

The Civil War Reenactor's Hymn & Tune Book
26 hymns with suggested tunes and notes on authentic singing practice
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Preface

Singing Soldiers, Singing Reenactors

Some Civil War reenactors who would otherwise be meticulous about their uniform or their musket or their mess kit or the tent they sleep in, are content to sing "the old hymn, "The Sweet By and By" in a church service or around the campfire accompanied by guitar in a Bluegrass style, in spite of the fact that "The Sweet By and By" was not published until 1868, and the loping bluegrass style did not emerge until the mid 20th century. Furthermore, guitar was not generally used to accompany hymns in the mid-19th century. Is this too picky? Only if you are not serious about recreating authentic musical practice at Civil War reenactments.

Singing was a very important part of soldiers lives. Bell Irvin Wiley tells us that "The men who wore blue, and the Butternut Rebs who opposed them, more than American fighters of any period, deserve to be called singing soldiers" (Wiley, 1953). This makes sense especially when we consider that there were no recordings in the Civil-War era and that except for the occasional live performance, the music you heard most of the time was music you made yourself or with a group of friends. This betrays the first challenge for the 21st century Civil-War reenactor: modern Americans, used to hearing professionals make music in recordings, don't sing much. Our goal should be to work at singing to the point that it is heard often in every corner of the camp. This aural image is clearly painted in the record.

Serious reenactors who are willing to sing and are interested in bringing mid-19th century singing practice into camp should carefully consider what soldiers sang and how they sang. While much more work needs to be done in helping reenactors sing correct secular music in an authentic manner, popular song from the era has at least been organized into songbooks with some commentary on their use. And it is good to see that craftsmen are making period banjos with musicians learning to play them in authentic style. In addition period string bands using period guitars and banjos have formed to play music that was popular among Civil War soldiers. But few has studied sacred music of the period as it applies to Civil War soldiers. In my research I have discovered that sacred hymns were a staple in the general song repertoire of soldiers. We rightly assume that soldiers sang hymns in often well attended church services and prayer meeting, but less well known is the evidence that these men also mixing sacred hymns with secular songs outside specifically religious settings. Scanned copies of period hymnals and tune books are readily available online but no one has organized this massive amount of raw information into something that is practical for the reenactor. The purpose, then, of The Civil War Reenactor's Hymn & Tune Book is to provide American Civil War reenactors with a list of popular period hymns, the tunes to which they were sung, and advice on how and where the hymns were sung.

Hymns and Tunes

In the 21st century we expect our hymns to be interlined with a tune because this is how American hymnals have been published since about the 1930s. Because of this we think that

a hymn and tune as printed have always gone together. But in order to grasp the hymn singing conventions of the Civil War era we must understand that church hymnals were typically published with only the words, no tunes. Tunes appeared in separate tune books. Although a few major church hymnals by 1860 introduced the inclusion of tunes on the same page with the hymn texts, they were only suggested tunes. There is evidence that by convention, some hymns were almost always associated with a particular tune, but this was the exception. The deacon or clerk or the presenter or the pastor had to choose an appropriate tune to which a hymn would be sung. Thus, they had to announce the hymn *and* the tune before a congregation could sing. Tunes used for a given hymn could vary from region to region and from congregation to congregation.

Hymn-and-tune books intended for revivals or "social worship," not the Sunday church service or "public worship," sometimes contained hymns interlined with tunes. At least one compiler of such a collection said that this was done to increase the variety of tunes. Variety would increase the enjoyment and "there is nothing that brings in the unconverted than good singing." (Dadmun, 1863, preface) It is apparent that this pairing of tune and hymn was not done to suggest any permanent association of music and text. Tune organized my meter are still listed in an index with the retention of the idea that hymns and tunes are interchangeable.

