

WILLIAM WALKER: CAROLINA CONTRIBUTOR TO AMERICAN MUSIC

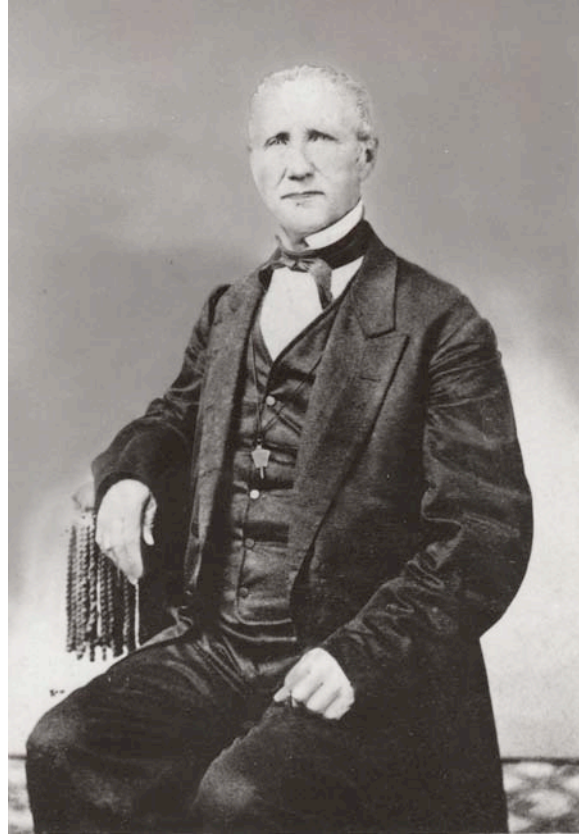
by

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INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the hymnody of the nineteenth century South, *The Sacred Harp* often comes to mind. After all, *The Sacred Harp* is still celebrated in singing practically every weekend across the United States. One singing school teacher whose compilations often get overlooked these days, however, is William “Singing Billy” Walker, a South Carolina native whose tunebook, *Southern Harmony* (1835), successfully rivaled the popularity and sales of *The Sacred Harp*.¹ Indeed, according to one of Walker’s Philadelphia publishers, nearly 600,000 copies of *Southern Harmony* had been sold by 1866,² an astronomical figure for the South at this time. Walker’s very name, it seems, was a household term familiar to virtually all southerners in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, as a quotation from Walker’s obituary attests: “*The Southern Harmony* and his name, the distinguished name of the author, are as familiar as household duties in the habitations of the South.”³ Indeed, I would argue that William Walker was not only South Carolina’s best known composer of hymn tunes, but has significantly influenced the face of American music today.⁴



WILLIAM WALKER

Walker's extended family would prove extremely useful to him in years to come. Distant relatives included the famous Confederate general Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, the Rev. John Landrum (the first pastor of the First Baptist Church of Spartanburg), and the Rev. Newton Pinckney Walker (founder of South Carolina's Institution for the Deaf and Blind at nearby Cedar Springs). More importantly, his sister-in-law had married Benjamin Franklin White, who in 1844 would collaborate with E. J. King in compiling *The Sacred Harp*.

Walker's musical experiences began at a very young age. By the time he was five, his mother had taught him three hymns with tunes reflecting the Anglo-American folk idiom.⁵ Walker in all probability had composed his first piece, SOLEMN CALL, a fudging tune.⁶ Further evidence of Walker's early musical activity is found in a manuscript collection containing pieces which in 1835 were included in Walker's first published singing school tunebook, *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* (hereafter *Southern Harmony*).⁷

In 1835 the then twenty-six year old Walker married Amy Shands Golightly (1811-97). The Walkers had a long and fruitful marriage with ten children. They became members of the newly organized First Baptist Church of Spartanburg in 1839. During his 36 years in that church, Walker, quite familiar with Baptist traditions of worship and music, served as a deacon, a frequent messenger to the Baptist association, and a leader of congregational singing.⁸

