

Interview with Tollie Lee, 1-31-98
Interviewed by Laurie Sommers, S. Georgia Folklife Project

030 announcement

2:40 begin interview. Sardis hymn sing was unusual. Silas Lee (Tollie's father) raised Primitive Baptist. My mother's parents and great grandfather PB. Primitive Baptists all the way back on both sides of my family. Hymn singing only at church in meeting. Sacred harp where we derive tunes because Lloyd hymnal is just poems. Sacred harp very prolific when I was growing up. In the winter time one or two sings a month.

4:29 My dad taught the sacred harp schools. They taught on Saturday, and then Sun. they came back and everybody had a sing in those days when I was growing up. There's a difference. The sacred harp to me was similar to the Mosaic Law because you have rules to go by, you have rudiments of music. Your timing, your pitch, and everything that's involved. And hymn singing, it was, to me, it's always been related to grace, what's in the heart....or we just sing in the meeting house during footwashing time, or before church from the hymn book. Whatever tune is given to the man that starts it, and the speed, it's usually slowed down some. They usually sing with more...more of a slowed down song. Time becomes irrelevant....To me that's why why, for many years, when we sing from the sacred harp book we're sticklers for the time that we learned it by, the 4/4s, etc. When you apply that tune to the Lloyd hymnal, we may call the syllables about the same, but we don't try to beat time. It's something from the heart. The feeling, in your bosom, in your mind. I think it gets in your bones, to me.

when hymns occur in service

7:18 People sing parts in church meeting that they would sing in sacred harp sing. (tenor, treble, bass, alto) To a person who likes music, the 4-part harmony is always better than unison singing. Bass and treble very imp. in hymn singing. Without the bass, if the Lord is our bass, our foundation, that's considered the footstool, the bottom, then you need that to support the tenor. And if he also represents heaven, then you need the treble to represent the high part, to make it complete. ...Some denominations disdain 4-part harmony in their meeting. We don't hold to that. We like all the parts in our meeting (in the Lloyd hymnal).

What about lined hymns? Unison?

I line, if its a common meter, and I line two lines, when the singers start singing, you're subject to hear all the parts, or you're subject not to. Tenor is the melody of the tune.

Alto a new addition?

BF White, first books he had no alto written. In later years, not sure of dates, alto was added. And in our part of the country, in S. GA, when my dad was singing, he didn't have alto singers, very few. The ladies were either tenors or treble. And he didn't stress it. Neither did my grandfather stress it. So it was not a prominent thing. It's just been in the last few short years that we are getting some alto singers in our part of the country.

13:30 is that accepted in the church?

Sure we love it. That puts the icing on the cake sometimes.

use of hymns during service:

Hymns vs
Sacred harp

14:12 When a servant is serving, morning worship, when the time of day arrives for the people to come together, the servant whoever it is to be, he lines the first hymn. And then, whoever comes behind him and gives out hymns, it's lined. Down to the dismissal hymn for that day. When you're singing in the morning before services start there's no lining. There's no lining at communion time, when we're washing feet and the people are singing. Or if people just want to sing some songs after church which we do sometimes. It's during the service that the preacher lines the hymn. It seems like that adds something to it, if there's a gift from the Lord been given, it causes the words of the hymn to be read and they're sung, and it should, to the congregation, it should deepen the meaning of the hymn to them, if we're blessed to sing with an understand of what we do sing.

lining

16:05 Difference in spiritual experience of worshipper between lining and hymn sing?

I feel like that there is. I feel like it is putting the peoples' hearts in tune. It gives them a chance to have their minds called in. Everybody to become, instead of an individual, in the congregation when a servant elder or preacher, public man, when he starts lining that hymn, I feel that it starts calling the minds together, hopefully the hearts together. It starts putting people in tune. It's like when you, when there were big families, they fed em all at one time...they said all you children come in and they sat down together. It starts bringing people together.

How is that different from 4-part singing, but not lined?