That tunes needed to be chosen, and were normally chosen ahead of time by a leader, is clearly seen in a story from *Incidents of the United States Christian Commission* (Smith, 1869, p 140-141). In reporting on a spontaneous soldier's prayer meeting a Northern chaplain states that a number of hymns were sung, one after another "without agreeing on a tune." This procedural comment betrays the practice. Evidently a soldier in the group did the unusual and led out on a hymn with the tune of his choice.

Church hymnals of the day often contained more than a thousand hymns. Protestant sects during this era saw the hymnal as a compendium of Christian doctrine in the service of "teaching and admonishing" believers. Pastors valued and required a large store of hymns to illustrate the themes of sermons, which accounts for the large subject indexes in many period hymnals. Parishioners were used to singing familiar as well as unknown hymns to a limited number of familiar tunes. So, for instance, the tune NEW BRITAIN, the tune to which we sing "Amazing grace how sweet the sound," could be used for any number of texts in the same meter—in this case common meter (C.M.) or four lines of text with 8, 6, 8, and 6 syllables respectively. To see how this works try singing a C.M. hymn like "When I can read my title clear" or "There is fountain filled with blood" to the tune NEW BRITAIN.

Choosing the Hymns

I chose 26 hymns for the Reenactor's Hymn & Tune Book. I used three basic criterion loosely applied: that they appear frequently in soldiers' hymn collections from both armies, that they were mentioned by soldier in diaries or other primary sources, and that they represent a variety of subjects suitable for church and evangelistic use.

Although many of the Northern soldiers' hymn collections contain patriotic hymns, I have not chosen to consider them for inclusion in the Reenactor's Hymn & Tune Book. Reenactors should, however, choose a variety of patriotic hymns for camp singing as the literature mentions their use frequently, sometimes in religious services, but more typically in social settings and military rallies and ceremonies.

Choosing the Tunes

Choosing tunes that mid-19th century church goers used for singing particular hymns is a challenge. It was up to the leader in every church to choose a tune that best fit the hymn and was reasonably familiar to the congregation. The leader could also add to the congregations tune repertoire by introducing new tunes. In the wisdom of the day leaders were to choose tunes that best amplified and supported the sentiment of the hymn. Within this general guideline the choice of tunes varied by convention, locale, musical taste, or all three, and made the possible permutations endless. In the preface of a tune-book assembled in 1848 for the Protestant Episcopal Church the compilers express a certain resignation to the difficulties of pleasing parishioners in the matching tunes with hymns, when they say that

The extravagant hope that every body will be satisfied with our work throughout, of course we do not entertain; but that, in the greater part, it will meet all reasonable expectations, our hope is very strong. . . . Great pains have been taken in the assortment of words and music in harmonious connection. The replies to our circular asking for aid in such arrangement presented so little agreement, that, with few exceptions, we were left wholly to our own choice. (*A Tune-book proposed for the Congregations of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 1959, preface)

The complications are also alluded to in the preface to *Hymns for the use of The Methodist Episcopal Church* (1857, preface) where the editor says that "the adaptation of tunes to hymns is a difficult task. Adaptation [is] a matter of taste, to a considerable extent. . . . For example, in some sections of the church, MENDON is employed to express the highest exhilaration, while in other places it is employed in the use of hymns of the greatest solemnity."

Issues of taste also extended to musical style. Big-city churches, north and south and along the coast, were more likely to sing tunes that matched the refined "scientific" specifications of the musical reformers of the day. Rural churches away from societal influences of the elite and sometimes amalgamations of various denominations called "Union" churches, gravitated toward the lighter tunes including the use of tunes to secular songs like "Auld Lang Syne" and "The Last Rose of Summer."

While soldiers mentioned favorite hymns, they almost never mention the tune to which it was sung. There is no lexicon of hymn-tune matches for this period. It is clear to me that choosing appropriate tunes in the way people did in the mid-19th century can only be approximated. Conventional wisdom guided the process and that wisdom has been largely lost. Fortunately, tune book compilers always interlined a representative hymn with the tunes, and I assume that the texts they chose reflected, at least in part, the choices that might have been made by a church music leader or pastor. Conversely, the compilers choice may have influenced the tune choices of leaders. In addition some hymnal compilers give one or more suggested tune names for each hymn. Again this may or may not represent common linkage of hymn and tune.