Despite the limits of his own formal education, Walker strongly supported formal educational institutions within his own community. In 1835 he was a trustee of the newly founded Spartanburg Male Academy, and in the same year he was one of eleven subscribers who pledged \$1300 to establish the Female Seminary in Spartanburg.⁹ On July 4, 1851, William Walker took part in the cornerstone laying ceremonies of Spartanburg's Wofford College.¹⁰

Along with his musical activities, Walker operated a bookstore in Spartanburg, a store that was really both a book and stationery store. Walker's *Southern Harmony* was an important factor in the success of his bookstore, enabling him to sell merchandise at lower prices, as mentioned in an advertisement on January 8, 1857 in *The Spartanburg Express*:

I have made permanent arrangements with several large book houses in New York and Philadelphia, to exchange my music work, the *Southern Harmony*, as cash prices for their books, etc. At cash prices nett. [sic] I will therefore be able to sell books and stationery lower than they have ever been sold in Spartanburg, and as I desire to do a cash business, I will sell at Columbia and Charleston prices.

This advertisement illustrates Walker's business acumen. It also documents that Walker was not simply a southerner whose works were sold only in the South. *Southern Harmony* was sold in the North as well as in the South. This is all the more remarkable since this was a time of increasing regional conflict leading to the Civil War.

Walker's impressive personal library attests to the fact that his interest in books went far beyond the mercenary. In the words of his biographer, "He was possessed of a mind of a literary turn, and had a large and valuable library, and having been engaged for some years in the introduction and sale of books in the town of Spartanburg, he became possessed of many rare and valuable book of general interest."¹¹

From about the mid-1850s Walker taught in normal music schools, established to train singing school teachers, using his own tunebooks as

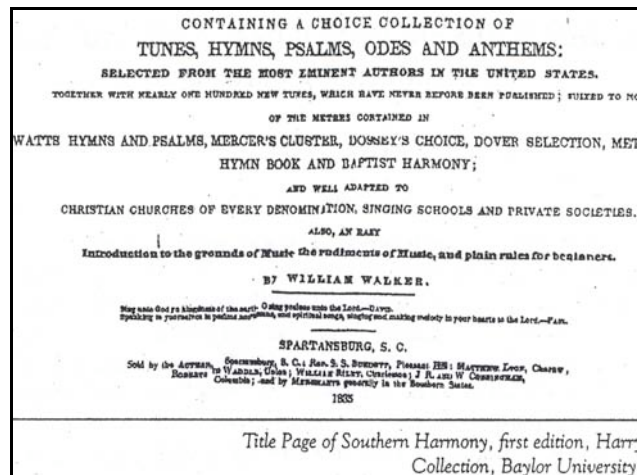
textbooks. Walker's professional activities as a singing school instructor ranged far, in his own words, extending thousands of miles across the South and Middle Western states.¹²

Altogether, Walker taught music for 45 years.¹³

WALKER'S TUNEBOOKS

In addition to *Southern Harmony*, Walker compiled one other major tunebook and two minor ones. Walker's second tunebook, in four-shape notation like *Southern Harmony*, was the *Southern and Western Pocket Harmonist* of 1846, designed as a supplement to *Southern Harmony* but with more hymns suitable for use in revivals. Walker's third tunebook, *The Christian Harmony*, was a major collection published in 1867 in which he switched from four-shape to seven-shape notation and incorporated more music of Lowell Mason and Mason's followers, further evidence of his northern connections. Walker's last collection, entitled *Fruits and Flowers*, was designed for children in both common schools and Sunday schools. Published in 1870 just five years before his death, Walker's preface included an address to children:

Well, children, I have been engaged for many years in making music-books for the grown people, so I thought I would now make a music book for you, that you might all learn to sing while you are little folks. My mother learned [sic] me to sing when I was a little fellow about three years old. My dear children, don't you want to sing? It seems to me that I can almost hear you say, Yes sir, that we do. Well then, get your parents to buy you a copy of "Fruits and Flowers"¹⁴



SOUTHERN HARMONY

Walker's compilations, like other singing school tunebooks, made substantial contributions in their day to the publication of hymns in the South. Especially during the antebellum period, a hymnal was a words-only volume, often published in miniature editions that could be carried to church in one's pocket. Congregational singing in the South among such mainline denominations as Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians was commonly unaccompanied. It was often lined-out, as is still practiced by some Primitive Baptist and some African-American congregations. In cases where churchgoers could read music, they probably learned using shape notes in singing schools.

