary practice had become entrenched and that some congregations preferred not to be reformed. The more pragmatic hymnodists of the day wisely accepted lining out and its faults as established practice. Isaac Watts himself explained in the introduction to *Psalms and Hymns* (1707), "I have seldom permitted a stop in the middle of a line, and seldom left the end of a line without one, to comport a little with the unhappy mixture of reading and singing, which cannot presently be reformed."[30]

With increasing literacy and better supplies of hymnbooks, lining out did indeed begin to disappear. But even though most mainstream denominations eventually abandoned it, the practice never actually perished. In fact, lining out did more than just survive; it thrived, particularly among conservatives like the Primitive Baptists, who took a hard line against modernization for the sake of a progress which they considered unscriptural, and also among black congregations, where traditions were particularly durable.[31] Part of the appeal of lining out was probably that, through use in the service, it had become part of a sacred tradition; thus, it was defended with great energy and piety. Further, it had been around long enough to put down roots in the oral tradition. White Primitive Baptist lining out survives today in some parts of the Southern uplands, but the white congregations recorded in this collection no longer practice it regularly. Lining out is very common, however, among the black Primitive Baptists, where it is also referred to as "outlining," "wording it out," "giving it out," and "interlining." There, it is not in the least threatened with extinction.

Originally, lining out consisted simply of spoken words which were inserted periodically (and probably awkwardly) during congregational singing, but in the black Primitive Baptist church it has become so thoroughly transformed by the musical context that the lining itself has become an integral part of the tunes. Without lining out, the performances are incomplete, and many singers admit that they cannot sing a tune without first lining it out. In fact, lining out is not always performed by the song leader alone; frequently a number of the members join in, producing lining phrases with a musical status almost equal to that of the melody.

One reason for the strength of the practice in the black church is probably the fortuitous compatibility of the alternation of lining out and singing, which is of European origin, and the call-and-response, or responsorial, structure of much African and Afro-American music. A more immediate reason concerns the taking of the hand of fellowship as a ceremonial form of greeting and parting during the singing of a hymn. This custom is actually practiced in both black and white Primitive Baptist churches, but only in the black service is it rhythmically coordinated with the singing: during the lining out, each member joins hands with two others (the use of both hands limits the use of a hymnbook to the leader), and during the singing of that line, everyone shakes hands in rhythm to the music. At the next lined phrase each member moves along to grasp two new hands, and so it goes, from line to line and from hand to hand, until the hymn is done. Individual styles vary, but usually each downbeat of the hymn is accompanied by a brisk downward jerk of the hands, alternating with two lighter upward strokes on the secondary beat, in the pattern ♩♫. It is a vigorous, exhilarating expression of fellowship, not to mention an important extension of the music. The structure of the hand of fellowship is so perfectly matched to the structure of lining out that, in effect, each contributes to the other's survival.

In technical terms lining out is a form of heightened speech or chant with melodic and structural characteristics unlike either speech or song. The song leader has some room for personal interpretation, and various members have their own characteristic lining styles, but black congregations generally agree on the proper lining "tune" for each hymn tune. Most singers apparently learn to line hymns by imitation, memorizing the lined-out phrases right along with the tune itself, and have little conscious knowledge of the technical relationships between lining and singing. The lined-out phrase resembles, but is never identical to, the corresponding line that is sung, and is delivered faster, usually with only one syllable per note. The lining melody seems to be a condensation or codification of the tune; together with the song phrase it forms a matched pair—two phrases in dynamic equilibrium. Each lined-out phrase covers one or at the most two lines of the hymn, and its final pitch is almost always the tonic, or occasionally the fourth below. One investigator has suggested that in the white churches of Kentucky the final note of the lined-out phrase is instrumental in helping the congregation locate the next pitch,[32] but that does not appear to account for lining out among the black Primitive Baptists. Since many of the members sing along with the leader's lining, the number of singers left to benefit from such pitch correction is small. And since lining out and singing are continuous, integrated, and equally melodic, there are no interruptions in the flow of the tune which might require a resetting of pitch.

Lining out in the black church is not so habitual that it no longer has any practical value. Congregations still depend to a degree on the leader for guidance in carrying the hymn, particularly for the less familiar texts that fewer members know by heart. The best confirmation of this is found not in the better performances but in those in which mistakes occur. For example, when a leader misreads the text in the course of his lining out, most congregations will sing the words as lined out, not as written, even if the misreading produces a grammatical or factual error. Or sometimes leaders signal the wrong tune to the singers by using an incorrect lining phrase; in these cases confusion is the principal result, as some singers try to jump to the new tune and others continue with the original one. Occasionally a

The hand of fellowship during the singing of a hymn at an outdoor baptism. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

leader lines out a song correctly for a few stanzas and then suddenly uses for the first pair of phrases in the stanza the lining that properly belongs with the second pair. The congregation usually follows along obediently, but the error throws the tune out of phase so that it ends at the half cadence. No one seems annoyed by these occasional confusions, which again illustrates the flexibility of the black singing style. Such errors may actually have a hidden value as sources for new musical ideas.

The Primitive Baptists themselves, of course, are not conscious of their hymnody in a sophisticated historical sense; nor are they particularly concerned with the many technical issues raised in this essay. The hymns survive not because of their proud history or excellence of form, although they possess both, but because they are expressive of a system of thought and a religious world view that is highly resistant to change. It is the Primitive Baptist religious commitment, not the hymnody itself, which is durable. What church people will not allow to be displaced is a perspective on life, which the songs embody in a condensed way. The hymns as discrete musical forms are quite susceptible to revision, modernization, and even replacement, but such changes are held to a minimum not only by the inertia of tradition but also by the Primitive Baptist view that the tradition has inherent spiritual value that goes beyond superficial musical beauty. A story told by a leading elder expresses the meaning of Primitive Baptist hymnody better than sociological or technical analysis:

There's a lot of difference in singing. There's pretty singing, and then there's good singing. And good singing is better than pretty singing. I'll give you an illustration. A son had left home. And his father couldn't sing a tune. He could not sing a tune. In a few years, he returned home. And he greeted his mother and said, "Mother, where's Dad?" "Down at the barn, doing his work." And he went down, and when he got in hearing, his daddy was going over the words

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

And he said he walked around, and as he turned around beside the barn, his daddy had his head over, and he could see the tears dropping, each time he went over those words. Now, he said, it wasn't pretty, but it was the best singing he'd ever heard in his life.

The Performances

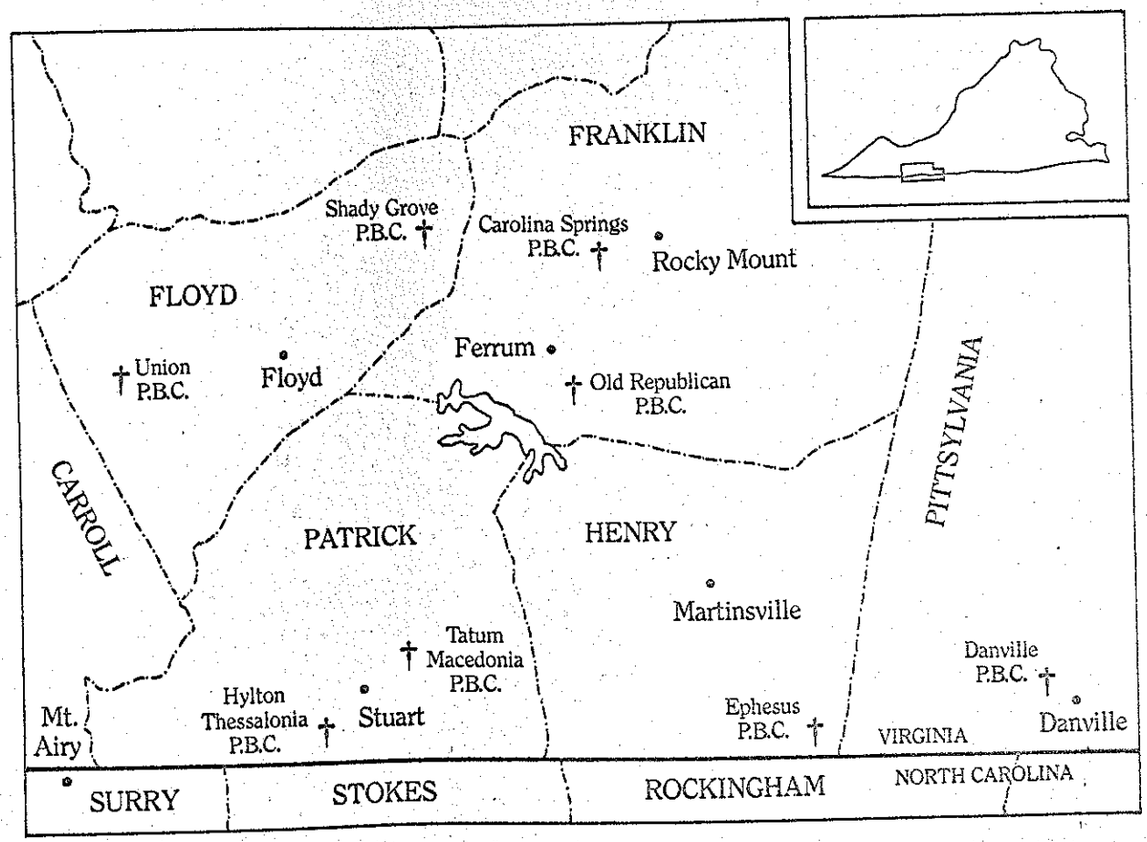
Each song is identified first by the name of the tune as it appears in tune books, if known (in italics), and then by the first line of text (in quotes). If the standard title for a tune is unknown or if the tune has no standard title, the title used is simply derived from the text. Following the title is the metric designation of the hymn and the hymn number (not page number) of the text in the Lloyd or Goble hymnbook. When the lyrics appear in both collections, citations for both are given, but the book listed first is the one used during the performance. The two exceptions are *Jesus Is a Rock* and *Long Sought Home*, in which verses have been gleaned from several hymns and no single hymn number is appropriate. Recording information follows. Accompanying the name of the author of each text is the source of its first publication. The musical transcriptions are not offered as precise replications of the performances. Since no two individuals sing exactly the same version of the tune, and since including the subtler features of the singing would needlessly clutter the transcriptions, what follows are only generalized representations of the tunes. Published versions are included for purposes of comparison. The lining phrases for black hymns are written out separately below the regular transcriptions. Pete Hartman recorded selections 2 and 3 on side 1, and 1 and 3 on side 2. All others were recorded by the author.