To account for a variety of tastes I chose tune books that represent everything from the most fastidious sensibilities of the musical elite to revival hymnals where the compiler solicited "favorites" from his constituency—tunes that appealed to those who appreciated and sang the lighter tunes. I also made use of the tunes appended to both *The Soldiers' Hymn Book with Tunes* and *Hymns Religious and Patriotic for Soldiers and Sailors* cataloged on this website. Then I looked to see which tune (or tunes) the compiler linked with a particular hymn. Sometimes, as in the case of "All hail the power of Jesus' name," compilers across the spectrum almost always link this hymn with the tune CORONATION. Consequently, I think it is

safe to say that "All hail the power" was sung to CORONATION almost everywhere. Other hymns like "Am I a soldier of the cross" or "Just as I am without one plea" were linked to a very wide variety of tunes, almost as many tunes as tune books. In all cases I chose tunes from both the more "refined" sources and the sources of tunes considered lighter in character, typically designated for revivals or "social worship." Every tune I chose is known to have been in use during the Civil War even though I may have scanned it from a tune book dated after the war. For practical use I have made a printable version of each hymn that contains the hymn text along with scans of suggested tunes from period tune books

How Hymns Were Sung

Singing hymns the way soldiers sang them is as challenging as choosing appropriate tunes. Descriptions of actual practice are not set down in any manual on hymn singing. Some experts on church music give their opinion. Lowell Mason, one of the leading church music reformers of the early 19th century, writes extensively on ideal practice in the preface to *The National Psalmist* (Mason, 1848), but his remarks probably don't fully represent what was really happening in churches across the country. More instructive may be his criticisms of current "incorrect" practice in the areas of vocal quality, tempo, tune choice, and other aspects of hymn singing. These criticisms of practice along with Mason's suggestions for amelioration may hint at how people actually sang hymns. Like today, people in the mid-19th century did as they pleased and often ignored the experts. In the end actual practice as it worked itself out in a given locale, can only be gleaned from tidbits of information found in soldiers' diaries, newspapers of the era, and other period literature. The descriptions of practice and the suggestions I have made have basis in one or more pieces of information from such sources.

Denominational and Regional Differences

From the start an important question arises: Did soldiers from different parts of the country and different denominations have different expectations regarding what hymns would be sung to what tunes? I think they did, at least as they marched fresh from their homes. A regiment from Boston, for instance, made up of Congregationalists and Presbyterians was probably used to singing tunes of the reformers and older tunes with modernized harmonies, tunes thought to be "correct" according to the "science of music." A Georgia regiment made up of Baptists and Methodists probably sang from tunes books like *Southern Harmony* (Walker, 1854)—folk-hymn tunes and fusing tunes from late 18th century New England. But purity of style and tune choice does not exist at either end of the spectrum. There is a lot of cross pollination.

There appears to be much less variation in the hymns (the words) across regions or denominations. At the core of most hymnals used anywhere, North and South, was a considerable number of hymns by Isaac Watts. The Psalms and hymns of Isaac Watts form a common thread that runs through almost every denomination, even in Methodist hymnals where Charles Wesley's hymns dominate. Other English evangelical hymn writers are also well represented in most hymnals of the day including John Newton, William Cowper, Philip Doddridge, Charles Wesley, James Montgomery, and Anne Steele. There are, however, some specific variations. Episcopalian and Unitarian hymnals often have a large selection from the "New Version" of the Psalms by Brady and Tate. Scottish Presbyterians sang from the Scottish Psalter, metrical versions of the Psalms.

