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## The Life and Music of Merit Woodruff: An Early American Psalmist

During the years between 1770 and 1820, generally considered the “psalmody era” in early American music, about 300 American composers contributed over 5000 works to a burgeoning repertory of sacred music.<sup>1</sup> Some of these composers, like William Billings, Oliver Holden, and Daniel Read, were well known and widely published. Others, like Justin Morgan, Alexander Gillet, and Solomon Chandler, were perhaps less famous but still contributed some significant works to the psalmody repertory. Many others remained shadowy figures whose surnames are attached to a few tunes, but little else is known about them: composers like Wright, Merservey, Ives, and Adams. They published no tunebooks, nor were their pieces reprinted in collections that would gain them wider popularity.

Almost no one, save a historian deeply immersed in early American psalmody, will have heard of Merit Newton Woodruff.<sup>2</sup> He was almost unknown in his own day, and fate was not kind to him. However, considering his situation and the problems of acquiring a sound musical education in late eighteenth-century America, he composed some remarkable music. He is the embodiment of that anonymous rural talent, eulogized in Thomas Gray’s lines:

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.<sup>3</sup>

This brief introduction to Woodruff’s life and music will, I hope, lead to a greater interest in his music. But, more than that, it should call attention to the legion of almost unknown American psalmists of which Woodruff is a representative, some of whom composed fine music that rests undisturbed in dozens of tunebooks.

Tunebooks during the American Colonial-Federal era were published for various reasons, but mostly as commercial enterprises for use in singing schools. Some were printed in substantial quantities and sold over a wide area.<sup>4</sup> Others were issued in only a few hundred copies and limited to the compiler’s home district.<sup>5</sup> Some contained a wide variety of musical pieces by many composers.<sup>6</sup> Others were devoted to the music of just one man.<sup>7</sup> In almost every case, however, the composer or compiler hoped to gain financially from the publication’s sale. Tunebooks were also issued to meet the musical needs of particular congregations or denominations.<sup>8</sup> At least one was

published as an act of charity, its profits going to alleviate need.<sup>9</sup> There may also have been a few instances where the composer issued the work out of vanity, to see his name and music in print.<sup>10</sup> There is only one instance that I know of where a tunebook was published as a *tombeau*, a memorial to a composer who had died.<sup>11</sup> That work is Merit N. Woodruff's *Devotional Harmony*, published about 1801 in New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>12</sup>

*Devotional Harmony* contains forty compositions, all by Merit Woodruff. The book was published some year and a half after his death by his relatives and friends. It was prepared for the press by Asahel Benham, a well known Connecticut singing master.<sup>13</sup> Instead of the usual section of musical rudiments, the book begins with a preface describing the composer's short life and untimely death a few days past his nineteenth birthday. Also included are several examples of his literary efforts. The lack of a rudiments section clearly shows that the book was not intended for instruction. The ordering of the music is also unusual: pieces were placed in approximate chronological order by the date they were composed, thus allowing us to gauge the composer's stylistic progress. They show a composer who was enormously gifted and gave promise of contributing significantly to American psalmody. That he did not live to fulfill this promise is a tragedy of the first order for American music.

Without this tunebook, Merit Woodruff would be known by only two compositions, WATERTOWN and SINCERITY published in Asahel Benham's 1798 tunebook, *Social Harmony*.<sup>14</sup> He would have remained among those all but anonymous figures, mentioned above, who often reside unnoticed in American tunebooks. He would have appeared a minor and undistinguished contributor to the gathering stream that was American psalmody of the 1790s and early 1800s. Because of the tunebook and its prefatory biographical sketch of Woodruff, we have an outline of his life to accompany a significant number of his compositions, showing the depth and variety of his musical accomplishments.

Who then was this composer, so beloved by his relatives and friends that they would spend a considerable sum to have his music engraved and printed in his memory?<sup>15</sup> The tunebook's preface gives us almost all the information we have about him, so we'll allow it to speak for itself:

Mr. Merit N. Woodruff, the Author of the following compositions, was the son of Mr. Isaac Woodruff, of an ancient and respectable family in Milford, in the State of Connecticut, and was born in Watertown, Litchfield County, June 17, A.D. 1780. When about two years old he had the misfortune to lose his father, who died very suddenly of small-pox.<sup>16</sup> His widowed mother, surrounded by eight children, and living at a distance from school, could not possibly give our author, in his younger years, the advantages of even a country school; but he soon disclosed a genius capable of surmounting every disadvantage which his situation placed him under.—At the age of twelve years he had acquired considerable knowl-

edge of the English language, writing, composition, arithmetic, and musick, chiefly by his own unwearied application without the assistance of an instructor. His industry and desire of improving himself was so great that for hours he would sit in some solitary place and read or compose by moonlight. In this manner he passed his life until the age of fourteen, when he had acquired his full growth, being more than six feet high and well-proportioned—at this period he composed several of the following tunes. ([tunebook footnote] The Tunes, being dated, are placed nearly in the order in which they were composed.)