Selecting twelve representative performances from several hundred possibilities was not easy. These selections are among the best and most interesting, but they have also been chosen to reflect the variety of hymn styles used by Primitive Baptists. Included here are four white congregational hymns, one of them in three-part harmony, one white duet, four black hymns with lining out, and three black hymn-spiritual combinations.

SIDE 1

Dunlap

This tune, also known as *Dunlap's Creek* and *Funeral*, appeared in Freeman Lewis's shape-note collection, *Beauties of Harmony* (1818 edition). Some subsequent compilers give credit for the tune to "F. Lewis," but others, following Lewis himself, ascribe it to Samuel McFarland. Still others do not specify a particular composer, but identify the tune simply as "Western Melody." It is probably a traditional tune at its roots. Jackson places it in the large *Lord Lovel* tune family, which



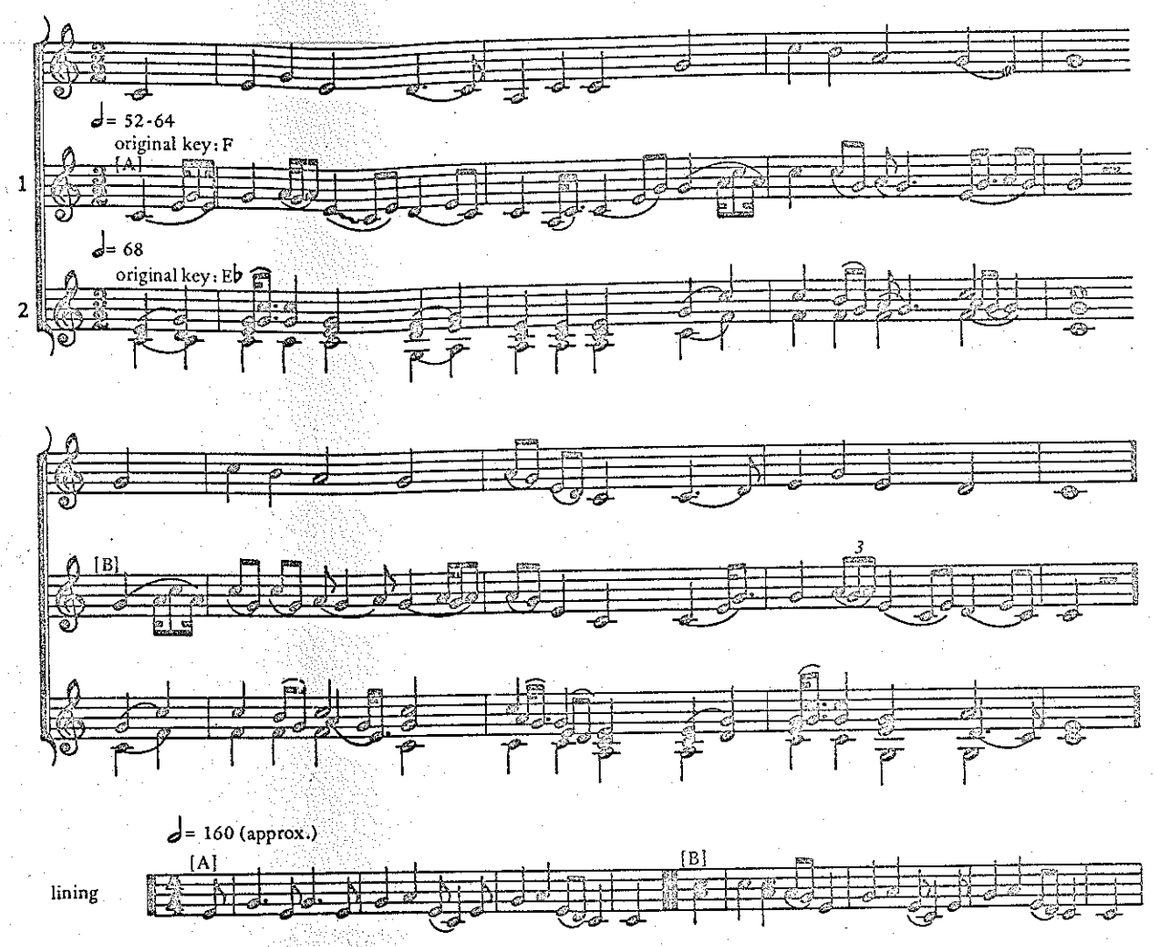
Locations of the Primitive Baptist churches represented in this collection.

contains a number of related Anglo-American tunes, secular as well as sacred.[33]

The black version here is typically slow and densely elaborated; the lining out is performed by some of the singers as well as by the leader. In the recorded performance the song is used with the customary exchange of the hand of fellowship, described above, which has the members on their feet and moving around the church building. Both white and black performances preserve the triple time of the written version, but in the black performance the feeling is more duple than triple because of the slow tempo and the pattern of stresses in individual syllabic phrases. This is one of the relatively few black hymn tunes in which each syllable does not receive equal time value.

The white version was recorded in church, but it is not strictly congregational. It was performed by four men during a break between the sessions of a longer meeting. This version is in strong contrast to the black version: there is no lining out, the pace is faster, the melody line is less dense, and several of the performers are singing harmony. The use of harmony is becoming more common in white services, but its presence here is distinctive because it does not occur in every line. It may be that the transition from the old monophonic singing that characterized Primitive Baptist hymnody in the past to the more contemporary part singing is not yet complete and the addition of contrasting vocal lines has been irregular. Traditional harmony in the white community, such as that heard in bluegrass singing, was probably inspired originally by shape-note hymnbooks and singing schools. However, neither the tenor and bass harmonies improvised here by the singers nor the harmonic structure that results matches that of the versions of *Dunlap* set down in the tune books. In the background are the sounds of conversation as members return to the church after the break.

Dunlap



1. *Dunlap*, "Dark was the night and cold the ground" (C.M., Lloyd 38). Hylton Thessalonia Primitive Baptist Church (black), Patrick County, Virginia. 25 January 1976. Text by Thomas Haweis, Church of England, from *Carmina Christa; or Hymns to the Saviour* (1792). 4:05.

Dark was the night, and cold the ground
On which the Lord was laid;
His sweat like drops of blood ran down—
In agony he prayed:

"Father remove this bitter cup,
If such thy sacred will:
If not, content to drink it up,
Thy pleasure I fulfill."

Go to the garden, sinner, see
Those precious drops that flow,
The heavy load he bore for thee,
For thee he lies so low.

Then learn of him the cross to bear,
Thy Father's will obey,
And when temptations press thee near,
Awake to watch and pray.

2. *Dunlap*, "My God the spring of all my joys" (C.M., Goble 160, Lloyd 268). Staunton River Association, union meeting, Danville Primitive Baptist Church (white), Danville, Virginia. 29 February 1976. Text by Isaac Watts, English Congregationalist, from *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707). 3:30.