Walker's *Southern Harmony* and his later *Christian Harmony* were two tunebooks among hundreds of singing-school collections published in America since the days of William Billings in the latter 1700s. From about 1800, singing-school tunebooks began to be published in a four-shape system of shaped note heads corresponding to the then four-shape Elizabethan sol-fa solmization. The ascending major scale would have shapes to represent the syllables fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi, fa. Although largely rejected in the Northeast, shape notes became very popular in parts of Pennsylvania on through the Shenandoah Valley to the South and Midwest as far as Missouri. In these areas it became practically impossible to get a tunebook published unless it was in shape notes.

Walker's tunebooks, like others of its time, served several purposes. It functioned as a textbook for singing schools that taught multitudes how to read music. *Southern Harmony*, like other singing-schools tunebooks of its day, begins with an introduction to music reading, including the use of shape notes. Indeed, the book's subtitle reads, "an easy introduction to the grounds of music, the rudiments of music, and plain rules for beginners."

In addition to its use as a textbook for singing schools, Walker's tunebook furnished music for congregational singing of hymn texts already published in words-only hymnals. Hymnals listed on the title page of *Southern Harmony* are *Watts Hymns and Psalms*, *Mercer's Cluster*, *Dossey's Choice*, *Dover Selection*, *Methodist Hymn Book*, and *Baptist Harmony*. Southern pastors compiled most of these hymnals. One pastor known to Walker was his fellow South Carolinian, Staunton S. Burdett, then pastor of the New Hope Baptist Church near Lancaster. Burdett's *Baptist Harmony* was published only a year prior to Walker's *Southern Harmony*. Burdett's name is listed on the title page of *Southern Harmony*, for he stocked and sold

copies of Walker's tunebook. Most of the tunes for congregational use are found in Part I of *Southern Harmony*.

The singing schools and churches were not the only intended users of Walker's tunebooks. They provided a repertory of challenging pieces for more advanced singers. Part II of *Southern Harmony* is described on the title page as "containing some of the more lengthy and elegant pieces commonly used at concerts, or singing societies." This section includes most of the fugal tunes and anthems, such as William Billings' well-known "Easter Anthem."

Perhaps the most interesting repertory of Walker's *Southern Harmony* is the folk hymn, and it is in this genre that Walker made his greatest contribution to American music. Walker and other rural-oriented singing-school teacher/compilers drew from the rich oral tradition of Anglo-American folksong to provide melodies for many hymn texts. Sometimes the folk melody and hymn text had already been coupled. In other instances, Walker and others fitted secular folk melodies to already well-known hymn texts. It is likely that Walker and some of his contemporaries had so fully absorbed the Anglo-American folksong idiom that they themselves composed tunes in this style.

8 NEW BRITAIN. C. M. Baptist Harmony, p. 123.

1 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

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

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

4 The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures; He will my shield and portion be, As long as life endures.

5 Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease, I shall possess, within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

6 The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, The sun forbear to shine; But God, who call'd me here below, Will be for ever mine.

The best known of all American folk hymns is "Amazing Grace," set to the tune NEW BRITAIN, published together for the first time in the 1835 first edition of *Southern Harmony*. The text, written by the converted slave-trader who became an Anglican minister, John Newton, contained the same six stanzas found in *Olney Hymns* (1779) and was already well known. The tune NEW BRITAIN had also been previously published, but with other texts. No earlier wedding of the tune and text has been documented. The melody, as was normal in this era, is in the tenor part, the middle of three voices.