His mind seemed formed above the follies of childhood and the levities of youth—modest, thoughtful, and obliging; his acquaintance was sought for by the friends of science, and his conduct considered as a model for those of his age. When arrived at the age of eighteen he entered himself as a clerk in the store of Messrs. Cutler and Smith, where his fidelity and attention to business gained him the friendship and confidence of his employers and the esteem of their customers. He was from his childhood excessively fond of Musick and employed his leisure hours in practicing or composing until the 26th [of] June, 1799, when going to a small pond to bathe, not being a swimmer, he unfortunately waded beyond his depth and instantly sunk to the bottom, and although raised in eight or ten minutes, and every effort of medical assistance made for his recovery, his life was gone forever.

Thus lived and died Merit N. Woodruff, who but a short time before his death had as fair a prospect of long life and usefulness as any young man of his age.

It is thought proper to give this plain narrative of the life and death of this amiable young man, for the gratification of his friends; for the consideration of the rising generation, and as an apology for publishing the following compositions, as it will sufficiently account for any inaccuracies in the same.

While the tone of the biographical sketch is laudatory, not unlike a funeral eulogy, it seems entirely credible. Merit Woodruff was apparently a remarkable young man, whose mental powers were well above the ordinary, and whose determination to improve himself through self-study was beginning to gain him recognition. He was born and lived his whole life in a small, western Connecticut town, about mid way between Hartford and New Haven. Even today, Watertown is far from being a major center of population.<sup>17</sup> The youngest of eight children, he probably would have had sufficient help with chores from brothers and sisters to permit him leisure time for reading, writing, and musical composition. Undoubtedly the family encouraged his efforts. His entry into the merchant's trade at the age of eighteen is consistent with his personality, social status, and educational attainments. While he may have had little formal schooling, he probably received support from someone who was well educated, perhaps the local minister.<sup>18</sup> The books he must have studied to reach his high level of intellectual achievement would not normally have been found in a rural home.<sup>19</sup>

A glimpse of Woodruff's intellectual prowess is provided by a poem he wrote shortly before his death. Typically, one would expect a young, self-educated, rural poet to express himself in the forms and styles likely to be most familiar to him, such as hymns, like those of Isaac Watts, cast in one of the traditional meters of English sacred verse. He had, after all, set some of these texts to the music he composed and must have sung many of them at Sunday worship services. However, his poem printed in the tunebook is in iambic pentameter and blank verse, showing a good command of language, thought, and poetic structure, and an unhackneyed mode of expression. This is the erudite poetic style of Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Young, not the popular style of a Watts, Wesley, or Tate.

Long has the rabble been to me my bliss,  
 And long may I regret it—sure I shall;  
 But now may I resolve and solemnly  
 Declare, that ever after now, my free  
 Unchained leisure hours shall be improv'd  
 In fixing in my heart the chosen part  
 To act through life.—There seems to be throughout  
 Fit characters, for every genius, so  
 That none can tax our author with a fault,  
 Or say with truth that partial aim inverts  
 To good of one, another's luckless ruin—  
 To you it seems our author lavished  
 His noblest talent—that of speaking peace  
 To all benighted souls—O heaven belov'd  
 And highly favour'd—shed on me one glimpse  
 Of your all saving rays, and bless me.—  
 How fitly one can act a part at ease,  
 If fitly chosen and congenial to  
 His nature—now myself I stare at, but  
 I pray that Jove may tenderly direct  
 Me, all my doings order, and my choice  
 Point out—It is a thorny road whereon  
 I tread, encompass'd about with briars,  
 Yet I direct my solemn steps along  
 The grateful maze that leads to heaven's gate.

The poem is introspective and self-searching, full of high aspirations and noble intentions, and replete with Christian and Classical allusions. It seems to express exactly the sort of altruistic thoughts a serious, sensitive, intelligent teenager, with a distinct gift for poetic self-expression, might set down. Woodruff shows a good understanding of poetical structure and expression: thoughts are not confined by line lengths, and caesuras occur at various points mid line giving an easy and natural flow to the verse.