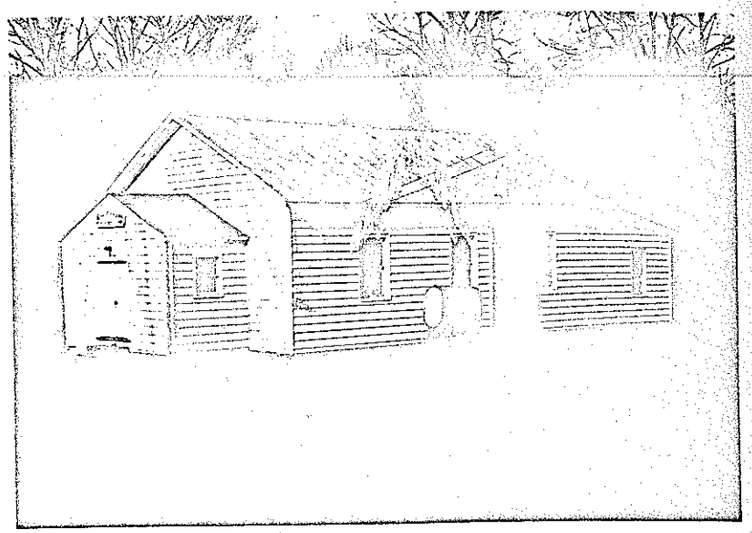
My God, the spring of all my joys,
The life of my delights,
The glory of my brightest days,
And comfort of my nights.

In darkest shades if he appear
My dawning is begun;
He is my soul's sweet morning star,
And he my rising sun.

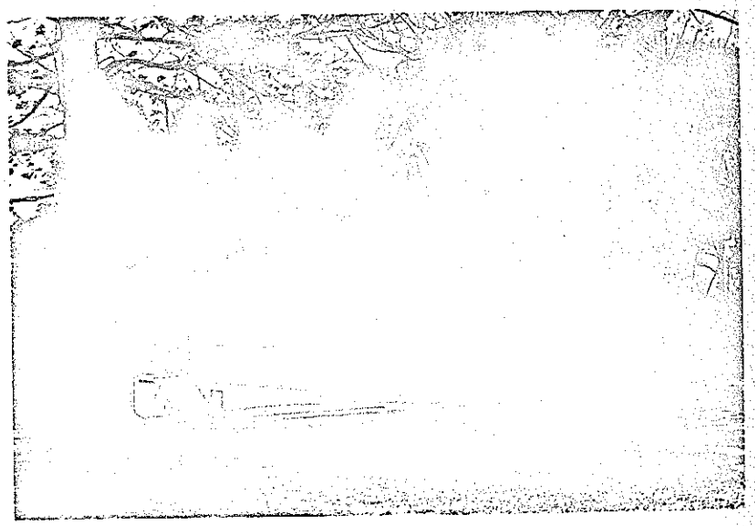
The op'ning heav'ns around me shine
With beams of sacred bliss,
While Jesus shows his heart is mine,
And whispers I am his.

My soul would leave this heavy clay
At that transporting word,
Run up with joy the shining way,
T' embrace my dearest Lord.

Fearless of hell and ghastly death,
I'd break through ev'ry foe;
The wings of love, and arms of faith
Should bear me conqu'ror through.



Hylton Thessalonia Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)



Danville Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

Devotion

Amariah Hall is credited with this tune, which was first published by him in 1811. It has also been printed in tune books under the name *The Penitent*. Jackson lists several secular parallels.[34] The white performance is not radically different from the published version, but is neatly elaborated into note pairs, some of them in dotted rhythm, others of equal length. Which syllables are to be rendered in dotted pairs and which are not is apparently clear to the singers, who maintain relative rhythmic unison throughout the song. The two-count pause on the last note of each phrase suggests alternating bars of four and five beats, but in the transcription the longer notes are simply marked with a fermata, which seems more in keeping with the duple sense of the melody. The text here expresses a theme close to the hearts of many Primitive Baptists.

Devotion is popular tune in black congregations, where it is always found in the condensed two-phrase version. The process of pruning the original four-phrase version down to two phrases, if that indeed is what happened, apparently required revision of the second phrase so as to retain the general contour and identity of the tune. The strong harmony floating a fourth or fifth above the melody in this performance (omitted from the transcription) is not a common feature in black singing in the Blue Ridge area. The singer responsible for it was a visiting elder from a distant church, a man raised in the Deep South, where that style is more common. Because selected members of local churches regularly visit the churches of other associations, the potential exists for the exchange of musical ideas across regional boundaries, but if any new idea is to become firmly planted in the local repertory, the congregations involved must be exposed to it regularly. Yearly visits do not seem to be enough to permanently affect local singing. The text used here is a special one sung only on communion Sundays.

3. *Devotion*, "Poor and afflicted, Lord are thine" (L.M., Goble 257, Lloyd 425). Union Primitive Baptist Church (white), Floyd County, Virginia. 25 April 1976. Text by Thomas Kelly, Irish Nonconformist, from *Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture* (1804). 5:41.

Poor and afflicted, Lord are thine;
Among the great unfit to shine;
But though the world may think it strange,
They would not with the world exchange.

Poor and afflicted, yet they trust
In God, the gracious, wise, and just;
For them he deigns this lot to choose,
Nor would they dare his will refuse.

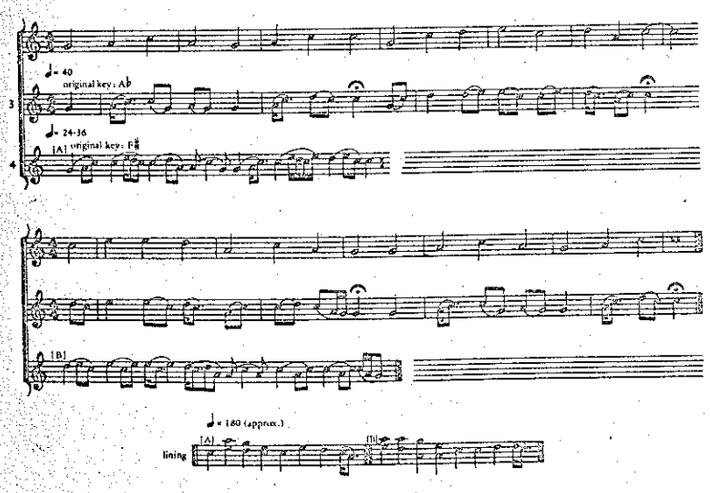
Poor and afflicted, oft they are
Sorely oppressed with want and care;
Yet he who saves them by his blood,
Makes every sorrow yield them good.

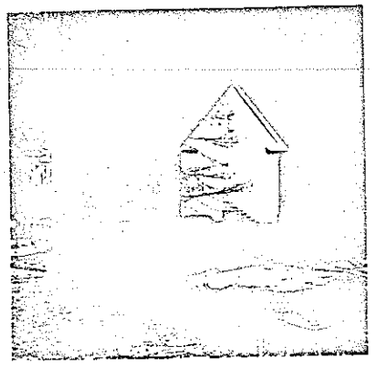
Poor and afflicted—yet they sing,
For Christ, their glorious, conq'ring King,
Through suff'rings perfect, reigns on high,
And does their every need supply.

Poor and afflicted—yet ere long,
They'll join the bright celestial throng,
And all their suff'rings then shall close,
And heav'n afford them sweet repose.

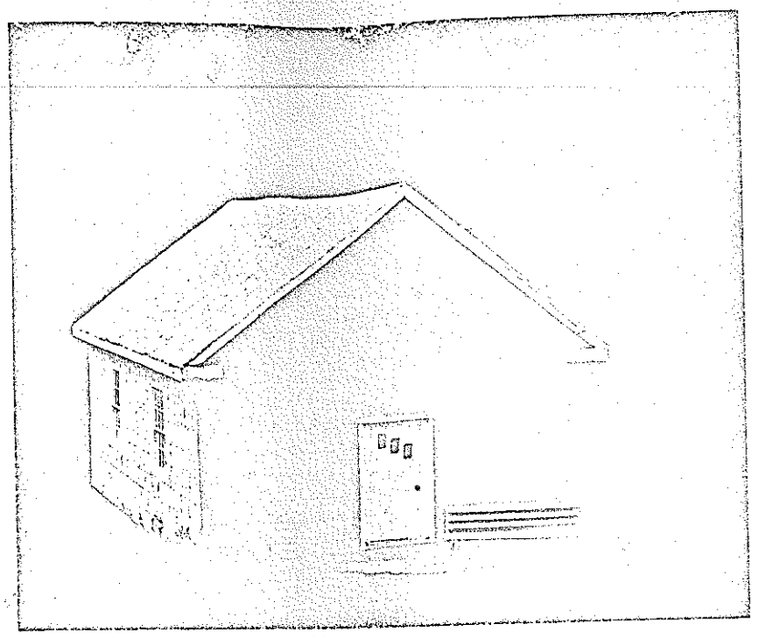
Poor and afflicted, filled with grief—
O Lord, afford us kind relief,
To cheer the heart that heaves a sigh,
And wipe the tears from every eye.