18:34 There's, personally I have been and observe other PBs and they have ceased to line hymns. It's OK, it's fine. I Don't believe for some calls it has the drawing power. Taking man totally out of it, I don't believe it has the drawing power. No doubt this hymn lining started years ago when people in our sect, when maybe there wasn't enough hymn books to go around...And when the practice or custom started, everybody didn't have the same book, and the preacher wanted to have everybody together. Maybe the friends that couldn't even read, and it started, and it caught on. And I think it served a good purpose. Talk about the drawing power. young converts be overcome in the heart and souls, and appear that the moment of change, or truth, maybe during the morning lining, I've seen young converts be overcome at this time and make their offering to a people of PBs. Ask for a home. And over the years and I think that's why they hold on to it. I really think there's love in the singing, and I think there's love in the lining. If a man is blessed with a gift to line a hymn, I think that it has a drawing power from the Lord.

19:11 probably this hymn lining

the gift is?

21:45 How to give it out, how he is pressed in his heart and mind, and even his voice. The Lord gives it all to us. Most everybody, they teach us how to read. Everybody could read a hymn. There's something special about lining. I think it draws the man's heart to the purpose of love. It draws his mind to the purpose of that hymn. The words you are singing about the the God of Love, it is really something that is hard to explain.

lining
22:58

(I suggest that lining, slower, more time to meditate on text)

24:11 allegory of fast and slow passenger train

Who can line a hymn?

26:00 The preacher, servant, the elder, the pastor, the asst. pastor. That's the preacher's duty to line the hymn. Ordained elder. Sometimes if no pastor is present, they can designate a leader. Divine worship includes singing from hymn book.

gift of singing, lining hymns?

27:45 There's diversity of gifts, but all the same giver.

You had an uncle who had gift of lining?

Uncle on my dad's side, and uncle on my mother's side that was gifted song liner. Uncle on mother's side do not remember. I do not remember my uncle on my dad's side before I was a professor. To me it's like Paul said, he didn't learn it by man, he wasn't taught it by man, neither learned it of himself. I don't know where it came from. It happened. And I want to put all the glory to the Father's house.

30:53 Before I was licensed to go to the public, I had been speaking some. And eventually to see what my problem was, the pastor offered me the book to give out a hymn. And I gave it out, I offered the hymn, and it came. It came practically the first time the way it is now. And I guess that probably one of the tokens that somebody was waiting on to see what would happen to me. In our conference, every male member has the right to speak if he's burdened. And it had happened to me a few times, caused me to get up a few times. And when I was offered the book, I was pressed in my mind to take it. And it came the first time. And what I've always wondered about, the gift that was given to me, and I have noticed, all glory to the Father yet, in most of the incidents, that the tune that whoever the brother was that started the tune, the gift of lining the hymn would almost fall in line with the tune that was used. And I would have read the first line. And that was consolation to me. sometimes that would be the only consolation I would get in serving, is that the voice that was given to me to line the hymn, would be in tune with the singers. On many occasions, when maybe words would fail to come.

34:00 servant another term for minister? yes.

All these terms we have, when we perform a wedding or sign other ministers' ordination papers or license papers, we sign as MG, minister of the gospel. (what's your preferred term?)

I would probably prefer they just call me Tollie. A wedding I sign it MG. Law requires that you have a title.

36:09 Beliefs of PB church about music? Explain why no instruments?
Unaccompanied singing only?

It's based on the Bible. King James, AV authorized version. He said to sing, in Paul's writing, hymns and spiritual songs, and make melody in your heart to the Lord. He didn't say play. ...Under the Mosaic law, they burned incense on the altar, they offered goats...and the Lord come down and took it in fire. And they played harps...When the savior came he fulfilled the law, He even changed the Lord's day from Sat. to Sunday. ...He changed everything. He was Lord of the Sabbath. He said it was not by lip and tongue anymore, not by outward motion, but in the hearts and souls where he'd write the laws. That's where the Baptists, the Methodists, all of them, where they got that from. I know there's some sects that play their piano, their harp, their fiddle. I guess if that suits them its all right. But I don't think that's necessary to worship the lord. I think it's more beautiful by lip and tongues. Make melody in your heart. You have to be glad to

*P.B. attitude
toward
music*

sing. You know you can't sing when you're mad... Anyway, that's where we got it from. I don't think that musical instruments are necessary. Even the sacred harp singing, which is a cappella. ...

41:00 When you have four-part harmony and the Lord or the good spirit, whatever it is that's causing people to sing, I believe to the trained ear, or the trained heart and ear together, I believe you will hear the violin, the fiddle, that harp of 10 strings that David played to soothe Saul, I believe you will hear all the strings, the strings of God's love, the chords of God's love.