Also typical of these folk hymns is the angular line of the melody and the use of gapped scales—in this case pentatonic, omitting the fourth and seventh degrees. In harmonizing these folk melodies, Walker and his contemporaries thought linearly as well as vertically, conceiving each voice part as a melody in itself. This practice sometimes produced chords without thirds, along with parallel perfect fifths and parallel octaves.

THE PROMISED LAND. C. M. Miss M. Durham Meth. H. B. p. 471 51



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

bound for the pro - mised land, I'm bound for the pro - mised land, O, who will come and go with me? I am bound for the promised land.

Another type of folk hymnody, a type that came from the camp meeting revivals, was what George Pullen Jackson called the “revival spiritual.” Ellen Jane Lorenz has defined this type as “informal hymns often with refrain and chorus, taking form in camp and revival meetings.”¹⁵ One of the best known of the revival spirituals, THE PROMISED LAND, was first published in 1835 in the first edition of *Southern Harmony*. To the hymn text, “On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand” by the English Baptist pastor, Samuel Stennett, an unknown American added the refrain beginning, “I am bound for the promised land.” Walker credits the tune to “Miss M. Durham,” who has recently been identified as Matilda Durham of the Spartanburg area, who married Andrew Hoy and later lived in Cobb County, Georgia, northwest of Atlanta. The tune was recast in major and reharmonized to accommodate the newer gospel hymn tradition, the form in which it appears in several current hymnals.

What wondrous love is this, oh! my soul! oh! my soul! What wondrous love is this, oh! my soul! What wondrous love is this! That

caused the Lord of bliss, To bear the dread-ful curse for my soul, for my soul, To bear the dread-ful curse for my sou.

There is yet a third widely-sung folk hymn text and tune that Walker, as far as documents show, brought together in print for the first time. In the second edition of *Southern Harmony*, published by Walker and the yet unidentified “E. King, Esq., Flat Rock, N.C.” listed on the title page, there is an appendix which includes WONDROUS LOVE, credited to Christopher. The text, “What wondrous love is this, O my soul,” had been published anonymously in two hymnals in 1811.¹⁶ It was another thirty-nine years before this anonymous text appeared in print together with this beautiful tune. Walker also published WONDROUS LOVE in his 1867 tunebook, *The Christian Harmony*. There he described WONDROUS LOVE as a “very popular old Southern tune” and indicated that it was “arranged by James Christopher of Spartanburg.” The melody had existed for a number of years in oral tradition, and James Christopher wrote it down and harmonized it. In *Southern Harmony* Walker included only the first stanza, an omission he later rectified in his *Christian Harmony* by providing six stanzas. The melody is in the Dorian mode, but is generally sung today with the sixth lowered. The text of *Wondrous Love* is in the same meter as the ballad of Captain Kidd and many other folksongs.¹⁷

It is clear that Walker was a folksong collector, arranger, and a composer in the idiom of folksong. In the preface to the first edition of *Southern Harmony* Walker wrote:

I have composed the parts to a great many good airs (which I could not find in any publication, nor in manuscript) and assigned my name as the author. I have also composed several tunes wholly, and inserted them in this work, which also bear my name.

Walker also published melodies from oral tradition harmonized by others, including Spartanburg area musicians of the singing-school shape-note tradition, such as Matilda Durham Hoy (THE PROMISED LAND) and James Christopher (WONDROUS LOVE). It is this indigenous sacred folksong arising out of the hill-country of Upper South Carolina that gave Walker's tunebooks, especially his *Southern Harmony*, much of its distinctive appeal to the South of his day.