Devotion





Union Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Pete Hartman.)



Shady Grove Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

4. *Devotion*, "'Twas on that dark, that doleful night" (L.M., Lloyd 240, Goble 90). Shady Grove Primitive Baptist Church (black), Floyd County, Virginia. 6 June 1976. Text by Isaac Watts, English Congregationalist, from *Hymns* (1709). 6:15.

'Twas on that dark, that doleful night,
When powers of earth and hell arose
Against the Son of God's delight,
And friends betrayed him to his foes.

Before the mournful scene began,
He took the bread, and blessed, and brake;
What love through all his actions ran,
What wondrous words of grace he spake!

"This is my body, broke for sin,
Receive and eat the living food;"
Then took the cup and bless'd the wine—
"'Tis the new cov'nant in my blood,"

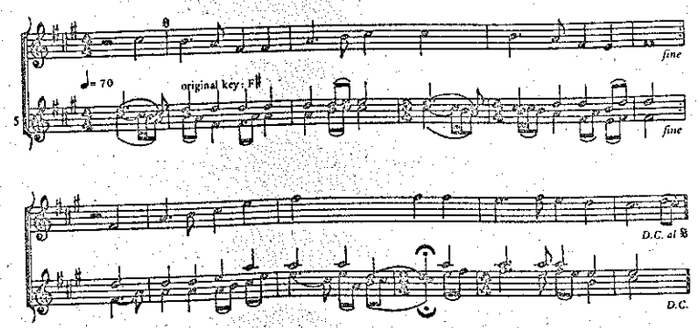
"Do this," he cried, "'til time shall end,
In memory of your dying friend;
Meet at my table and record
The love of your departed Lord."

Jesus, thy feast we celebrate,
We show thy death, we sing thy name,
Till thou return, and we shall eat
The marriage supper of the Lamb,
The marriage supper of the Lamb.

Pilgrim

Some of the best hymn singing occurs not in the churches themselves but in informal settings outside the church. This performance is a fine example of the stylistic differences between the congregational and informal modes. Elder Bennie Clifton, who is the pastor of several churches, and his wife Edrie have been singing together for many years, as attested to by the close blend of their voices and the rhythmic coordination in their singing. Neither singer reads music, and both are singing by ear. The tune *Pilgrim* appears in one of the earliest four-shape collections, Jeremiah Ingalls's *Christian Harmony* (1805). The transcription below is taken from John G. McCurry's *Social Harp* (1855). There are numerous secular variants.[35] An interesting feature of this performance is the harmonious coexistence of two melodic types, one archaic and the other more contemporary. The melody (Bennie's part) falls into the pentatonic mode A-C-D-E-G, a scale more spare than the hexatonic (the sixth is added) of the tune book version. This pentatonic pattern is common in older shape-note tunes and in unaccompanied folk songs from the Southern Appalachians. Edrie's part, however, which she improvises with a natural gift for "hearing" the harmony for a tune in her mind as she sings, creates a modal shift from the minor-third pentatonic to the major-third hexatonic C-D-E-F-G-A, producing harmonic patterns that shift the emphasis of the original melody. The Cliftons are

Pilgrim



using an eight-phrase tune, each repetition of which uses two four-line stanzas. Since the hymn as printed in the Goble collection only has seven stanzas, the singers therefore use the full melody three and one-half times, ending at the half-cadence.

5. *Pilgrim*, "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand" (C.M., Goble 209, Lloyd 275). Elder Bennie and Edrie Clifton, Patrick County, Virginia. 5 March 1976. Text by Samuel Stennett, English Baptist, from *Rippon's Selection* (1787). 3:43.

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land
Where my possessions lie.

Oh, the transporting rapt'rous scene,
That rises to my sight!
Sweet fields arrayed in living green,
And rivers of delight!

There gen'rous fruits that never fail,
On trees immortal grow;
There rocks and hills, and brooks, and vales,
With milk and honey flow.

All o'er those wide-extended plains
Shines one eternal day;
There God the Sun forever reigns,
And scatters night away.

No chilling winds, or pois'nous breath,
Can reach that healthful shore;
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and feared no more.

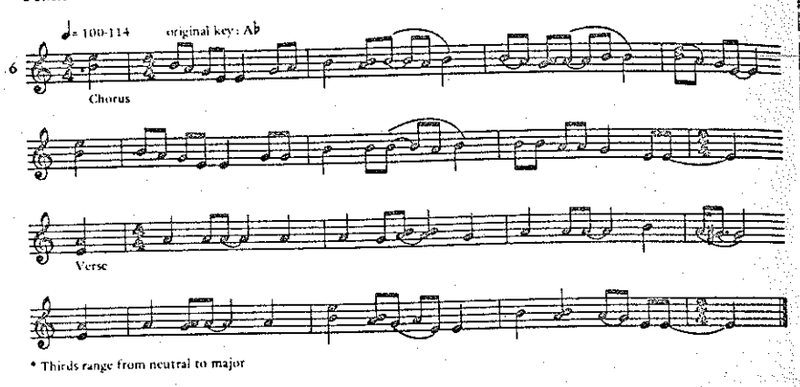
When shall I reach that happy place,
And be forever blest?
When shall I see my Father's face,
And in his bosom rest?

Filled with delight, my raptured soul
Can here no longer stay;
Though Jordan's waves around me roll,
Fearless I'd launch away.

Jesus Is a Rock

Two kinds of sacred singing coexist in the black Primitive Baptist churches: the old-time hymns and the spirituals, which are known across denominational lines in the black community. For the most part, the two genres retain their individuality, but in some instances the innovative energy of the black musical tradition produces hybrids with some of the best features of both. The performance here is fundamentally a spiritual rather than a hymn tune. The repetitiveness of the tune,

Jesus Is a Rock



* Thirds range from neutral to major

its melodic simplicity and narrow range, the faster tempo, and the more pronounced rhythmic pulse are all typical features of spiritual songs. But the verses are drawn from various hymns in the Primitive Baptist hymnbooks—most are easily remembered first stanzas—and are plugged into the framework of the spiritual in spontaneous and random fashion by several different leaders. The result is a performance with the special vitality of a spiritual and the textual richness of a hymn. The worshipers at the frontier camp meetings in the early nineteenth century are thought to have generated spirituals in much the same fashion.

6. *Jesus Is a Rock* (mixed C.M. stanzas). Ephesus Primitive Baptist Church (black), Henry County, Virginia. 9 May 1976. Various authors (indicated in parentheses below, first stanzas unless noted otherwise). 4:03.

Chorus:
Jesus is a rock in a weary land,
A weary land, a weary land;
Jesus is a rock in a weary land,
A shelter in a time of storm.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.
(John Newton)

Chorus

I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place,
And he has made me glad.
("I heard the voice of Jesus say," Horatius Bonar, verse 2)

Chorus

Dark was the night and cold the ground
On which the Lord was laid;
His sweat like drops of blood ran down—
In agony he prayed.
(Thomas Haweis)

Chorus *(twice)*

Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No; there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me.
(Thomas Shepherd)

Chorus

The consecrated cross I'll bear,
Till death shall set me free,
And then go home my crown to wear—
For there's a crown for me.
(same as above, verse 3)

Chorus

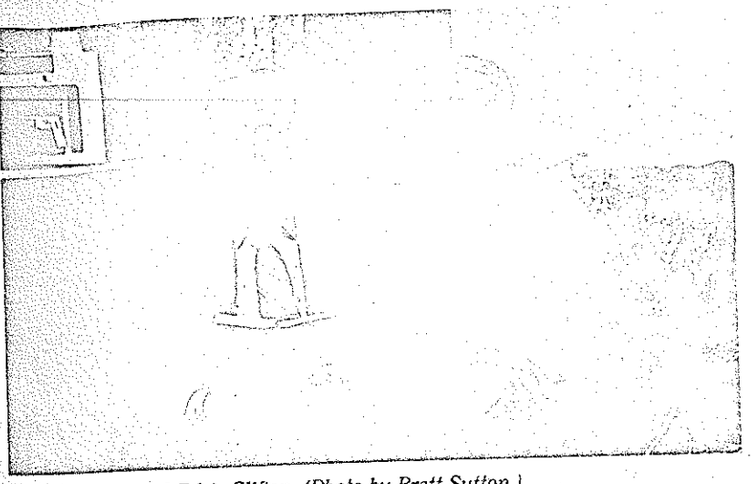
When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.
(Samuel Stennett)

