

Physical Description:

4 linear feet: 1 chart (8' x 3')

Dates:

1937

Provenance:

The shape-note singing chart was purchased by the Center in September 2006 from Gary W. Ledbetter of Livingston, Tennessee.

Agency History/biographical sketch:

A singing school is a brief course of musical instruction that teaches the rudiments of note-reading and sight-singing, with a focus on sacred music. Singing schools began in New England during the 18th century, but found popularity in the South with the invention of shape notes. This simplified notation became the standard for sacred-music publication. Singing schools are credited with establishing the first American musical profession in the form of a singing master, and also facilitated the publication of music in the form of tunebooks. During the 19th century singing schools became connected with specific tunebooks, such as *The Sacred Harp* or *The Southern Harmony*. After the Civil War, singing schools and shape notes became increasingly identified with the South, where various publishing houses perpetuated the instruction of the older four shape-note, and later the seven shape-note system.

Scope and content:

This collection consists of materials pertaining to the singing school tradition and its continued popularity in the South.

A shape note singing chart (06-008), is part of this collection. It is 8' x 3' hand-painted on canvas. The chart belonged to singing master R. W. Ledbetter of Livingston, Tennessee and is dated 1937. Traditionally, these charts were made by singing masters as a teaching tool during the singing school sessions. The chart illustrates music pedagogy complete with a table of shape notes and scales. Other sections of the chart are labeled "Five degrees of power," "Four Properties of Tone," "What is Music?" and the transposition of sharps and flats.

Location:

The singing school chart is located in the Oversize collections area of the storage area.

Related Materials:

The Center holds many secondary sources supporting the study of singing schools, searchable in Voyager. *Sing With Understanding* by Harry Eskew; *Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music* W. K. McNeil editor; *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* by James R. Goff Jr.; *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* by Don Cusic; *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris.

Singing School Collection continued

Singing school instruction books may be found in the Center's rarebook collection. Various manuscript collections, such as the T.J. McClung Gibson collection (04-008) and Ruebush-Kieffer Company Corporate Collection (07-010), contain singing school components. All of these categories are searchable in the Center's InMagic database.