

attended only three sessions of school in late summer. Music fascinated him and his own curiosity would not be denied. Without a teacher, he mastered the music books that were available to him.

On the last day of December 1825, Ben White married Thurza Melvina Golightly. He met William Walker and discovered their mutual interest in music and they became friends.

William Walker married Thurza's sister, Amy, six years younger, in 1833. By this time, Ben and William were working on a collection of tunes that had been previously published. Walker took the shape note manuscript to New Haven, Connecticut, and *The Southern Harmony* (1835) became very popular in the South.



B.F. White and his wife, Thurza.

In May 1842, Ben White moved his family to Georgia. He dreamt of compiling a tunebook. In one of his singing schools, he met Elisha J. J. Jing, who worked with him on a new book.

In Spring 1844, *The Sacred Harp* manuscript was sent to a printer in Philadelphia.

Following the publication of *The Sacred Harp*, Ben White's reputation and popularity increased considerably. He held singing schools, taught shape-note singing of the "fasola" syllables, and promoted his book. White had unusual insight into the need for a musical organization in Georgia that would be giving stability to the singings and continuity for future singings. He helped promote the Southern Musical Convention.

On December 5, 1879, Ben White died.

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We especially thank Zach Allen, Michael Morgan and the McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, for lending additional shaped note books to the PHC for this exhibit, as well as the individuals, churches and foundations that financially contribute to the operation of the Presbyterian Heritage Center.



Presbyterian Heritage Center Exhibit

The Shape Note Tradition

part of the Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee exhibit
featuring 500 years of church music

Shape Note Tradition

The repertoire of the nineteenth-century shape note music constitutes one of the greatest American traditions.

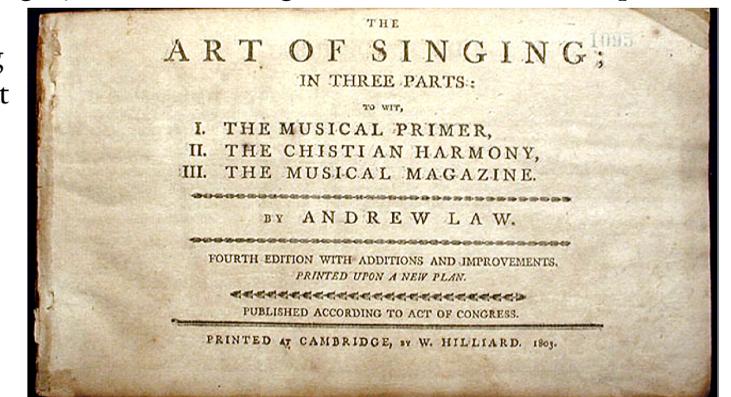
Shape notes may date from late 18th-century America. Shape note song books appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when two publications came out using shaped note heads – *The Easy Instructor* by William Little and William Smith in 1801, and *The Art of Singing* (in three parts including the Musical Primer, fourth edition) by Andrew Law in 1803, intended for use in singing schools.

Little and Smith used the four-shape system. Little and Smith followed traditional music notation in placing the note heads on the staff, in place of the ordinary oval note heads.

Law's system had slightly different shapes: a square indicated fa and a triangle la, while sol and mi were the same as in Little and Smith. More radical than Little and Smith's. Law dispensed with the use of the musical staff altogether, letting the shapes be the sole means of expressing pitch. There are no hymn books today that employ the Law system.

Andrew Law claimed and legally defended his rights as the inventor of shape notes. Little and Smith did not claim credit for inventing shape notes, but reported that the notes were invented around 1790 by John Connelly of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Little and Smith claimed that Connelly signed over the rights of his invention to them in 1798.

Shape notes proved popular in America, and quickly a



1803 The Art of Singing by Andrew Law.

wide variety of hymn books were prepared making use of them. The shapes were totally replaced in the Northeast by a “better music” movement, headed by Lowell Mason. But in the South, shape notes became entrenched, and multiplied into a variety of traditions. Ananias Davisson's *Kentucky Harmony* (1816) is generally considered the first Southern shape-note tunebook.

Some Influential Shape Note Tunebooks

The Southern Harmony, perhaps the most famous shaped note book, but not the first.

This exhibit features two editions from the Presbyterian Heritage Center's collection (1847 and 1850, which recently donated by Diane Claybrook). The 1854 edition is lent by Zach Allen. Shown open is the 1847 edition with the 1850 edition original blue cover on display, and an 1854 rebound edition.

The next set of shaped note books includes the rare *Union Harmony* (1837) written by Presbyterian William Caldwell and printed in Maryville, TN (lent by the McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library). Only one printing was made, but the book's influence of the hymns and tunes is seen in other later books by different editors, such as the *Sacred Harp*.

