The Music Herald

"Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."
Colossians 3:16

"Excelling in Voice, Ear, and Taste for Music"

Such was the description given of a mother in a humble home in Springfield, Massachusetts. The words were written by one of her many sons. He went on to say, "Knowing nothing of notes or rules on paper, she was, by rote and mere memory, an admirable, perhaps it may be said a perfect singer of 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.' Her house was, for an extensive region round about, the center of vocal musick [sic], her children, all of them, from their infancy, being furnished with that talent."

This home, a "center of vocal musick," was destined to become that center not only for its own small region but for an entire nation. Mrs. Eunice Colton Chapin, the lady referred to, was married into a long line of devout Christians. Her husband, Edward Chapin, was the fourth generation from Samuel Chapin who had come from England to America in 1636. Edward himself, like his wife, was also a fine singer and, as a deacon in their church, often led the congregation in singing. Thus their children were immersed in sacred singing literally "from their infancy," and it would be a powerful force in shaping their future, and ultimately in shaping the course of sacred music in the infant United States.

At least five sons were born to Edward and Eunice Chapin, and it was through these, their offspring, that their influence would be carried so far and so effectively. Their son Aaron, born in 1753, became a teacher of sacred music in Connecticut. After a long life of faithfulness, at the age of 84, he was still leading music in his church. It was said that, even at this age, his voice still retained "the same sweetness and without a gravel in the notes." Another son, Alpheus, born in 1765, became a sacred music teacher in Massachusetts.

It was Lucius, born in 1760, who would become the leading figure of the family. At the age of fifteen, in 1775, he enlisted in the Continental Army as a fifer. The next year, he reenlisted and served at Ticonderoga. When that enlistment was up, he volunteered for three more years, serving at the battles of Monmouth and Stillwater and suffering the hardships of the winter at Valley Forge. This winter gave him what he termed a "frosting of the legs" that would trouble him for the remainder of his life.

After the war, Lucius embarked on what would become his life's work. He became a teacher of music, teaching in the states of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. In 1787, he set out into heretofore uncharted territory for teachers of sacred music, the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, still a frontier in that day. By 1791, his name had become well known enough that William Graham, Presbyterian pastor and founding rector of Liberty Hall in Lexington, Virginia, had asked him to come and teach singing in that southwestern portion of the state as well. On May 4 of this year, Graham wrote that Lucius Chapin had "acquitted himself as a Master in his profession." Liberty Hall would later become Washington and Lee University, and its students, many taught in music by Lucius Chapin, would fill many important posts throughout the country.

After his marriage in 1791, Lucius Chapin continued to teach sacred music all through this area of Virginia, holding singing schools in the counties of Rockbridge, Augusta, and Rockingham. Though Lucius was primarily a teacher and not a composer, he did compose several tunes himself and also arranged existing melodies. Many of his tunes bear the names of the places in which he taught, such as "Rockbridge," "Rockingham," "Kentucky," and "Liberty Hall." In this same year, he was joined by yet another brother eight years younger than he, Amzi Chapin. Amzi joined forces with Lucius and taught music alongside him for the next several years, and also did his share of composing and arranging.

In 1794, Lucius, already on the fringe of civilization, took yet one more step into the American frontier, crossing into Kentucky, the first singing master ever to teach west of the Alleghenies. These were the days when Indian raids were still a very real danger, but here he settled and lived for forty years, teaching the earliest Kentucky settlers the best of the sacred music of the day. From there, he also taught some in Cincinnati and in eastern Indiana. Amzi again joined him for a few years, from 1795 to 1799, before Amzi returned east to teach music in Pennsylvania.

The music that the Chapins taught and diffused was that body of early American psalmody that we looked at in a series of five newsletters earlier this year. Lucius and Amzi Chapin were also key figures in developing what could be called yet a "sixth style" in that succession, one uniquely suited to the frontier in which they labored.

The frontier being settled by a variety of English, Scots-Irish, and German settlers, these all brought their various melodies from the Old World. These melodies were almost exclusively diatonic or modal, containing almost no accidentals. They were often made up of pentatonic scales, reflecting their antiquity. This pentatonic and modal character became a distinguishing feature of the frontier hymnody, the melodies in many cases being not truly newly

composed but only newly put on paper and arranged.