Evidence seems to point to the fact that as soldiers of various religious persuasions and walks of life mixed and found common ground in death, they put aside any denominational or regional preferences regarding hymnody. It is also well known that chaplains from all of

the protestant denominations agreed to put aside doctrinal and liturgical differences in the effort to give spiritual comfort and bring God's Word to soldiers. For example, in his post-war report *Christianity in the War* U.S. Chaplain Amos Steven Billingsley reported that

Such a spirit of union pervaded the [prayer meeting in the Hampton Hospital] that we seldom inquired to what church a man belonged. Denominationalism was swallowed up in the great interests of the soul. (Billingsley, 1872, p. 96)

A southern minister visiting a southern soldiers' service reported that "We had a Presbyterian sermon, introduced by Baptist services, under the direction of a Methodist chaplain, in an Episcopal church" (Wiley, 1943, p. 187). To some extent Protestant ecumenism even embraced Catholics and Jews (Faust, 2008, p. 7-8)

This kind of interdenominational practice, no doubt, also had the effect of washing out denominational hymn and tune preferences. Soldiers did complain about doctrinal differences heard in sermons (Wiley, 1943, p. 187), but to date I have not seen evidence of arguments over hymns or musical taste regarding the tunes in any soldiers diaries or other descriptions of soldiers' lives.

The soldiers' hymn collections cataloged on this website give us a good representation of the hymn repertoire sung across all denominations and regions, North and South, in the mid-19th century. Also, the tunes I have recommended represent those used by a wide variety of Christians. I would, therefore, recommend that the hymns and tunes seen here form the core hymnody for reenactors no matter the Christian denominational influences on persona. Trying to be denominationally correct with regard to hymnody adds an unnecessary complication and in the end may be more incorrect in the world of the soldier.

I will claim some ignorance regarding hymn singing among Catholics and those of the Jewish faith. Both armies had Catholic chaplains and a Jewish chaplaincy was authorized by congress in the North in 1862. Catholic hymnals of the day include service music and hymns in Latin and English but do not contain the vast repertoire of Protestant hymnals. Jewish services were probably limited to Hebrew chants. I can imagine that both Catholics and Jews may have sung Protestant hymns in informal and recreational settings as described in the next section.

I have not included the singing of hymns among black soldiers but I want to do so with care in the near future. The difficulty is that white officers who tried to describe the singing of black soldiers seemed to be at a loss for accurate terminology because what they heard was not anything like the singing of white soldiers, and black soldiers were not likely to write about their experience whether singing or otherwise.

Where and When

There is evidence that soldiers in both armies sang hymns not only in organized camp church services, prayer meeting, and in personal devotion, but also in recreational and leisure-time settings, sometimes mixed in with secular songs. They even sang hymns as they marched.

In letters to father and sister written by Minnesota soldiers William and Thomas Christie one of them mentions that they were hungry for copies of any kind of music "Sacred, or mirthful, for our singing is about equally divided between the two, with a specimen of Sentimental thrown in once in a while." (Smith, 2011, p. 106) In another letter Thomas writes that while "writing to you my Dear Sister," his bunk mate O'Hara was "turning over the leaves of a music book, and singing sacred hymns to well known tunes. . . ." (Smith, 2011,

p. 111) A Confederate soldier reported that the great variety of songs he and his fellow soldiers sang included "patriotic songs, romantic and love songs, sarcastic comic and wars songs, pirates' glees, plantation melodies, lullabies, good old hymn tunes, anthems, Sunday school songs, and everything but vulgar and obscene songs—these were scarcely every heard, and were nowhere in the army well received or encouraged." (Able, 2000, p. 179) And in another case a Union soldier said that he and his fellow soldiers sang the hymn "There is a happy land" while on the march. (Wiley, 1951, p. 167) I have included this hymn in the Reenactor's Hymn and Tune Book. The tune HAPPY LAND to which this hymn was often sung is indeed a good tune for marching.

21st century Americans assume a separation between the sacred and the secular where hymns are sung only in church or perhaps privately, but there was no such separation in the mid-19th century. Hymns were sung any time in a variety of settings by both the religious and irreligious. They were simply a part of the cultural fabric.