42:00 terms--do you call it music or singing? "I call it music."

There's been a stigma, and to me it's bad and sad, misrepresentations from some of our forefathers. I meet a lot of people over the years. And they say, well, you don't have music in your church. And I say, What are you talking about? We sure do have music. Well, what kind of instrument is it? I say, vocal chords. ...

43:36 Over the years, the old Testament is full of wars, it's sad that people fight over it. There's so much in the past, a lot of narrow-mindedness in all sects....New tunes from sacred harp applied to Lloyd hymnal. some people get all ruffled by that. And it's sad. If you put 10 Methodists, or Baptists, or Catholics in the same room, it won't be long before you have some dispute. Doesn't amount to a hill of beans. But yes we have music, and I call it music. I call singing music.

Are there some who wouldn't? PBs?

Yeah, he'd probably say it's singing. Probably wouldn't use the word "music." He'd say we don't have music, we sing. But singing is music! ...

45:50 When I was growing up I learned to play the harmonica. And I played it for years. I still have one, I can still play. All the tunes I played as a kid, folk stuff. I never applied it to any religious music. I can make you pat your foot. It was in my bones.

46:17 secular vs. sacred music in Tollie's background, among PBs

47:08 There were people that were raised so strict that when they grew up--PB parents were so strict with their children, that when children left home, that was it, they didn't come around again. I was not raised that way. We didn't have radio and TV in the home per se, but when I was, I secretly bought a radio and kept it hid from my parents. ..It was an ugly thing to have a radio. I haven't been that strict. I was strict about TV with my children. There were people raised strict. I was not raised that strict. Daddy would let us boys listen to radio in the car sometimes... There was nobody that loved a fiddle player better than I did...Man that's playing a tune, folksong, or a love ballad, it'll make me turn my head and listen. When this change came to me, concerning PBs, it caused me to despise the worldliness, the cheapness of it. They sell it. To me religion is not for sale. It's still free grace. That's probably why it was looked down on. they take their gift and throw it to world and sell it to make money.

50:25 Making merchandise out of a human voice, a human gift. Kind of music I'm talking about was assoc. with bar hopping, bar drinking. Your country music, your rock 'n roll music....When it happened to me, the wild worldly music that I used to love so good, when this change came, then I preferred sacred harp singing, the Lloyd hymnal singing.

51:55 story of his Uncle Raymond, fiddler, playing tape of fiddle in car on the way to a sing. Vision--could not hear the music. I did not know the man that I got to seeing. my mind was totally transformed, my internal eye, I got to seeing this man's bosom that used to be a preacher. And in his bosom was the shape of a violin, a fiddle, turned vertical in his bosom. And I thought he was a-talking, a-preaching to me, and that's what I was a-hearing. And for the longest time I couldn't talk, I couldn't say nothing, I was totally transfixed. ...His words sounded like the fiddle but it wasn't the fiddle. All I could think of later was the harp of 10 strings, the gospel, if it's being served by a called Minister of Jesus Christ. It'll be a melodious sound. And my uncle knew that something had happened to me, but he was ashamed to ask me because I was a church member and he wasn't. But he didn't get offended, he took it out (the tape) after he played it awhile. He asked me a couple months later. he could see something had happened to me... He was a thinker, he was just not a "professor."

(we discuss the vision so I understand what he is saying)

57:30 The Lord was showing me where the real music comes from, the sweet music. It does come from the heart, from the heavens. He gives it to us.

So what if someone was playing harmonica from the heart? Felt it was a gift from God?

I don't think he would be telling the truth. The devil has gifts too.

(Tollie used to know Barbara Allen, sung it as a kid)

59:12 There's a difference. You hear people, artists today, the Grammys, I've heard this. And you'll hear the people saying things, thank everybody. And they should, that's common courtesy. But I really don't believe that song is a religious gift. That's my opinion. ...If this was put out to the general public, there's no telling how many people would call in, boy that man is a hypocrite. If someone hasn't had an experience they're going to throw stones at you. Occasionally I listen to NPR, sometimes they do these folk things. And sometimes people call in. And that's fine, I guess. I want to be careful, I don't want to contradict the Lord. A man to contradicted. I don't want the truth to be contradicted. To blaspheme, he tells us, it wouldn't be forgiven in this world or the world to come. So I guess that's why I want to be careful.