Turning to the tunebook itself, we find it typical of its time and place. An end-opener, approximately 5 by 8 inches, consisting of 60 pages, it was

printed from engraved copper plates. Although no craftsman signed his name to the work, the style resembles that of Clement Beecher, an engraver and silversmith living in Berlin, Connecticut.<sup>20</sup> Beecher had engraved Asahel Benham's *Social Harmony*, and, considering Benham's close connection with Woodruff's *Devotional Harmony*, Beecher seems a reasonable choice as the engraver of this tunebook. The engraving is neatly done, and, although a few errors exist in the work, none is so egregious as to distort the musical setting.

We do not know how many compositions Woodruff may have composed in his nineteen years, but *Devotional Harmony* does not contain all his music, since the two pieces, mentioned above, published in Benham's *Social Harmony*, do not appear in Woodruff's tunebook.<sup>21</sup> Benham's publishing Woodruff's music in his own tunebook and his overseeing of the production of *Devotional Harmony* suggests a relationship between them, probably student and teacher. However diligently Woodruff may have studied on his own, he hardly could have mastered the elements of musical composition without some assistance and criticism from an experienced composer. Benham (1754-1803) was in the right place to supply both. A well-known singing master working in the western part of Connecticut and Massachusetts, he compiled *The Federal Harmony* in 1790, which went through six editions by 1796.<sup>22</sup> Benham himself was the composer of several tunes, popular in the late 1780s and early 1790s, including BRANFORD, TRUMBULL and DEATH'S ALARM. Indeed, several points of stylistic similarity between Benham's and Woodruff's music draw them closer, including a fondness for the dotted-eighth, sixteenth, eighth, eighth rhythmic figure and the use of staggered repetition in the fusing tune.<sup>23</sup> In preparing Woodruff's tunebook for the press, Benham may have made some improvements in the music, but given its overall stylistic consistency and sense of progression, major changes seem unlikely.

The forty tunes in *Devotional Harmony* plus the two in *Social Harmony* give Woodruff a fairly substantial catalog of works, one that would place him among the more prolific American psalmodists, even if he had lived much longer than nineteen years. Among these works, two forms predominate: the fusing-tune and the tune with extension.<sup>24</sup> Both are strophic settings of poetry. The former, extremely popular in rural Connecticut and Massachusetts during the 1780-1800 period, features at least one section in which the voices enter individually, one after another, declaiming the text at different times, causing a verbal conflict. In the latter, the text is sung simultaneously in all voices, but the tune is expanded beyond its normal length by using melismas or word repetition. Eighteen of Woodruff's pieces are fusing-tunes; seventeen are tunes with extension. A distinction that can be made in the fusing-tune is whether the fusing section forms an integral and inseparable part of the structure, or whether it is a detachable contrapuntal coda that could be omitted if the singers desired. Psalmodists often preferred one type to another: William Billings, for example, wrote mostly the detachable type—the so-called fusing chorus—while Daniel Read, whose popularity and influence was wide-spread

in western Connecticut, preferred the integrated form. Woodruff seems also to have preferred the integrated fusing-tune, with two-thirds of his fuges being of that kind. The seven remaining pieces in Woodruff's catalog are four plain tunes, unelaborated settings of one stanza of text, and three set pieces, through-composed settings of poetical texts.

The three set pieces—THESSALY, COME LORD JESUS, and NEW YEARS THOUGHT—are the largest works in the tunebook and make their appearance only in its second half. The first two are settings of poetry by Isaac Watts in which the moods and gestures of the music are closely aligned with the message and imagery of the text. They feature a variety of textures, rhythms, and attempts at word-painting and show Woodruff expanding both his musical means and techniques of expression. At 194 measures, NEW YEARS THOUGHT is by far the longest setting in the collection, over twice the length of its nearest rival. A through-composed setting of 48 lines of iambic pentameter verse, it is set for only two voices—tenor and bass.<sup>25</sup> Although impressive for the work of a teenaged composer, the setting points up a weakness in Woodruff's technique. It is cast entirely in D major, without any attempt to modulate even to closely related keys like B minor and G and A major. The lack of modulation in hymn- or fusing-tunes may not be considered a flaw, since their brevity makes the expressive use of other key centers somewhat tenuous. However, in a lengthy, multisectional work, like NEW YEARS THOUGHT, the lack of key change deprives the music of an element of variety and interest that can contribute much to an effective setting and shows that, as a composer, Merit Woodruff still had room for growth.<sup>26</sup>