Leading and Accompanying

The fashionable accompanying instrument for church hymn singing in 1861 was the organ. Except for Episcopalians (Anglicans) the use of organ in church was a long-fought battle and a fascinating story in itself. But by the time of the Civil War the organ was well established, especially in large churches in coastal cities. Some churches, especially in rural setting could not afford an organ or made do with the smaller, portable melodeon; and a few churches were still suspicious of anything but unaccompanied singing.

If an organ was available in a commandeered church building and if a skilled player was available, it was often used to accompany singing. For example, a private in the First Minnesota Regiment recorded in his diary that he went to services conducted by the chaplain in the Presbyterian Church of Charlestown, Maryland, a confederate building taken over for the soldier's use. "'The fine organ discoursed sweet music,' he wrote. 'The church is a fine brick building with gallery.... The Min. 1st run the whole institution, organ and all.'" (Wiley, 1851, p. 271)

We get a clue to the process of leading a hymn when no organ was available in a scene from a Presbyterian church service in Chattanooga in August of 1863. On this given Sunday the organist was absent;

'... and I will be thankful,' [said] the minister, 'if some one in the congregation will raise the tune.'—The tune was raised; the whole congregation joined in singing, as in days gone by; the sacred notes rose in humble melody from the house of God, swelling their holy tribute to His glory. (*The Daily Dispatch*: August 29, 1863.)

To "raise the tune," an old fashioned practice for this 1863 congregation, meant that a designated person led out with the first few words or the first line at a singable pitch, with the congregation joining in. In an example that gives some indication of a failure of leadership, partly in establishing a singable pitch in "raising the tune," an Ohio soldier tells of stumbling on a service at the Cayuga Baptist Church in Mississippi during the Vicksburg siege. "The audience started up a hymn, but no go. Some too high and others too fast, and so they failed. But they succeeded at last. We had a very pleasant meeting notwithstanding." (Wiley, 1951, p. 271)

Another possibility for pitching and leading a tune was the use of "lining out" which was an old fashioned practice in most quarters and often decried by church music reformers of the mid-19 century. The reformers notwithstanding, lining out was still in use, especially among

Baptists and Methodists. In lining out the leader sings phrases of the tune or speaks on a single pitch each line of the hymn with the congregation singing the hymn a phrase at a time in response.¹

The use of lining out is mentioned a number of times by soldiers and chaplains. An article in *The New York Times* describes a scene where the well-known pastor of the Plymouth Church of Brooklyn, Ward Beecher, presided and where lining out was used.

At the roll of the drums the regiment, nine hundred stalwart men, was formed in a hollow square . . . At the desk sat Mr. Beecher, by his side Sat Prof. Raymond. . . . The benches were filled with ladies—mothers, wives, sweethearts and sisters of the soldiers. . . . [T]he drums ceased to roll. Mr. Beecher—All ready, Colonel Cross?—All ready, Sir. Mr. Beecher—Prof. Raymond will line out to you, my friends, the glorious words of The Army Hymn by Prof. Holmes and we will all sing it, line by line, to the tune of "Old Hundred." Whereupon Prof. Raymond, in a clear, loud voice, having first read, with all his power of elocution, the entire hymn, lined it out a la Baptist Deacon, and the whole regiment, led by their officers, sang with wonderful effect. . . . (*New York Times*, June 24, 1861)

In another setting a Confederate chaplain mentions the lining out of a hymn ("while lining a hymn") in such a way to make it sound quite normal, an everyday practice. (Bennett, 1877, p. 20). My sense is that lining out was considered unusual in the New York service where Mr. Raymond "lined it out a la Baptist Deacon," and may have been used because "The Army Hymn" was not available to the participants in written form.