Chorus

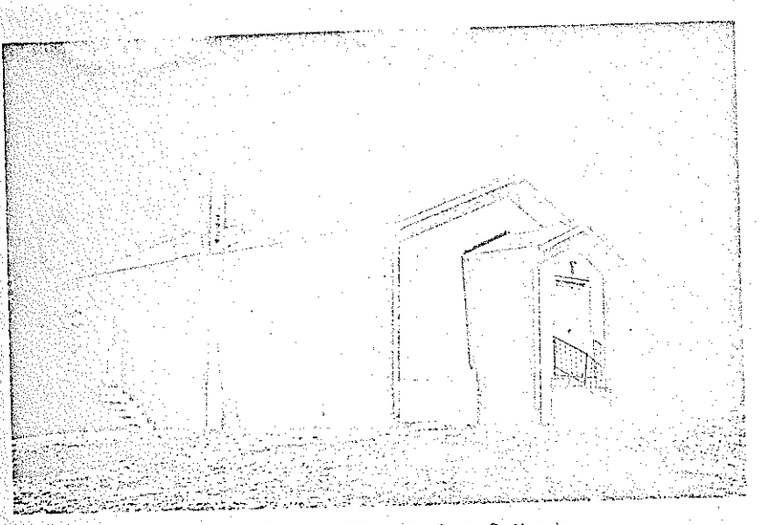
SIDE 2

Pisgah

This popular hymn tune, a member of the *New Britain* family, is in some printings attributed to J. C. Lowry, in others to "anonymous," and is occasionally described as a "Western Melody." It has been reprinted frequently in the old shape-note books, including two published in 1820, the *Missouri Harmony* and the *Supplement to the Kentucky Harmony*. The white performance is more angular in

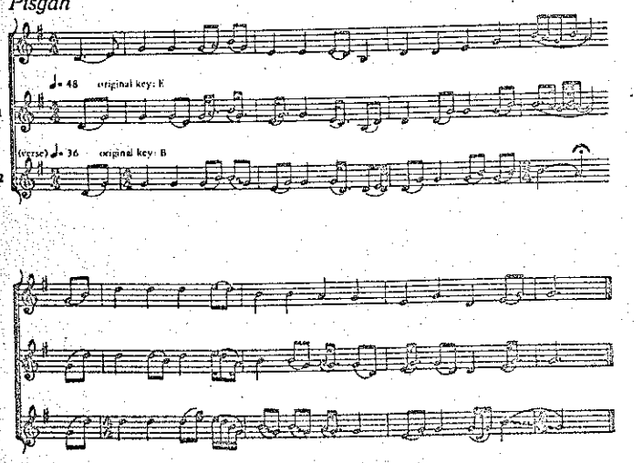


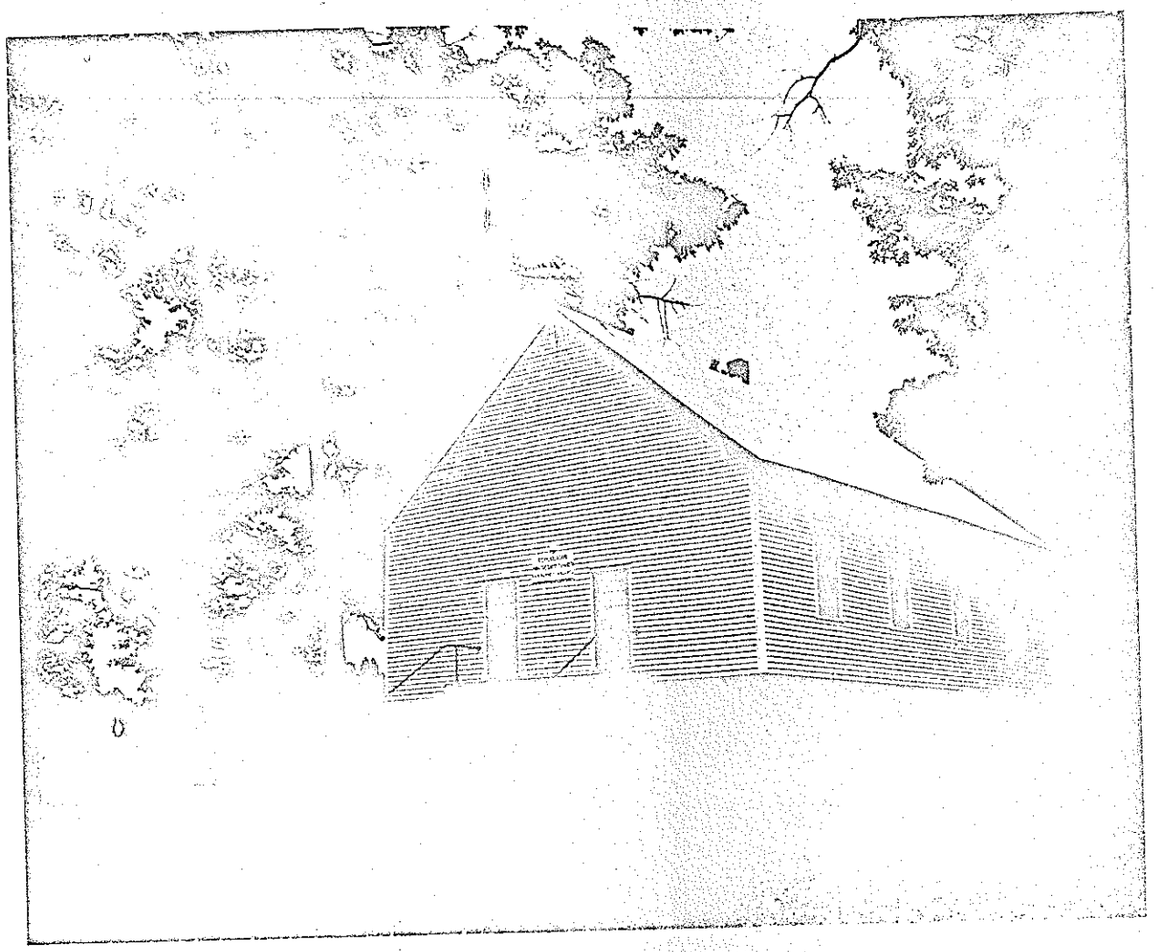
Elder Bennie and Edrie Clifton. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)



Ephesus Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

Pisgah





Old Republican Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

rhythm than written versions or performances by shape-note singers because of a marked use of dotted rhythms in the note pairs. This feature is sometimes called the "Scotch snap," after a similar feature in the traditional music of Scotland, and it gives the tune a martial feeling. Printed versions of *Pisgah* usually contain a chorus repeating the tune with a rearrangement of lines from the preceding verse, but both white and black Primitive Baptist congregations sing a less complicated version using each stanza only once, without the second half. Black congregations use the tune not only with hymn texts but with spiritual lyrics, as in the chorus of this black performance. These lyrics are sometimes used in black churches as extra stanzas in performances of the tune using various C.M. hymns, but may also occur with additional spiritual verses in the same pattern, including "I'm gonna stay on the battlefield . . . ," "I'm gonna do the best I can . . . ," "I'm gonna treat everybody right . . . ," and so forth.

1. *Pisgah*, "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord" (C.M., Goble 128, Lloyd 356). Old Republican Primitive Baptist Church (white), Franklin County, Virginia. 18 April 1976. Text by Isaac Watts, English Congregationalist, from *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707). 2:42.

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Or to defend his cause,
Maintain the honor of his word,
The glory of his cross.

Jesus, my God, I know his name,
His name is all my trust,
Nor will he put my soul to shame,
Nor let my hope be lost.

Firm as his throne his promise stands,
And he can well secure
What I've committed to his hands,
Till the decisive hour.

Then will he own my worthless name
Before his Father's face,
And in the new Jerusalem
Appoint my soul a place.

2. *Pisgah*, "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound" (C. M., Lloyd 3, Goble 175). Tatum Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church (black), Patrick County, Virginia. 8 February 1976. Text (excluding chorus) by John Newton, Church of England, from *Olney Hymns* (1779). 5:01.

Chorus:

I will trust in the Lord, I will trust in the Lord,
I will trust in the Lord till I die;
I will trust in the Lord, I will trust in the Lord,
I will trust in the Lord till I die.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound!
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!

