

ARTIST/INFORMANT DATA SHEET

NAME David I. Lee

ORGANIZATION/GROUP NAME Hoboken Sing

SEX M

ADDRESS AND PHONE Rt. 1, Box 40, Hoboken, GA 31542; h-912-458-2493; w-912-458-2853 or 912-284-9900; fax-912-458-3024

COUNTY Brantley

BIRTHDATE 11-25-54

BIRTHPLACE Jacksonville, FL

CATEGORY OF ARTIST vocalist, song leader, community scholar for sacred harp

GENRE/CATEGORY OF PRODUCT sacred harp, Primitive Baptist hymns

ETHNIC BACKGROUND Lees from France via England to North Carolina and then Okefenokee

TRADITION BASE

ETHNIC

URBAN rural, regional

OTHER

RELIGION x

OCCUPATION

PRIMARY LANGUAGE English

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION former Primitive Baptist

OCCUPATIONS John Deer distributorship

ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

FIELDWORKER: Laurie K. Sommers, S. Georgia Folklife Project

DATE: 2-15-97

LOCATION: David Lee home

COMMENTS: Traveled to the home of David Lee, Hoboken, GA where I spoke with David and his cousin Clarke Lee about sacred harp in the region. I recorded an interview with them in David's living room. Occasionally, Clarke's wife Julie and David's wife (Cathy) sat down on the couch behind me and made a few comments in response to the conversation. I had met the Lees at the sacred harp sing in Hoboken last month, where David was the song leader, assisted by Clarke. David is the designated talker of the two, and is very articulate, but Clarke chimes in when he has something to add. I had originally thought the two were brothers, but in fact are some sort of distant cousins (raised near one another and acting like brothers), with their kinship relationship strengthened by marriage. All the long-standing families around the swamp seem related in some way, but the complexity of family ties is baffling to me at least.

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Last Name Lee First Name David Middle Name I Sex M

Organization/Group Name _____

Address Pte 1, Box 40

City Hoboken State _____ Zip 31542

County Brantley Phone (912) 458-2853

Birthdate Nov-25, 1954 Deathdate _____

Birthplace Jacksonville, FL

Category of Artist Sacred harp, bass

Genres/Category of Product _____

Ethnic Background French-English

Ethnic-based Tradition? _____

Primary Language English

Religious Affiliation former Primitive Baptist

Occupation business mgmt. - wholesale distributorship

Fieldworker LK Simmons

Date 2-15-97 Location Hoboken



FAD Accession #s _____ Museum Accession # _____

Participant? _____ Area _____

The Lees are very open and very articulate about their tradition. Both men are in their early 40s. They have spearheaded an attempt to revitalize a dying sacred harp tradition which has been a part of David's family, at least, for 5 generations. The sacred harp of the region is closely tied to the Primitive Baptist faith, especially the conservative Crawfordite branch of Primitive Baptists. Both men have been thrown out of the High Bluff church, into which they both became members at age 17, because of their recent sacred harp activities and attempts to revitalize the tradition over the past two years. As the Lees describe it the tradition was dying: there were few sings and those that occurred were not enjoyable--people came because they thought they should, not because they wanted to. This was in sharp contrast to much of the two men's life experiences, where sacred harp and the hymn sings of the PB church were a way of life. Different families had sings in their homes, and families in fact each had their own style of singing. Singing occurred in community halls, at weddings, funerals. Like other Crawfordite PBs, David Lee said that he doesn't listen to radio (sacrilegious) and bought a TV only recently to view videos made of the sacred harp sings (hasn't yet hooked it up). Other kinds of singing was considered blasphemous. The factionalism among the different PB groups (described in John Crowley's dissertation, FSU, History, 1996, The Primitive Baptists of South Georgia and Florida) helped caused the decline of sacred harp. Different people don't speak with one another, etc. By the late 1980s and early 90s things were getting pretty bad, and Clarke Lee--the current song leader--was so disgusted he didn't want to continue.

That is when David Lee decided to try to revitalize the tradition and he got Clarke interested in working with him. They were so isolated that until the last couple years they didn't know about all the other sacred harp groups in the country. They have since been to Tallahassee, Atlanta, all over Alabama, Chicago, etc. attending sings. David started the sings in the Hoboken school in fall of 1995 using a new model, adapted from other sings he had visited, of having different song leaders for each song, allowing women and children to participate, and not requiring that people walk time.

If I understand this correctly (as explained to me first by John Crowley and then by the Lees themselves), the most conservative Primitive Baptists don't believe in prayer in front of non PBs (and perhaps not even in front of members of other associations of PBs) and because sacred harp sings fairly universally end with prayer, Clarke and David's participation in sings around the state, region, and nation caused their ouster from High Bluff. I don't believe they are currently a member of any church, although David attended services at the Sardis Church (Folkston, GA), led by his cousin Tollie Lee, on Feb. 16, and both Clarke and David attended the hymn sing after church. Tollie is more flexible in his views and is attending the sings in Hoboken.

Despite the tensions with the home church, the fledgling sings have been successful so far. David Lee has succeeded in getting his children interested in sacred harp, and although Clarke's children are young, they too are being mentored. The efforts of the two are beginning to lure back many folks who used to sing but who had quit. Still the majority of singers are from the Hoboken-swamp vicinity. In December 1996 the all-day sing attracted a number of singers from elsewhere. In the video and audio tapes David loaned me of this, the style of singing was different from the "Hoboken style" (faster, higher, no ornaments). The Lees have become more self-conscious of their own style since they have discovered and heard other singers. They can hear the difference and others comment on it. Basically, the Hoboken style is heavily influenced from PB hymn styles: it is slower, lower pitched and more ornamented than other sacred harp singers. David doesn't want to loose the Hoboken sound, and he understands that by opening up, this may happen. Already the different family styles appear to be lost, and Hoboken's sings are a blend of the area styles. But he is philosophical about change: better a changed sacred harp than no sacred harp. He says that this is "a living tradition" (sounding remarkably like a folklorist!) and that traditions change. He wants the tradition to be around for his children.

They do have recordings from area sings dating to the 1970s, so there are recordings of the sings prior to this change in the fall of 1995. David is recording the sings with a good stereo audio recorder, and also some video now. Of the two, he is the one most actively playing the role of community scholar, keeping records and deliberately making recordings for posterity. I played them the DAT recording I made at the Jan.

sing, and we were all very pleased with the sound quality. I played back a couple of examples of songs to ask about particular points of style. They have become quite aware of their style--and talked about the ornaments, the relationship to singing in the meeting house, etc.

My impression is that the two--and others I am meeting--are very interested to do what they can to preserve and encourage their distinctive traditions and that sharing with a folklorist and having tapes for deposit at VSU and copies for them is of considerable interest.

I was not able to attend the sing in the evening, but I understand David started a singing school (one last year as well according to the minutes) and that he will continue this for the next few months. His Uncle Silas Lee (Tollie Lee's father) was a singing school leader for many years--(Silas died June, 1997). The sing leaders are always male: in the interview David and Clarke describe the informal weeding out process of the more promising singers to identify sing leaders of the next generation, and how Clarke become the song leader.