WALKER'S LEGACY

The music of William Walker's tunebooks may be found today primarily in three contexts. The first context is the traditional shape-note singing. Two of Walker's four tunebooks are still used today in singings year after year. The only singing that currently makes exclusive use of *Southern Harmony* is the Big Singing Day each fourth Sunday in May at Benton Kentucky.¹⁸ Walker's *Christian Harmony*, his post Civil War tunebook in seven-shape notation, is far more widely used in singings than his *Southern Harmony*. A 1994 reprint of the 1872 edition of *Christian Harmony* is used in a number of annual singings in western North Carolina. In Alabama, Mississippi, and North Georgia an edition of *Christian Harmony* extensively revised by Alabamians John Deason and O. A. Parris was published in 1958 and revised and reissued again in 1994.

Tunebook singings had completely disappeared in from Walker's home state of South Carolina until 1994, when a singing was established on the campus of Wofford College in Spartanburg. This singing, now known as the "South Carolina State Singing in Memory of William Walker," meets on the Saturday before the third Sunday in March and uses *Southern Harmony*, *Christian Harmony*, and *The Sacred Harp*. This singing concludes with a short walk to Spartanburg's historic Magnolia Cemetery for a closing song and prayer of thanks with singers gathered around Walker's grave. Growing

out of the Wofford singing in recent years is an annual singing at Furman University in Greenville, on the Saturday before the fourth Sunday in May.

Walker's legacy in traditional shape-note singing is not limited to the present-day use of *Southern Harmony* and *Christian Harmony*. Glenn E. Latimer analyzed the frequency of songs using the minutes of *Sacred Harp* singings in 2005. Of the 25 top *Sacred Harp* songs in 2005, number one was Walker's HALLELUJAH; two other songs from *Southern Harmony* were NEW BRITAIN (number 7) and WONDROUS LOVE (number 20). These same three tunes placed among the top three among songs used for memorial lessons at *Sacred Harp* singings. Among the top songs for closing *Sacred Harp* singings in 2005, number one was PARTING HAND from *Southern Harmony*, and two others were HALLELUJAH and NEW BRITAIN. Thus the popularity of Walker's tunes and those from *Southern Harmony* at present-day *Sacred Harp* singings also constitutes a significant part of his legacy.

The second context in which the music of Walker's tunebooks is found today is in choral arrangements. Choirs in churches and schools have sung countless arrangements of "Amazing Grace" across the English-speaking world. "Wondrous Love" has also appeared in numerous choral arrangements. Walker's life itself has served as the impetus for an opera. In 1952 Donald Davidson of the English Department of Vanderbilt University and composer Charles F. Bryan of Peabody College collaborated in the production of a light opera, *Singin' Billy*, based on the life of William Walker.

The third context, one that Walker shares with other shape-note composers of his era, constitutes his greatest legacy. This context is that of congregational song, the inclusion of early American folk hymnody in current hymnals of practically every major American denomination. It is notable that some of these folk hymns, such as "Amazing Grace" and "Wondrous Love," have gained ecumenical acceptance, appearing in practically every major new hymnal. While Lowell Mason and his colleagues in the Northeast were composing and arranging hymn tunes based on classical European models, southerners such as William Walker, Benjamin Franklin White, Elisha J. King and others were composing and arranging hymn tunes based on Anglo-American folksong. These folk hymns of the shape-note tradition from this Carolina contributor are a wonderful treasure of early American song that constitutes a continuing gift to singing congregations and the American heritage even now in the twenty-first century.

ENDNOTES

¹ The most extensive treatment of *The Sacred Harp* is Buell E. Cobb, Jr. *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens and London: Brown Trasher Books, University of Georgia Press, 1978, 1989).

² Preface to *The Christian Harmony* (Philadelphia: E. W. Miller and William Walker, 1867), iii. [Preface dated October 1866]

³T. O. P. Vernon, "Late Prof. Walker of S. C.," *Musical Million* VII:1ff, January 1876).

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, biographical data on Walker is based on Harry Lee Eskew, "The Life and Work of William Walker" (M.S.M. thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960).