Absent from the published pieces by Woodruff is the anthem, a through-composed setting of a prose text, usually of biblical origin. We do not know if Woodruff composed any anthems, but none were published by Benham. Anthems posed substantial challenges to the American psalmodist, since their prose texts with irregular verbal accents denied him the compositional aids inherent in metrical verse.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, since anthems were pieces usually performed only on special occasions, such as on Thanksgiving and Fast Day, or at funerals and ordinations, they were not in great demand by singers.<sup>28</sup> The lack of an anthem may have been a matter of practical choice: to allow more space for serviceable pieces. Although *Devotional Harmony* was a memorial volume, it seems also to have been intended as a useful one.

Another aspect of the repertory of *Devotional Harmony* that suggests a utilitarian purpose is its array of poetical meters. While tunes were customarily published with an underlaid text, those words were not necessarily sung when the piece was performed. Text substitution was a common practice of the day. In order to sing the variety of religious verse available in most psalm and hymn collections, tunes in about a dozen different metrical designs were necessary. Tunebook compilers were careful to include a good selection of the three primary poetical meters, Common Meter, Long Meter, and Short Meter, along with one or two tunes in each of a half-dozen or more so-called Particu-

lar Meters.<sup>29</sup> *Devotional Harmony* shows an unexpected balance among the poetic meters suggesting that Benham, when making a selection from Woodruff's pieces, kept this feature in mind. As in most tunebooks, Common Meter tunes are the most prevalent with twelve, followed by Long Meter with nine, and Short Meter with three. Each is spread sufficiently among major and minor keys to allow the performers to match the mood and meter of poem and music. The sixteen Particular Meter tunes are divided among eleven different metrical patterns, some showing Woodruff's attraction to meters more common to Methodist than Congregational hymnody.<sup>30</sup> Although some common Particular Meters are missing, most are present, and *Devotional Harmony* could have provided music for singing most of the psalms and hymns of Isaac Watts, the psalms of Tate and Brady, and the hymns of Wesley and Whitefield in the church, singing school, musical society, or home.

In a tunebook where the pieces are arranged in approximate chronological order, one would expect to find a growth in the composer's technical facility and musical imagination as the pieces progress. This is generally what seems to happen. The pieces at the front of the tunebook are, on the whole, shorter and musically less developed than those appearing later. The tunes in the first third of the tunebook, with one exception, average about twenty measures in length, are mostly plain tunes or tunes with extension, and are usually set in keys no more complex than one sharp or one flat. In the latter two thirds, the average tune length increases to over thirty measures, the prevalent form is the fusing tune, and the music moves through more remote keys, including some unusual ones for psalmody—A-flat major, E major, B minor.<sup>31</sup> The later pieces display more complicated structures, for example, fusing-tunes with several fusing sections, tunes with extension that include expressive melismas, word repetition, and word painting, all seldom found in the earlier pieces. The impression one receives from an overview of Woodruff's music is of a vigorous young composer in the first bloom of his powers, bursting with ideas, and exploring to its limits the technical and expressive possibilities of the compositional system he inherited.

A closer look at three works from *Devotional Harmony* will exemplify Merit Woodruff as a composer. YOUTH is the first work in the collection and, presumably, among the earliest of Woodruff's compositions. Isaac Watts's hymn admonishing the youth of his day may have been positioned for its symbolic value, just as the biographical sketch was included "for the consideration of the rising generation."<sup>32</sup> Woodruff set the poem as a tune with extension, repeating the final text line to new music. He employed, as in all his pieces, the additive method of composition widely used by Anglo-American psalmists of the day.<sup>33</sup> The main melody was composed first, to which the bass was then added following rules of consonant counterpoint. The treble was then composed to harmonize and perhaps also to contrast with the tenor and bass, and, finally, the counter (or alto) was added to fill in missing chord tones. This method is similar to that used by Renaissance composers and gives

the music a sound more closely associated with the sixteenth century than the late eighteenth. YOUTH is set in A minor, but with the frequent use of the lowered seventh scale degree. The piece is cast in two musical periods, separated by a measure of rest. The first, consisting of two phrases, presents a somber, gently arching melody beginning and ending on the tonic. The second period shifts the tonality briefly to the relative major and presents a series of two-measure phrases, with greater rhythmic and melodic activity leading to the final cadence in the tonic key. The piece is competently crafted, with but a few minor contrapuntal errors, and similar to pieces composed by much older American psalmodists, but it is a significant accomplishment for a composer of only fourteen or fifteen years.