Chorus

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

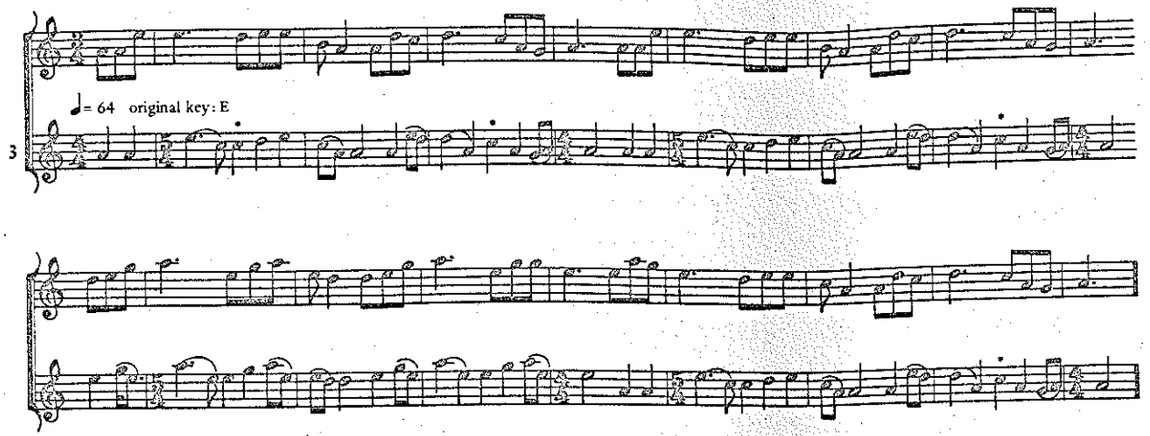
Chorus
(hymn continues)

Wayfaring Stranger

This tune is an American classic, widely recognized as a folk spiritual and frequently anthologized in popular folk song collections. There are a number of related secular folk tunes, many of them known in the southern highlands, including *Drowsy Sleeper* and *Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies*.[36]

The lyrics that are found with this tune in most printed versions, "I am a poor wayfaring stranger" (the text that provides the tune title used here and in most books), fall into a metrical pattern of 9-8-9-8, which matches none of the standard Primitive Baptist hymn texts. With slight alterations, however, the tune can be made to fit any 8s,7s text. This performance achieves the transition to the new meter smoothly, but not without yielding an unusual rhythmic pattern—alternating units of duple and triple time best transcribed using a time signature of 5/4. This structure is unique in the Primitive Baptist repertory of tunes, where duple time predominates, and would probably pose a problem if Primitive Baptist song leaders beat time with the hand, as do shape-note leaders. But congregational singing in most Primitive Baptist churches paces itself without formal direction, and in this case the unusual pat-

Wayfaring Stranger



* These thirds range from minor to major.

tern seems to unfold naturally.

Another notable feature of this performance is that the third degree of the scale is not constant, but appears in various forms, not only at different places in the melody but occasionally on a single syllable. The third just before the end of some of the phrases is particularly noticeable, as some singers opt for the major third and others sound the minor, producing a fleeting dissonance. From the evidence of this and other recorded performances it seems that the trend is toward the gradual pulling up of thirds from the minor position toward the major, perhaps as a step from modal to modern musical consciousness.

3. *Wayfaring Stranger*, "Come thou long-expected Jesus" (8s,7s, Goble 304). Old Republican Primitive Baptist Church (white), Franklin County, Virginia. April 18, 1976. Text by Charles Wesley, English Methodist, from *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (1744). 2:30.

Come, thou long-expected Jesus!
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee:
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the saints thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation –
Joy of every longing heart.

Born, thy people to deliver;
Born a child, and yet a king;
Born to reign in us forever;
Now thy gracious kingdom bring:
By thy own eternal Spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thy all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

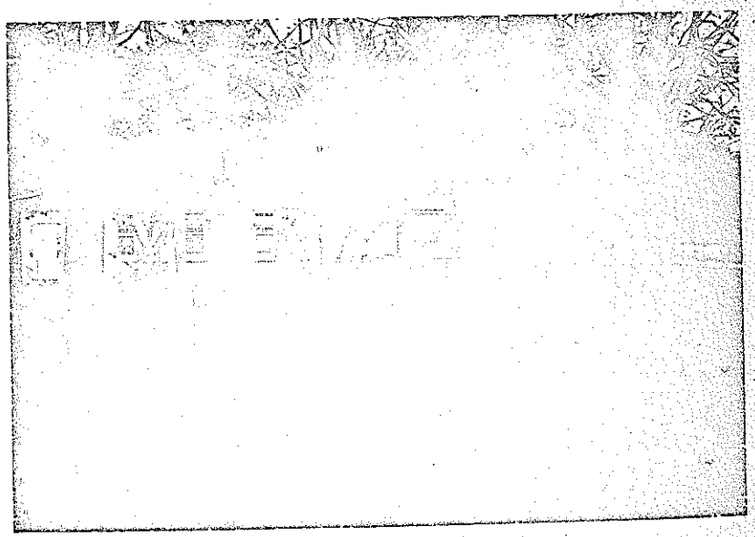
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

This is a tune for which we could locate no published analog, so we have simply named it after the text used with it in this particular recording—other performances use different hymn texts. The tune resembles several tunes, including *Hicks Farewell*, published in William Walker's *Southern Harmony* in 1835, but there are significant differences. The tune is possibly a product of the same condensing process that produced the black version of *Devotion*, in which a tune is pared from four to two phrases and adjustments are made in the remaining phrases to achieve proper balance and contour. At any rate, the hymn is widely known in the American black tradition, and has been recorded in the Deep South as well as in the urban North.[37]

Like the white performance of *Wayfaring Stranger*, this performance employs a variety of thirds. However, the singers here usually agree on the disposition of each use of the third. This particular performance is pitched lower than most tunes in the black services, producing a rich texture with voices in three different octaves. The hymn text is the only one used regularly by black congregations that does not appear in either hymnbook, but it is familiar enough to the singers that, with lining out, the lack of a printed text presents no problem.

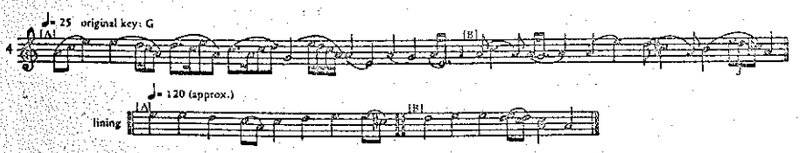
4. *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*, "I heard the voice of Jesus say" (C.M.) Hylton Thessalonia Primitive Baptist Church (black), Patrick County, Virginia. 28 March 1976. Text by Horatius Bonar, Free Church of Scotland, from *Hymns Original and Selected* (1846). 7:57.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast."



Tatum Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say



I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live."

I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright."

I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till trav'ling days are done.

Condescension

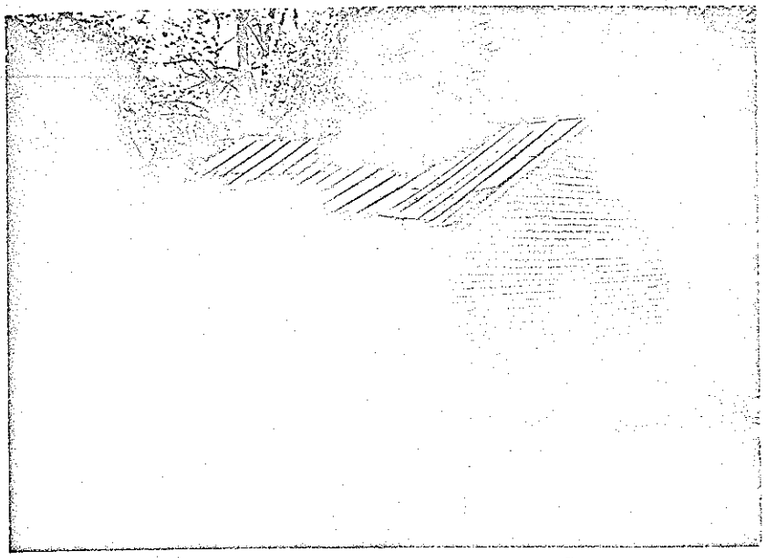
Other names for this popular tune, according to Dorothy Horn, include *Adoration*, *Nelson*, and *Return*.[38] It was set down by Ananias Davisson and printed as *Condescension* in his *Kentucky Harmony*, but structurally it is very much like a ballad tune and has a number of secular analogs.[39] The black version heard here is rhythmically flexible and quite heterophonic. The congregation here is small, and the texture of the performance consequently thin, but that transparency brings out the detail of individual voices. The leader's florid style dominates the performance, the tempo of which is somewhat faster than the norm.

5. *Condescension*, "Firmly I stand on Zion's hill" (C.M., Lloyd 353). Carolina Springs Primitive Baptist Church (black), Franklin County, Virginia. 2 May 1976. Author of text unknown. 3:32.

Firmly I stand on Zion's hill,
And view my starry crown;
No power on earth my hope can shake,
Nor hell can pull me down.