LKS I'm not going to use something like this on the radio.

What about PB view of singing in home, ballads, lullabies? Is that viewed in the same way? Not commercial use, or selling. To me, seems in different category.

105:18 when our 4 kids were small, probably the Mother Goose rhymes I could put a tune too, they heard it. And I made up some. I didn't feel that broke my religious tradition, because that what my dad did. Made us happy. Made our work fun. There was some PBs--I know lots of them--I was singing some nursery rhymes to some of their kids one night and I was reminded that I should be singing from the hymn book. I don't think you can make religious proselytes out of little children. I was never against lullabies.

107 Are you in the minority?

There are some PBs that would claim they didn't do stuff like that. I wonder about it. I would call them an old prude. so upright, so pious.

108:23 Would Barbara Allen be in same category?

I'd probably sing it to them if I could remember the words. Tunes that dad taught us: Old Dan Tucker was a fine old man, washed his feet with a frying pan, combed his hair with a wagon wheel, died with a toothache in his heel. He had a little tune to it. And I passed it on to my children. There's PBs that wouldn't do that. But I did.

109: 33 Did people who were raised PBs, would you find people who hadn't had experience singing sacred harp?

You have some people who go to the meeting house who rarely go to a sacred harp sing. You have both. People who just hear tunes at meeting house, and ones who go to sacred harp and meeting. They're probably better singers.

How typical was Lloyd hymnal sing that I recorded? Kelly Day requested it.

112: It would be at somebody's request. Most of time that we did it, an elderly person ill, in bed, haven't been to church. They desire meeting at their house. After meeting, the candidate--the sick person--or maybe somebody else, they would sing from the Lloyd hymnal. Maybe 10 or 12. We haven't had scheduled Lloyd hymnal sings. Most generally a sickbed meeting, there's going to be Lloyd hymnal singing afterward.

What about when growing up?

Same thing. I know my grandfather, Martin Dowling did it, because his voice was much loved. Back in horse and buggy days, he would stay overnight in a home, he would be an early riser, up on the porch, and he would sing two or three songs, and he would wake people up, he was their alarm clock. They would maybe get up and join hymn. Singing in our family it's just been a tradition. I don't think that was so much on my dad's side until my dad came along, until he met my grandpa and met my mom. And he loved it.

116:33 What about Lloyd hymnal at funerals? for example, your father's funeral?

At the meeting house there was two hymns sung during the service. That might be unusual for present-day PBs. I requested them to sing 206 when the funeral director let people view the body. And I think they sang a couple more. At cemetery, my dad was known all over region as sacred harp, and we sang 4 sacred harp songs at the gravesite. And my family wanted that. ...There was people from Alabama there that was sacred harp singers. We've always sung sacred harp at graves. Even if there was no funeral involved. My dad was asked for sacred harp singers to sing one or two songs. he would get a request for particular song numbers. ..There's been feuding over singing, but there's always been sacred harp singing at graves.

120:50 What about two versions of Lloyd Hymnal, 700 and 705? Why is 700 preferable?

122:19 That's a tough question. You are no doubt a business lady and understand change. I spent 20 years with Bell and ATT, different things all the time. You have a sect of people, my family, my uncle, my own father, when it come to religion, they were very protective, very jealous of any change. They didn't want no change. That's why there was so much of an uproar when bathrooms were being built. Some people wanted privies. 700, I was at Nathalene, I took the orders. I bought 4 dozen of them, when we found out we weren't going to get any more (and I could afford them--3 1/2 dollars a piece--a lot of the members bought that many. Stocked up. Had to order that many to get them to publish again. I think it was 1000. Pre-dates 705. It was the original. I've

been told when Benjamin Lloyd did it it was 700. ...The 702 came out, they took out the Romish Lady (I've been told). "Oh they changed it! That's a poison book." Then came out with 705. I have no problem with it personally. But there is people that thinks its poison. Just like there's people that think this new Cooper book, 1991 or 2 revision of BF White cooper book is poison because it's not like the 1962... It's not only in south GA, That principle is in Alabama about song books. I feel sure in the future that the next time we order we're going to have to take what they got.