## YOUTH

Isaac Watts

Merit N. Woodruff

The musical score for 'YOUTH' is presented in five systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The lyrics are as follows:

- System 1: Now in the heat of youthful blood,
- System 2: Remember your creator God;
- System 3: Behold the months coming on,
- System 4: When you shall cry, My joys are gone.
- System 5: when you shall cry, My joys are gone.

Figure 1. YOUTH, Merit N. Woodruff



The second work, coming from the middle of the tunebook, shows a considerable advance over the first. CRADLE HYMN is a setting of two stanzas of Isaac Watts's lullaby from his *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*. While this was not a particularly popular text with psalmodists—only one other setting is found in the repertory—Woodruff's work is noteworthy in several ways. First, it is a fugging-tune. The idea of setting a lullaby as a fugging-tune is itself extraordinary, but this peculiarity is heightened by his handling of the fuge. Instead of the usual method of having the homophonic section come to a cadence and the fuge begin anew, the fugging section enters surreptitiously with the voices dropping out and reentering the texture. The fuge also ends

### CRADLE HYMN

Isaac Watts

Merit N. Woodruff

Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber Holy angels guard thy  
 bed; Heav'nly blessing without number Gently fall - ing  
 on thy head. Sleep my babe, sleep my babe thy  
 on thy head. Sleep my babe, thy food and  
 on thy head. Sleep my babe, sleep my babe, thy  
 on thy head Sleep my babe, thy food and  
 food and rai-ment, House and home thy friends pro- vide  
 rai-ment, House and home thy friends pro- vide, And with out thy care or pay-ment  
 food and rai-ment, House and home thy friends pro- vide,  
 rai-ment, House and home thy friends pro- vide, And with out thy care or pay-ment  
 And with - out thy care or pay-ment All thy wants are well sup-plied

Figure 2. CRADLE HYMN. Merit N. Woodruff

## SHEFFIELD

Isaac Watts

Merit N. Woodruff

Stand up, my soul, shake off thy fears. And guard the

gospel; ar-mour in March to the gate of

end-less joy. Where Je-sus went and claim'd his throne.

Hell and thy sins resist thy course. But

hell and sin are van-quish'd foes; Thy

Figure 3. SHEFFIELD, Merit N. Woodruff

in this uncharacteristic way. Normally, the verbal conflict between the voices is resolved by various means into a homophonic concluding phrase. In CRADLE HYMN the voices drop out until only the counter and bass sing the final phrase. After a beat of rest, all voices join afresh in the concluding homophonic section. The fugue is, perhaps, an attempt at word-painting the text. The work is in E minor, again with conspicuous use of the lowered seventh scale degree. The principal melody, in the tenor, is more wide-ranging and expressive than in the earlier piece, while the treble provides a more tuneful countermelody than before. The work would be a remarkable achievement for a psalmodist of any age, but Woodruff was perhaps only sixteen when he composed the piece.

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the cross, And

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the cross And sang the

Je sus nail'd them to the cross, And sang the tri umphs

sang, and &c

cross, And sang, and sang the tri umphs when he rose,

sang and &c.

when he rose, And &c.

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the cross, Thy Je sus nail'd them to the

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the cross, them to the

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the

Thy Je sus nail'd them to the

cross, Thy Je sus nail'd them to the cross, And sang the tri umphs when he rose.

Figure 3 continued

The final example comes from toward the end of the tunebook. SHEFFIELD is a setting of two stanzas from a hymn by Isaac Watts. At 51 measures, it is one of the longer pieces in the collection. Its location as well as its technical proficiency suggest that SHEFFIELD is one of the last pieces Woodruff composed before his death. It is a fusing-tune of the fusing-chorus type, with the music coming to a distinct cadence at the end of the first stanza. The section that follows has two fusing phrases, the first beginning in the bass voice, and the second, in contrast, beginning in the treble voice. The martial spirit of the text is reflected in the music by its major key, its wide-ranging melody, its sturdy, swinging gait, making use of the dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note rhythm on beat one of many measures, and the melodic and rhyth-

mic independence of the voices. The tenor melody, in particular, with its many short, expressive melismas, is challenging in both its vocal range and its intricate melodic detail.