The Chapins and their pupils and contemporaries then harmonized these melodies in the "unscientific" style that they had learned in their youth, as opposed to the "scientific" rules of harmony that were, by the early 1800s, being imposed in New England by a wave of Enlightenment "reform." Lucius Chapin, not aloof from instruction, was a friend of the "reformer" Andrew Law and sought his advice and help, but his compositions have come to us retaining the non-reform features of earlier psalmody. Even more than the early American psalmody, the Chapins and their colleagues leaned heavily on perfect consonances, especially at the ends of phrases. In addition to the fifth, octave, and unison of the early psalmody, they also began to use the fourth between phrases wherever full resolution was not desired, placing the bass on the fifth and an upper part on the root. They allowed more frequent use of parallel fifths, octaves, fourths, and unisons. They frequently omitted the presence of the alto line, allowing abundant opportunity for these open intervals. They also maintained and even increased the tunefulness of all the parts, giving each part its own independent melody line even where this necessitated a strong harmonic clash in the middle of a phrase; this clash would then be satisfyingly resolved by the perfect consonance at the end of the phrase.

The Chapins made use of shape notes, a device invented in 1801 as an aid in sight-reading. This shape-note system used the four solfege syllables that had been used for centuries: fa, sol, la, and mi. It assigned one shape to each of the four syllables: a triangle for fa, an oval for sol, a rectangle for la, and a diamond for mi. Thus singers could be taught the interval relationship between the shapes and could learn to sight-read without having to learn the complexities of key signatures and of lines and spaces on the music staff. This system enjoyed great success in teaching sight-reading, and the Chapins adopted it.

Thus the Chapins maintained the noble heritage of sacred music in America and brought it to the settlers of the new frontier, where it became a powerful force in shaping a Godly culture.

What compelled Lucius to go to such lengths as a sacred music teacher as to brave the frontier? He considered himself a missionary, bringing the Gospel and its music to the American frontier. Having been raised in a Godly home, his own conversion seems to have taken place in 1792 when he was returning by ship from a visit in New England back to Virginia and the ship almost went down in a storm. Apparently Lucius called on the Lord in that trial, and the Lord saved him. Ever afterward, his life was marked by genuine piety and outspoken faith in Christ and His Word. He once wrote to one of his sons: "I hope you do not neglect the Bible, that precious book; which is able to make you wise for time and eternity — attend to the descriptions it gives of the nature, tendancy [sic], and consequences of sin." His letters are full of such words and also of quotations from the religious poetry of his day.

The family historian, Calvin Chapin, the brother who wrote the opening lines of this newsletter about his mother, also came to the western frontier as a missionary. He was not a singing master like his brothers, but primarily a missionary of the Gospel, though it is without doubt that he also carried with him the sacred music learned in his childhood home. Such was the lasting legacy of the Chapin family, teaching a nation to love and praise the God of the Bible in song.

By 1835, the music "reform" movement had reached Kentucky and tastes were changing in favor of refined European music, looking down on the "unscientific" music of the frontier. Lucius, now seventy-five years old, was suffering much from that "frosting of the legs" he got at Valley Forge. He ceased teaching and moved to Ohio, spending the last years of his life there until his death in 1842. But he left behind a rich treasury of excellent music and instruction, and what is perhaps worth more than both, a new generation of singers and teachers to carry this body of sacred music forward.

Lucius Chapin had been the teacher of fellow-Presbyterian and singing master Ananias Davisson, whose landmark tunebook, the *Kentucky Harmony*, would have a profound influence on American hymnody over the next two hundred years, especially in the South where this frontier hymnody would find a permanent home. Lucius had also overseen several networks of singing schools, giving many singing masters their first start at teaching and replicating his own instruction many times over. In addition, he left behind nine children, three of whom followed in his footsteps as music teachers and carried forward his music and teaching in the next generation.

Truly the hymnody that fueled the Godly culture of early rural America owes much to this one remarkable family. What had once been said of the mother could, by the early 1800s, be said of her prolific offspring, that they "excelled in voice, ear, and taste for music." And from their family circle, they had instilled in a nation that same excellence.

Though ever-changing tastes have, over the years, pushed much of this hymnody into isolated pockets, it is still, as then, music of "excellent taste." The music that the Chapins labored so earnestly to spread, the music that fueled such a Godly culture is worthy of being sung yet today by us, the grateful heirs of such a heritage.