⁵These three tunes are found in Walker's *Christian Harmony*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Miller's Bible and Publishing House, 1873). Their names with their first lines and page numbers are: SOLEMN THOUGHT (Remember, sinful youth, you must die, you must die), 361; THAT GLORIOUS DAY (That glorious day is drawing nigh), 114; and FRENCH BROAD (High o'er the hills the mountains rise), 208.

⁶Ibid, 155. The fugal tune features a homophonic opening section followed by a section of imitative entrances, the latter section being repeated, making an ABB form.

⁷See Milburn Price, "Miss Elizabeth Adams' Music Book: A Manuscript Predecessor of William Walker's *Southern Harmony*," *The Hymn* 29, 2 (April 1978), 70-75.

⁸Walker's associational activities are described in Alfred Merrill Smoak, Jr., "William Walker's *Southern Harmony*" (M.C.M. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973), 17-22.

⁹Fronde Kennedy, *A History of Spartanburg County* (Spartanburg, S. C.: The Spartanburg Branch, American Association of University Women, 1940), 60-61.

¹⁰John B. O. Landrum, *History of Spartanburg County* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1900; reprint, Spartanburg, S. C.: The Spartanburg Journal, 1954), 368-369.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Walker, *Christian Harmony*, iii.

¹³This information is given on Walker's tombstone in Spartanburg's historic Magnolia Cemetery. The full inscription reads: "In memory of William Walker, A. S. H. [author of *Southern Harmony*] Died Sept 24, 1875 in the 67th year of his age. He was a devoted husband and kind father. A consistent Baptist 47 years. Taught music 45 years. The author of 4 books of sacred music. He rests from his labors. He died in the triumphs of faith. Sing praises unto the Lord."

¹⁴William Walker, *Fruits and Flowers* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott and Company, 1873), 3.

¹⁵Ellen Jane Lorenz, *Glory Hallelujah! The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 131.

¹⁶Six stanzas were published in Stith Mead, *A General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs Now in Use* 2nd ed. (Lynchburg, Va. 1811), no. 121 and seven stanzas in Starke Dupuy's *A Selection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs from the Best Authors* (Frankfort, Ky., 1811), no. 198.

¹⁷See Ellen Jane [Lorenz] Porter, "Two Early American Tunes: Fraternal Twins?" *The Hymn* 29:4 (1978); and Ellen Jane [Lorenz] Porter and John E. Garst, "More Tunes in the Captain Kidd Meter," *The Hymn* 30:4 (1979), 252-262.

¹⁸See Deborah Carlton Loftis, "Big Singing Day in Benton, Kentucky: A Study of the History, Ethnic Identity and Musical Style of *Southern Harmony* Singers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1987).

¹⁹Published by Folk Heritage Books, 21 Miller Road, Asheville, N. C. 28805. This reprint includes four popular tunes added to the original edition on pages 381A-381D. This edition is out of print.

²⁰See Harry Eskew, “*Christian Harmony* Singing in Alabama: Its Adaptation and Survival,” in *Singing Baptists: Studies in Baptist Hymnody in America* (Nashville: Church Street Press, 1994), 265–276.

²¹ Published by the Alabama Christian Harmony Singing Association. This edition is out of print, but a new edition combining the North Carolina and Alabama editions is scheduled to be published in 2010.

²²*Sacred Harp Singings 2005 & 2006*, ed. Shelbie Shepherd (Anniston, AL, 2006). “Analysis of 2005 Sacred Harp Minutes Book,” typescript compiled by Glenn E. Latimer (fasolalatimer@yahoo.com).

²³ Although Walker first published “Amazing Grace” with the tune NEW BRITAIN, the shape of the melody and harmony by which it is best known today first appeared as arranged in E. O. Excell’s *Make His Praise Glorious* (Chicago, 1900), no. 235.

²⁴ A reprint of the score and a book of lyrics with introductory notes to this opera was published with a 1985 copyright date by the Foundation for American Education, P. O. Box 11708. Columbia, S.C., 29211.