

The History of HTMA

Written by Bill McCampbell – March 2001 (lightly edited by J. LeCroy in 2010)

When I, in a moment of weakness consented to working up a little history of the Huntsville Traditional Music Association, I thought it would be relatively simple to come up with a year-by-year account of major happenings--something that would be accurate but readable. I was wrong. First, nobody whom I know has records at all of the years since the founding of the old Huntsville Music Association, our parent organization.

As far as I know, I have the most nearly complete records since 1989, as well as the years 1980 and 1981. Memories of former associates seem to be conflicting, and I am not sure how accurate mine are.

So what I am left with is the prospect of some facts from newsletters and my notes and memories.. In essence, this will be mostly my memories and some fact. I must say this though: my memories of our current HTMA and the previous organizations are mostly pleasant ones. Sure, there have been some disappointments along the way, but more than offset by the happier times.

Enough of the bushwah. I will start now.

In nineteen seventy something, my wife gave me a mountain dulcimer. I could get some simple tunes on it, but wanted to learn more. I put an ad in the MARSHALL STAR to that effect and got a call from Sara Burcham telling me of a group called THE HUNTSVILLE ASSOCIATION OF FOLK MUSICIANS. That is, our old HAFM. It was indeed a fine organization populated by some very fine musicians. I had found a home.

It had been founded about 1966 by a group of amateur and professional musicians. Some were regulars at night clubs etc.

Some are still friends of HTMA, such as Terry and Sara Burcham and Bob and Kathy White. Most have gone to other interests and several are deceased, which, after over thirty years, is not surprising.

Before the group's demise in the early eighties, members included:

Joe Gambill (dulcimer builder and musician par excellence), Bob Barnes; Bob and Kathy White, Aunt Bertha Robinson (great two-finger banjoist), Jim Johnson, Monte Crowder, Terry Burcham; Leo Adkins (harmonica), our own Jim Smith (with his banjo and toe taps), Bernie Lawrence, with his piano accordion; Doug Crosswhite, Jim Weaver: P1~ward Bozeman, with hammer and Sara Burcham, with her autoharp and beautiful voice.

Jim Smith and I are the only persons of that era who are now members of the Huntsville Traditional Music Association.

Musical instruments ranged from the mundane to the exotic, almost. There were; guitars; tenor banjos; ukuleles, both soprano and baritone; Hawaiian guitars, Jew's harps; harmonicas; accordions; spoons; lap and hammer dulcimers, ocarinas, recorders; tin whistles and even fiddles. Types of music, within the realm of what might be loosely called folk music, were old folk ballads (Even Barbara Allen), sacred, blue grass, gospel, and sixties folk songs--including the protest songs of the era. Musicians as well as listeners came from fairly long distances just to be with us at our meetings and to participate in our concerts. One Sunday concert, held at Big Spring Park in front of the big spring, had several visitors

in concert, including two champion fiddlers from Tennessee. One was Frazier Moss from Cookeville, who was later a featured fiddler at the World's Fair in Knoxville. Another, Bob Douglas of Chattanooga, was proclaimed world champion by the Smithsonian Institution. I saw him at Norris, Tennessee, at the Appalachian homecoming festival in 2000, a featured artist on the main stage at the age of 101.

There were at least two picnics that I remember. One at the Redstone Arsenal recreation area drew at least fifty, including some from Red Bay, Alabama, and Golden, Mississippi. Sponsored events attracted performers such as Jean and Lee Schilling and Ramona Jones with daughter Lisa. The Jones concert drew quite a crowd at the Space & Rocket Center auditorium on a very cold evening.

In the sixties, the HAFM put out a great album entitled "Alabama Folk Music." I had some copies. The organization had received a charter as a non-profit educational corporation and had received a grant from the Alabama Council of the arts. They later generated one album featuring Jim Connor. That album included some of our favorite local musicians, including Terry Burcham, Joe Sharp, Richard Van Valkenburg, Bob Barnes, Joe Gambill, Aunt Bertha Robinson, and Rusty Hayes' sister Benita Hayes. It is hard to imagine such an accomplished bunch of musicians as there were in little old "Huntspatch."

Then, along about 1980 through 1982, the group began marching toward a slow death. One may well ask, "If it was so great, how come it didn't last?". I will tell you why, or at least why I think it happened.

First, our few leaders had carried the load almost single-handed for years. We had not helped as we should. Notice, I said WE, not just THEY. Each in turn developed other interests or simply got tired. To head such an organization is quite a load, as our current president can attest, especially when one has a job to work at. It can well consume several hours of work a month. Leadership declined.

Then general interest in folk music subsided, and it no longer made interesting news copy, resulting in the media also losing interest. Non-members were allowed to come in to meetings and dominate the playing time. After a while, one type of music was about all that could be heard. Members with more traditional agendas simply drifted away. Attendance at meetings dropped. Then the non-members left. There were no picnics or other social functions and no community service activities.