On these two pages, we have one tune by Amzi Chapin and one by Lucius Chapin. In both of these tunes, as in the tunes of early American psalmody, the melody is in the tenor voice, the third line. These tunes were sung exclusively a cappella, and both the top line (the treble) and the tenor were sung by both men and women singing an octave apart from each other. These tunes were to be sung in a key comfortable for all parts, not necessarily in the keys in which they are written.

This tune, by Amzi Chapin, is a good example of the features of this “sixth style” of early American sacred music that the Chapins helped to develop. Though not a pentatonic melody, it is a gapped melody, omitting the seventh scale degree. Notice that it is entirely devoid of accidentals. Notice also the abundance of open fifths and fourths, especially at the beginnings and endings of phrases. The fourth at the beginning and ending of the second phrase, allowing for an open interval without full resolution, is a unique feature of this hymnody, almost never found in earlier American sacred music. Notice the stark parallelism between the tenor and treble in the third measure and between the tenor and alto in the last three measures.

A remarkable tunefulness is also present in each of the four parts. The treble could almost form a separate melody itself. And the alto, with its relatively wide range and eighth notes, is delightful to sing. Notice the strong clash created by the eighth note at measure six, as the alto gets melodic motion at the expense of perfect harmony, creating great tension just before the resolution. The bass also is tuneful in its own way.

The text is hymn number 88 in Watts’ second book of hymns, those “composed on divine subjects.” The “divine subject” of this one is simply “Salvation.” A short text, it extols the joy of salvation in beautifully expressive language, which is conveyed fittingly by this joyful tune.

The shape-note notation in both this song and the one on the next page is that system invented in 1801 that we discuss on page 2, each shape being assigned a different solfege syllable. The system proved eminently successful and is still used in many places today, having been used over the years to teach many generations to sing.

PRIMROSE. C.M.

A Major Isaac Watts, 1707.

Amzi Chapin, 1812.

1.Sal - va - tion, O the joy - ful sound! 'Tis plea - sure to our ears; A
2.Bur - ied in sor - row and in sin, At hell's dark door we lay; But
3.Sal - va - tion! Let the ech - o fly The spa - cious earth a - round; While

sov - 'reign balm for ev - 'ry wound, A cor - dial for our fears.
we a - rise by grace di - vine To see a heav'n - ly day.
all the ar - mies of the sky Con - spire to raise the sound.

Charles Hamm, “The Chapins and Sacred Music in the South and West,” *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Autumn 1960), pp. 91-98.
George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1965.
D. Warren Steel and Richard Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp*, Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: Univ. of IL Press, 2010.
Robert Stevenson, *Protestant Church Music in America*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970.

This tune, arranged by Lucius Chapin, was written by Jeremiah Ingalls as "Delay" and first published in 1805. This arrangement by Lucius removes an accidental, greatly increases the movement of the bass line, and changes the timing from 4/4 to 3/2. As with Amzi's "Primrose," several features are notable. The melody is pentatonic, the only seventh being passed by briefly in a triplet. No accidentals are used at all. There is strong parallelism; for example, between tenor and bass at the beginnings of both of the first two phrases and also between treble, alto, and bass at the beginning of the third phrase. The song begins with an open fifth, and every phrase ends with one as well. Again, the parts are all tuneful in their own right. The treble could again form its own melody. And the bass, with its delightful descent in the third phrase, forms almost a "counter melody" to the tenor, while also giving a satisfying chord progression. The alto too, while not as tuneful as that of "Primrose," is satisfyingly active.

The text is by hymn writer Philip Doddridge, who followed in the hymn writing path charted by Isaac Watts. A dissenting preacher in the 1700s, Doddridge wrote most of his hymns drawn from the Scripture texts on which he was preaching and introduced them to his congregation following the sermons. This one is drawn from Ephesians 2:5: "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)."

NINETY-THIRD PSALM. S.M.

C Major Philip Doddridge, 1755.

Arr. - Lucius Chapin, 1812.

1.Grace! 'Tis a charm - ing sound, Har - mo - nious to the ear; Heav'n with the ech - o shall re - sound, And all the earth shall hear.

2.Grace first con - trived the way To save re - bel - lious man; And all the steps that grace dis - play, Which drew the won - drous plan.

3.Grace taught my wan - d'ring feet To tread the heav'n - ly road; And new sup - plies each hour I meet, While press - ing on to God.

4.Grace all the work shall crown Through ev - er - last - ing days; It lays in heav'n the top - most stone, And well de - serves our praise.