126:10 discuss Benjamin Lloyd and BF White. Lloyd a PB minister. Collected hymns, didn't write any himself. Picture in book is not Lloyd, but his brother in law. ...We in this sect have always used the sacred harp tunes to the Lloyd hymnal... BF White was a missionary Baptist. ...Missionary and Primitive Baptists were bitter rivals in those days. (speculates if this was Lord's master plan--bringing two together) this discussion ends at 134:33

See, my dad would not allow any religion be mentioned at his sings. Everyone was welcome. Didn't allow denominational hymnals. There was 100-200, 300 people, from all denominations. That's been one of my arguments with people in my SE GA Assoc. He went to White Springs one time (to FFF) sang Beautiful Land on High, Sweet Bye and Bye, I was in the Glee Club in Hoboken HS and we went.I graduated in '60. it was probably school year 58-59. The school went twice. Our teacher was Miss Griffin. The second time we went her and daddy became close friends. She didn't miss a sing. She was an alto singer. First alto singer daddy ever got to hear strong. I think that's right.

Discuss recordings at festival. It sounded good when they did it. ...

139:19 Had a quartet from Hoboken HS (barbershop) that performed singing Go Down Moses. I was in the glee club, later on the Quartet. I had music from 7th grade on. Music teacher taught voice exercises the same way dad did, and he had no training. That was what was amazing to me.

140:55 singing schools lasted 6 weeks.

141:15 They meet at 10:00 on Sat., have a recess, lunch break, and go back after lunch and sing a couple hours. He actually on a Sat. went through exercise with them, and it was like tell, show and do. He would teach them to sing the numbers, by the note, and he would have children up that learned how to walk time. He would do drones (he would get tenor singers in the middle...) They did the drones with the notes and with the songs. He would teach em to hold a note, and all this was walking time.

143:14 He taught them to beat time with their hand and walk time with their feet. ...I guess why the walking time was instilled in them it was part of the music.]

^6 consecutive Saturdays? Yes, and

143:54 On Sunday, in that place, they usually met in old country schools. ...No electricity in em, so they had to do it in the day time. Sunday they'd meet back there and have a 3 or 4 hour sing. Sometimes people would take lunch, some times they'd just go home. On Sunday all the mommys and daddys would come.

144:50 At Walkerville, Satilla, Piney Grove, in Pierce Co. down here it was--can't think of the one in Charlton Co. 145:21 "He was called by the community, he didn't do this on his own. would call on him to go and teach a sing. He probably got a dollar a day for his trouble. And the people wanted it.]

Singing School

+

↓

↓

↓

taught

socializing day

85

David and Clarke's sing is much streamlined version of the old-time sing.

Daddy never wrote nothing down. It was all there.

Does David cover same things?

Quite a bit of difference in method of teaching. Some similarities.

*Singing schools
past + present*

147:20 When daddy was teaching, certain families in a lot of communities was mandatory. Women and men that are 70 and 80 years old, that don't know me, they'll say to me, he taught me sacred harp singing. when they were kids, back in the 20s when they started, it was mandatory to go to the singing school. They made it fun. ...David's got a different time, not many parents now that's going to tell them now that kids have to go to singing school.

Singing schools

149:18 There was adults at Daddy's sing. [It was at fall of the year when all the crops was gathered in, and in the winter months when he would teach sings. It was always in the wintertime, cause he was in a farming community] and they would have sings in these outposts. They would have sings through the summer on Sunday. When he was having sings on Sunday he was still teaching. Any song that was called out to sing, he spent about 10-15 seconds on the basic rudiments. ...

Something he always used to teach with? a particular song?

Singing schools

151: 00 He did Parting Hand. He also did 152, ¹⁵²⁻³⁵ he would teach them to sing a measure of notes and a measure of words when he was teaching accent, and syllable, and expression, and breathing. He talked about all that. When to take a deep breath. Always sing from down here, not from your nose. No Billy goats (imitates) he wanted you to sing from your larynx. ^{imitates} At the same time you had to be beating time. He was showing you how your voice ascended or descended with your arm... *ah ah- doing that."*

David was taught by your father? No he wasn't.

154: 21 end