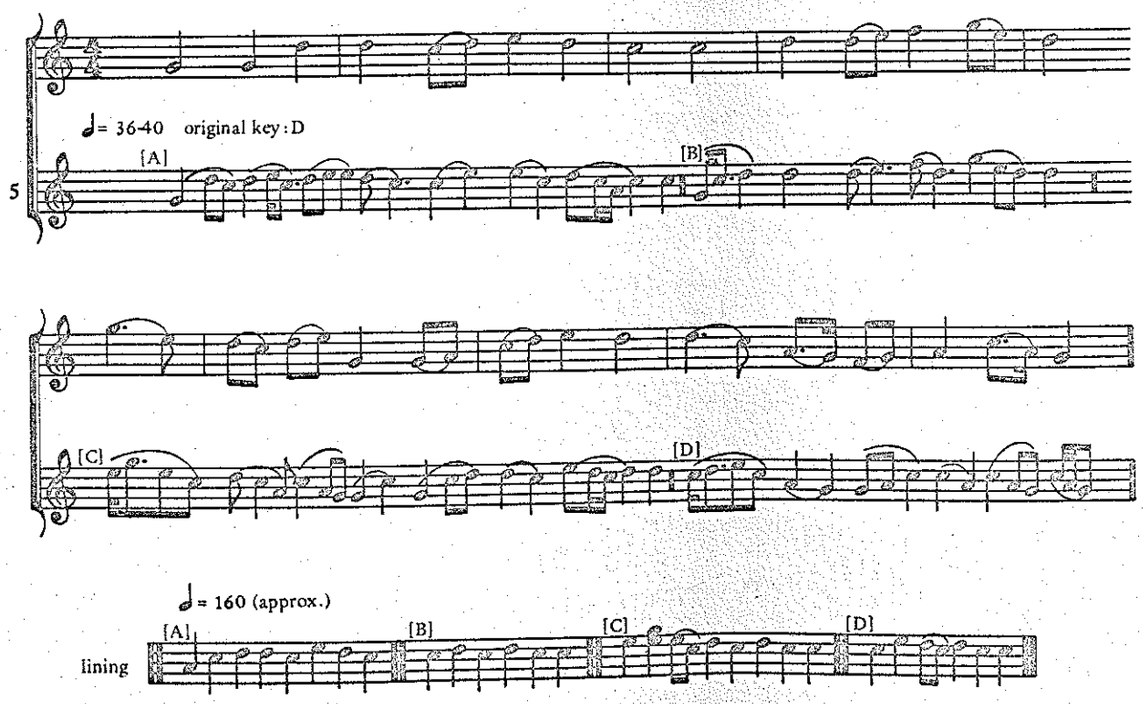
The lofty hills and stately towers
That lift their heads on high,
Shall all be levelled in the dust;
Their very name shall die.

The vaulted heavens shall melt away,
Built by Jehovah's hands;
But firmer than the heavens, the Rock
Of my salvation stands.



Carolina Springs Primitive Baptist Church. (Photo by Brett Sutton.)

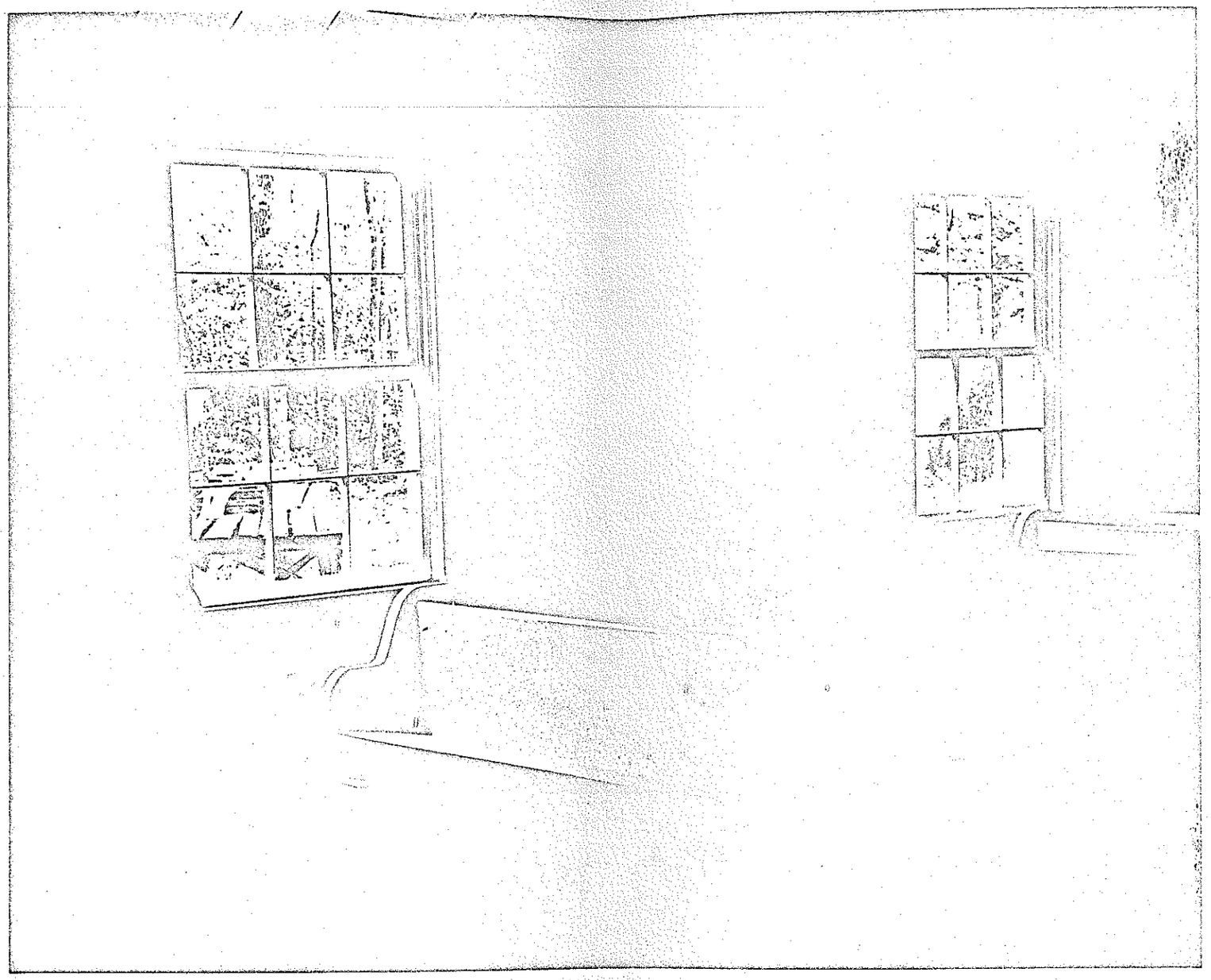
Condescension



Long Sought Home

This performance might with justice be entitled *Amen* because the spiritual chorus that has been attached to the old hymn tune *Long Sought Home* is as prominent a feature as the tune itself. The hymn tune as printed in shaped notes is the work of William Bobo and appeared in William Walker's *Southern Harmony* (1835), but that spare, open version is quite different from this melodically and rhythmically complex tune. Because of the longer notes in each bar in the tune-book version, the tune is easily adapted to the antiphonal treatment provided by the singers in this performance. Such call and response, in fact, may have been present in early oral versions which might have preceded Bobo's shape-note harmonization. ("The "response" notes of the antiphonal pairs are set off in the transcription by parentheses.) Among the black Primitive Baptists, humming and moaning by individual worshipers is one of the expressions of strong spiritual emotion, but the organized humming of entire choruses, as heard here, is rare. This particular performance took place during the serving of communion, and the sounds of the preparation of the bread and wine are audible in the background. The verses are selected from several different hymns.

6. *Long Sought Home* (mixed C.M. stanzas). Ephesus Primitive Baptist Church (black), Henry County, Virginia. 9 May 1976. Various authors (indicated in paren-



theses below, first stanzas unless noted otherwise). 5:10.

(hummed chorus)

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Come unto me and rest.
(Horatius Bonar, verse 1, first half)

(hummed chorus)

Amen (amen) amen (amen)
Amen (amen) amen
Amen, amen, amen.

Must I be carried to the skies,
On flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?
("Am I a soldier of the cross," verse 2, Isaac Watts)

("Amen" chorus*)*

(hummed chorus)

O there's a cross for everyone
And there's a cross for me.
("Must Jesus bear the cross alone," verse 1, second half, Thomas Shepherd)

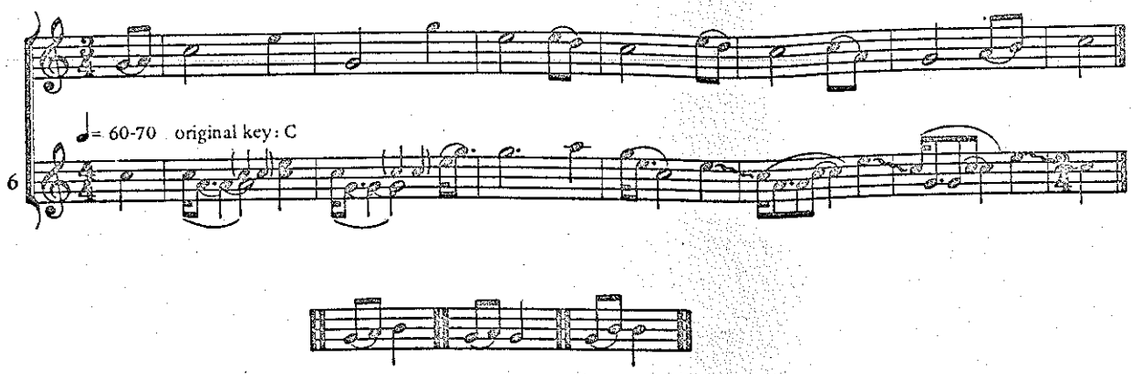
("Amen" chorus*)*

(hummed chorus)

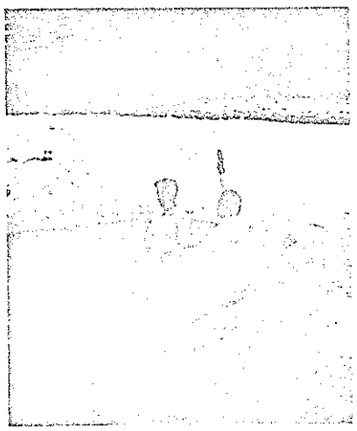
I came to Jesus as I was
Weary worn and sad.
(same as above, verse 4, first half)

(hummed chorus)

Long Sought Home



Church members often photograph outdoor baptisms. (Photo courtesy of Mamie Patterson.)