Denominations got into shape note music with the *Presbyterian Psalmodist* (1852) by Thomas Hastings (PHC Collection) and the *Methodist Harmonist* (1837) by T. Mason & G. Lane, and lent by Zach Allen. While the Methodist book went through many editions, the *Presbyterian Psalmodist* was the only shape note hymnal by the denomination.

The Hesperian Harp (1848) was published in Georgia by Dr. William Hauser and was perhaps the largest shape note books of its day at 552 pages. The four-note book contained 36 tunes by Hauser.

The exhibit features the 1859 edition of the *Sacred Harp* by B. F. White (lent by Michael Morgan), which is still a major force in shaped note singing today.

The other shape note book that continues to influence today was the *Christian Harmony* (1868) by William Walker. *The Social Harp* also was printed in 1868. *The Christian Harmony* and *Social Harp* are lent by Zach Allen.

William Walker & The Southern Harmony

William Walker (May 6, 1809 – September 24, 1875) was an American Baptist song leader, shape note “singing master,” and compiler of four and seven shape-note tunebooks, most notable of which was *The Southern Harmony*.

In 1835, Walker published a tunebook entitled *The Southern Harmony*, using the four-shape shape note system of notation. In this book, the American folk tune New Britain was first used with *Amazing Grace* by Walker. This is the tune most familiar today with the hymn. He was helped in producing the tunebook by his brother-in-law Benjamin F. White, who did not receive any credit.

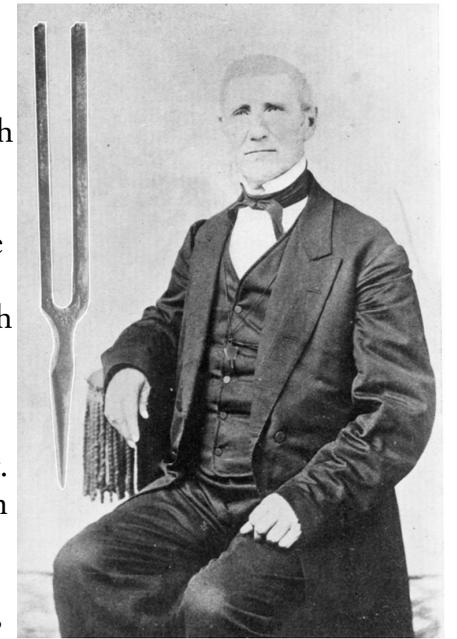
This *Southern Harmony* collection was revised in 1840, 1847, 1850 and 1854. In 1846 he issued *The Southern and Western Pocket Harmonist*.

Intended as an appendix to the *Southern Harmony*, the *Pocket Harmonist* contains a large number of camp-meeting songs with refrains. In 1867 (preface signed October 1866), Walker published a tunebook entitled *Christian Harmony*, in which he adopted a seven shape notation. He incorporated over half of the contents of *The Southern Harmony* in the *Christian Harmony*, and he added alto parts to those pieces which had lacked them before. For the additional three shapes, Walker devised his own system—an inverted key-stone for “do,” a quarter-moon for “re,” and an isosceles triangle for “si” (or “ti”). Walker issued an expanded edition of *Christian Harmony* in 1873. In the same year, he brought out a collection of Sunday school songs entitled *Fruits and Flowers*.

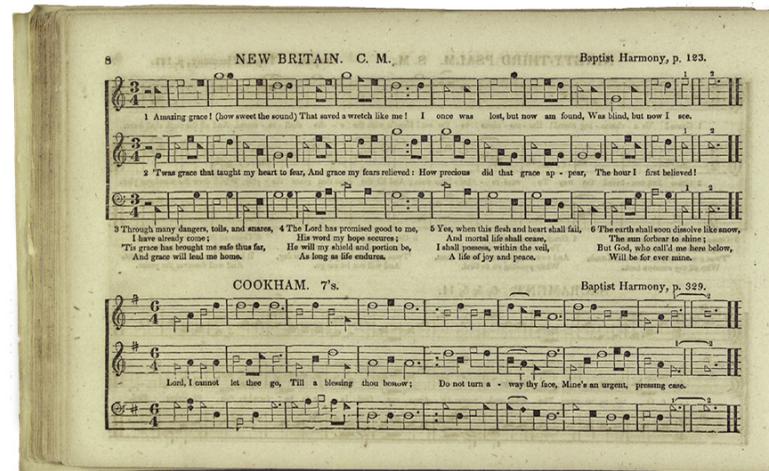
Benjamin White & The Sacred Harp

Benjamin Franklin White was born near Cross Keys in Union County, South Carolina, September 20, 1800. When his mother died in 1807, Benjamin was raised by his older brother Robert White, Jr., and his wife Polly.

Ben White's early education was very limited, for he



William Walker



The Southern Harmony is the first printed pairing of Amazing Grace with the New Britain tune.