There are a number of reports of regimental brass bands accompanying hymn singing in frequently outdoor camp church services. There is one report of a piano in the parlor of a home taken over by the army being used to accompany informal hymn singing (Smith, 1869, p. 412). A suitable accompanying instrument, like a melodeon (small reed organ), hauled in from a nearby community, was more likely available in longer encampments. Some regiments formed choirs that practiced regularly when possible and which performed anthems when scores were available or led soldier-congregations in singing. But these men had no need of accompaniment. Because of circumstances unaccompanied singing was the norm; and part singing is often reported.

There is no evidence that guitar, banjo, or fiddle were used in camp church services. These were instruments of the minstrel show or for the accompaniment of parlor songs. I am, however, of the belief that if there was an instrument, someone probably played a hymn tune on it. In fact I found a report of hymns being played "quite competently" by a fiddle player and another of hymns being played by a string band. These were informal situations, not organized prayer meetings or church services. If a reenactor feels inspired to use guitar or banjo to play or accompany a hymn tune, he or she should be aware that apparently these instruments were not used in organized church services.

Any of the methods of leading hymns described should be used by reenactors including organ (melodeon or piano) accompaniment as available, "raising the tune", or lining out.

¹ The performance of modern Primitive Baptists singing "O Sing to me of heaven," one of the hymns sung by soldiers may illustrate how lining out sounded. A video of this performance can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Zchl6cdngCk

Vocal Tone

Reports of singing in 18th and early 19th century America indicate a preference for what was sometimes described as harsh, sometimes as nasal. To reformers in the first half of the 19th century this kind of vocal tone was considered "uncultivated" and instruction in proper singing tone often appeared in singing-school tune books of the day.

A good example of the differences between those who favored cultivated vocal style and those who didn't care can be seen in the experience of Christiana Tillson, a Massachusetts Congregationalist who in 1822 attended a church service in the frontier town of Hillsboro, Illinois. As she entered, a preacher was leading the congregation in song. He raised the hymn "When I Can Read My Title Clear" by "reading the first two lines of the verse . . . with an indescribable nasal twang" Then the congregation sang the hymn to the tune 'Old Grimes' [or "Auld Lang Syne"]. In looking back on these meeting she recalled one impression: "that of intense disgust." (Allen, 1963)

Lowell Mason suggested that nasal singing should not exclude anyone from singing with the congregation. But with a bit of condescension he says that the presence of a nasal singer might "call for forbearance," and that it may be the duty of some to "do whatever circumstances allow for the removal of the cause of offense by suitable attempts at cultivation." (Mason, 1860, preface.) That singing with a nasal tone was common among white Protestants is seen in the report of William Allen, a musicologist who studied slave songs, when he says that singing among black people had changed and that it was "closely imitated from the white people, which is solemn, dull and nasal." (Allen, 1867, preface)

Despite attempts to eradicate nasal tone in the singing of congregational hymns, it appears to have been common practice, especially in rural area where most people lived in the mid 19th century. A Congregationalist soldier from Boston, whose church had long ago turned to "cultivated" singing, would no doubt have found himself in a prayer meeting with some Ohio Baptists who sang with a nasal twang, and may have reacted with "intense disgust." I'm going to guess, however, that nasal singers outnumbered singers who sang with a cultivated tone among Civil War soldiers especially in the South.

Tempo

Mid-19th century Americans sang hymns slowly by 21st century standards. In the preface to his *Sabbath Hymn and Tune Book* (Mason, 1860), Lowell Mason recommends that the tune OLD HUNDREDTH, the tune we use for the "Doxology," should take between 40 and 50 seconds to sing. This seems slow to me, as we would most likely sing this tune in the space of about 25 to 30 seconds. Lowell Mason is trying to speed things up. Unbelievably, he reports that "Old Hundredth has been often sung so slowly as to occupy *a minute and a half, or even more*, in its performance. (emphasis mine)" Try this for your own amazement. Some soldiers would have been used to singing hymns very slowly. Others may have come from congregations that had sped them up a bit. In general reenactors should consider taking hymns more slowly than in modern practice; maybe a lot slower.

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