For this baptismal service members first had to chop a hole through seven inches of ice. (Photo courtesy of Bernice Shelor.)

Notes

1. Elder Cushing Biggs Hassell and Sylvester Hassell, *History of the Church of God from the Creation to A.D. 1885* (Middletown, N.Y.: Gilbert Beebe's Sons, 1886; reprint ed., Conley, Ga.: Old School Hymnal Co., 1973), p. 736.

2. This conservative movement was complex and produced other groups whose beliefs and practices resemble those of the Primitive Baptists, notably the Old Regular Baptists, which are common in other parts of the South but not in the Blue Ridge region considered here.

3. Unpublished MS, Primitive Baptist Library, Elon College, N.C.

4. Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 104.

5. Ibid., p. 105.

6. Charles L. Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), p. 202. The attempt to replicate black dialect with nonstandard spellings was customary in the early part of this century when these passages were taken down.

7. Ibid., p. 267.

8. Unpublished MS, Primitive Baptist Library, Elon College, N.C.

9. Jesse A. Ashburn and Francis Preston Stone, *History of the Fishers River Primitive Baptist Association, 1832–1904* (Elon College, N.C.: Primitive Baptist Publishing House, 1953), p. 52.

10. Harris recorded *No Sorrow There* and *I'll Lead A Christian Life* for Brunswick in New York in 1931, and the disc was released on the Melotone label (M-12178). On a subsequent trip to New York, Harris cut *Dunlap* and *Parting Hand* and eventually manufactured and distributed the record at his own expense on his Harris label (pressing number 10P150). See Kip Lornell, "My Christian Friends in Bonds of Love: The Story of Elder Golden P. Harris," *Old Time Music* (forthcoming).

11. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), vol. 2, p. 141 (book 3, chapter 20: 31).

12. Ibid., p. 142.

13. *Bay Psalm Book: A Facsimile Reprint of the First Edition of 1640* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), not paginated.

14. Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, ed. Timothy Dwight (New Haven: Samuel Wadsworth, 1821), p. 260.

15. Hassell and Hassell, p. 546.

16. D. H. Goble, comp., *Primitive Baptist Hymn Book* (Greenfield, Ind.: D. H. Goble Printing Company, 1887); Benjamin Lloyd, comp., *The Primitive Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Sacred Poems* (Rocky Mount, N.C.: Primitive Hymns Corporation, 1971 [1841]).

17. A good general history of shape-note singing is George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).

18. George Pullen Jackson, *Another Sheaf of White Spirituals* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), p. xiii.

19. Elder John R. Daily, *Primitive Baptist Hymn and Tune Book* (Cincinnati: Old School Hymnal Co., n.d. [1902]).

20. Ibid., not paginated.

21. The most recent edition is *Old School Hymnal No. 10* (Cincinnati: Old School Hymnal Co., 1964).

22. Ibid., not paginated.

23. William Tallmadge, however, working in eastern Kentucky, found very little overlap in the shape-note repertory and that of old-time hymn singers. See his article "Baptist Monophonic and Heterophonic Hymnody in Southern Appalachia," *Yearbook for Inter-American Musical Research II* (1975), pp. 106–36.

24. Since no published version of this tune could be located, we simply assigned it a title based on the first line of text used in one of the performances.

25. Dorothy D. Horn analyzes the formulaic melodic elements of shape-note tunes in *Sing to Me of Heaven* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970).

26. George Pullen Jackson, *Spiritual Songs of Early America*, 2nd ed. (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1953 [1937]), p. 14.

27. Quoted in Gilbert Chase, *America's Music from the Pilgrims to the Present* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), p. 31.

28. For further information on the English origins of this style, see Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), esp. pp. 91–98.

29. Quoted in Edward S. Ninde, *The Story of the American Hymn* (New York: Abingdon, 1921), p. 76.

30. Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (London: J. Bruce et al., 1793), p. viii.

31. Lining hymns are used by urban black churches as well as rural ones. Ben E. Baily found them to be widely used in the urban South. See Baily, "The Lined-Hymn Tradition in Black Mississippi Churches," *Black Perspective in Music* 6 (1978): 3–17.

32. Tallmadge, p. 111.

33. Jackson, *Spiritual Songs*, p. 108.

34. Ibid., pp. 141–42.

35. Ibid., p. 124.

36. Ibid., pp. 70–72.

37. A solo version using the text "I heard the voice of Jesus say," recorded in Mississippi, appears on David Evans's collection *Sorrow Come Pass Me Around*; the same tune is used by Rev. R. C. Crenshaw and his congregation in the performances recorded in Memphis, Tennessee, by Alan Lomax and included in his collections *Negro Church Music* and *Roots of Blues* (see discography); Jeff Titon has recorded the same tune in a black congregational performance using the text "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound" in Detroit, Michigan (personal communication).

38. Horn, p. 148.

39. Jackson, *Spiritual Songs*, p. 60.

Discography

American Folk Music: Volume Two, Social Music. Edited by Harry Smith. Folkways FA 2952. Includes two black lined hymns led by Rev. J. M. Gates, recorded originally in 1927.

Dr. C. J. Johnson Presents the Old Time Song Service (vols. 1 and 2). Savoy MG 14126. MG 14156. Black congregational singing from Georgia; one lined hymn on each disc.

Elder Songsters (vols. 1 and 2; *Music from the South*, vols. 6 and 7). Folkways FP 2655, FP 2656. Includes several black lined hymns recorded in Alabama and Louisiana.

Gaelic Psalms from Lewis (*Scottish Tradition*, vol. 6). Edited by Morag Macleod. Tangent TNGM-120. Singing analogous to the old-style hymnody of the American South, recorded in the Hebrides Islands of Scotland.

The Gospel Ship: Baptist Hymns and White Spirituals from the Southern Mountains. Edited by Alan Lomax. New World NW 294. Includes several white lined hymns recorded in Kentucky in Regular Baptist churches.

Mountain Music of Kentucky. Edited by John Cohen. Folkways FA 2317. Includes one lined hymn from Jeff, Kentucky.

Negro Church Music. Edited by Alan Lomax. Atlantic 1351. One lined hymn by Rev. R. C. Crenshaw and congregation, Memphis, Tennessee.

Old Hymns Lined and Led by Elder Walter Evans (vols. 1 and 2). Sovereign Grace 6057, 6444. Elder Evans leads the singing at his church in Sparta, N.C.

Roots of Blues. Edited by Alan Lomax. New World NW 252. Includes lining hymn and prayer by Rev. R. C. Crenshaw and congregation, Memphis, Tennessee.

Singing Preachers and Their Congregations (*Negro Religious Music*, vol. 3). Blues Classics 19. Reissues of old commercial recordings. Includes two lined hymns recorded in Chicago in 1956, led by Deacon L. Shinault.

Sorrow Come Pass Me Around: A Survey of Rural Black Religious Music. Edited by David Evans. Advent 2805. Includes a solo version of a lined hymn.

White Spirituals. Edited by Alan Lomax. Atlantic 1349. Includes one lined hymn recorded in Blackey, Kentucky.

A Word of Acknowledgment

Pete Hartman helped conceive this project, collaborated during the fieldwork phase, and was responsible for half the recording duties. Original funding was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, with additional support from the Curriculum in Folklore, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The original tapes are housed in the Folk Music Archives there, and editing of the tapes was done at the facilities of WUNC-FM, Chapel Hill. Special thanks is due to Dan Patterson for his wise supervision and for his keen ear in identifying tunes. I am grateful, above all, to the members of the many churches who helped, those whose voices appear on this record as well as those whose contributions are less audible but no less indispensable. Their patience, cooperation, and generosity have made this project very rewarding.

This book accompanies the record "Primitive Baptist Hymns of the Blue Ridge,"

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