Actually, we were just lazy. You know, "Let Joe do it."

Then came 1989. Wayne Taylor proposed trying to strike up the old HAFM. I felt it a useless effort. After all, Emily and Nancy Van Valkenburg had tried to restart the association earlier, with no success. But Wayne can be very persuasive as well as persistent. So, in March of that year, Wayne and I met with ~ three former members and planned the rebirth. We contacted, by telephone or otherwise, at least thirty old members, plus some whom we suspected would be interested. There are thirty names crossed out on my list, but I know of several more.

April 20,, 1989 was the big day. At least twenty persons attended. Temporary officers were elected. They were; Wayne Taylor, president; Terry Burcham, vice president; Bill McCampbell, secretary; Bob White, treasurer. I do not have a list of those who were at the organizational meeting, but I do have a list of the members as of August 1989. You may well recognize some of the names. There were Pat Lewis, Bill Adams, Bob Barnes, Terry and Sara Burcham, Lew Koch, Brooks Moore, Harlace Scott, Bob & Kathy White, Damon Nolin, Aunt Bertha Robinson, James C. (Jim) Smith , and, of course, Bill McCampbell.

Submitted by Bill McCampbell
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In the first year, there were several out-of-town members who were very helpful to us. They included Robbie Robbins of Decatur, Virginia Payne of Gadsden, Herb Cambron of Grant, Alabama, Delaine Chafin of Waterloo, Alabama, Becky Ferguson of Killen, Alabama, and Martha Jean Crain of Dolomite. I might mention too, that we again, for some reason, had the support of the Huntsville papers, the music stores (especially Fret Shop) and public radio WLRH. Even the local commercial stations would run our notices freely in their public service segments.

September of that year found us doing a very successful members' concert at Lions Park in Meridianville. We started playing at a nursing home, now Windsor, one Friday night each month. On occasion we played at Wyndham Park and Presbyterian Apartments (for seniors). In December, we staged a concert at the UAH student center cafeteria. Monthly meetings were changed from Lions Park to the Huntsville Public Library. We set up the third Sunday in July for our annual members' concert.

In early 1990, we gained some highly valued members, including Enos Yeager of Lincoln County, Ken Hinkle of Madison, Archie & Ann Lee of Red Bay, Kim Caulfield with her dulcimer, singing voice and Irish harp, and last but not least, John Ferguson (Riverboat John) then of Gadsden. John came with us in 1991 and attended practically every meeting and every special engagement, until he went away and went professional. John was back to do a Coffeehouse concert for us in fall 2000.

It may be that our early triumphs depended partly on our lack of organization and absolute zero formality. No constitution and no bylaws. Essentially, business, which is kept to a minimum at meetings, is carried on by whoever happens to be at a meeting. Members, that is. Another factor is our diversity. At times we have had accordions, tin whistles, recorders, Irish harps, banjos, harmonicas, ukuleles, hammer and lap dulcimers, harmonicas, Jews harps, gut-buckets, and even mouth bows. Music has covered a wide range of traditional and folk music, and even stretched the definitions a bit.

There have been old time ballads, gospel, spirituals, sacred harp, cowboy songs, new Nashville, sea shanties, hillbilly, blue grass and such, up to and including near-classical. Presidents have been Wayne Taylor, Tauna Moorehead, McCampbell, Ken Hinkle, Herman Garrett, Joe Berry, Jack Ellis, and our current Jerry LeCroy. I believe that is all.

I have spoken mainly of the old HAFM up to now. There was a time we went By Tennessee Valley Association Of Folk, Traditional And Old Time Musicians; but then we changed to Huntsville Traditional Music Association (HTMA), which we judged to be more descriptive of our doings and easier to handle.

I would like to be able to tell you, blow by blow, the events we have engaged in since 1989. However, they have been too numerous for that. Besides, records are not complete. I will, however, tell you of some of the events for which we have played or may have staged.

One is Panoply, even when it was called just "Arts in the Park." I know that the Wade Mountain Wanderers, with Wayne Taylor and Tauna Moorehead, were regulars for years. Lew Koch and the Legends were there several times. We played at festivals and fund-raisers at Falls Mill Park & Museum on several occasions. Park Place fund raisers. We played at the fern sale at Botanical garden. Fund-raiser for an Anglican Church charity. Entertainment for several health care facilities, including Wyndham Park, Tut Fann veterans home, Big Springs Specialty Center, Atria, Westside Manor, Agape Village, Agape Manor, Greystone Retirement Facility, Cogburn Nursing Facility, Presbyterian Apartments. .

Get the idea? Many of these we have visited in the year 2000.

My desire was--and is--to give you a little summary, month by month, of our activities in the year 2000. When I get more info together, I will try to add some more.