Following Woodruff's death, his music was eclipsed but not immediately forgotten. Benham included four pieces—MONTVILLE, SINAI, WORSHIP, and FLORENCE—from *Devotional Harmony* in the 1801 edition of his *Social Harmony*. Two of these works, MONTVILLE and SINAI, were picked up later by William Smith in his *The Easy Instructor, Part II* (1803).<sup>34</sup> Another work, ROWLAND, reprinted by John Bushnell in his *The Musical Synopsis* (Northampton, 1807), seems to have come directly from *Devotional Harmony*. These were the final appearances of Woodruff's music in the psalmody repertory.

Had Woodruff lived to the biblical three-score and ten years, there is no way to tell if he would have fulfilled the promise of his early works. Other promising young psalmodists seem to have stopped composing as they grew older and the pressures of a family and an occupation increased.<sup>35</sup> This might have happened to Woodruff. There is also no way to gauge his reaction to the reform movement that all but swept American psalmody from the sanctuaries only a decade or so after his death.<sup>36</sup> He might have adapted to its requirements by becoming a "scientific" musician,<sup>37</sup> like Lowell Mason, or pursued a creative outlet in poetry instead of music. He clearly had talent in both areas. But he never really got the chance. Merit Woodruff, a gifted, amiable, serious young man, whose music shows a distinct flair for expressive melody, a lively imagination, and a sense for the dramatic, was a young composer who died too soon.

## NOTES

1. These figures come from my database of compositions by American or supposed American psalmodists between the years 1770 and 1820. They generally agree with numbers given by Nym Cooke in his *American Psalmists in Contact and Collaboration* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1990), p.xxiii.

2. Woodruff's middle name was supplied from Katherine A. Pritchard, *Ancient Burying-Grounds of the Town of Waterbury, Connecticut* (Mattatuck Historical Society, 1917), p.243.

3. Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard," lines 55-56 from *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed. by H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (Oxford, 1966), p.39.

4. For example, *The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony*, (Worcester and Boston, 1786-1803) was issued in eight editions, numbering as close as can be ascertained about 3000 copies each, and sold throughout the eastern seaboard from Boston to at least Baltimore.

5. While there is often no way to tell exactly how many copies of most tunebooks were printed, a gauge may be the number of surviving copies. It can be argued that the more copies printed, the more were likely to survive. One of the rarer tunebooks that seems to have been limited to up-state New York, around the Albany area, was Nathaniel Billings's *The Republican Harmony* (Lansingburgh, 1795) which currently exists in only two copies. (Nathaniel Billings was apparently no direct relative of William Billings.)

6. Most tunebooks fit this description, for example, Andrew Law's *Select Harmony* (Farmington, CT, 1779) contains 65 compositions by at least 16 composers, both American and British.

7. Five of the six tunebooks of William Billings were devoted solely to his music. Other early single-composer tunebooks include Daniel Read's *The American Singing Book* (New Haven, 1785), Jacob French's *New American Harmony* (Boston, 1789), and Abraham Wood's *Divine Songs* (Boston, 1789).

8. The music in most tunebooks was shared by the various denominations. Congregationalists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and others apparently used many of the same hymns and could employ the same hymn-tunes for singing them. Some denominations, however, had special musical needs. For example, John Aitken's *A Compilation of the Litanies and Vesper Hymns and Anthems* (Philadelphia, 1787) was compiled for use in the Catholic Church. At least part of William Billings's *The Suffolk Harmony* (Boston, 1786) may have been published for use by the Universalist Church. Other tunebooks were compiled particularly for use by Baptist churches or by the Methodists. In the early 1800s, several Boston churches issued collections for use in their congregations, including First Church (1805), Trinity Church (1808), Brattle Street Church, and West Church (both 1810).

9. The publication of William Billings's *The Continental Harmony* (Boston, 1794) was sponsored by a committee of Boston choristers in order to alleviate the composer's severe financial plight.

10. Most tunebooks were published by subscription, whereby a group of interested people promised to purchase books after publication and advanced a portion of the cost in order to secure a reduced price. The printer of the tunebook rarely assumed any financial risk in its production. While it is tenuous to impute specific motives to composers and compilers without direct evidence, one can suggest that a likely candidate for a vanity publication is Samuel Thomson's *The Columbian Harmony* (Dedham, 1810). The tunebook, containing only 29 compositions, all by Thomson, is a slight, 40-page work, with only a perfunctory theoretical introduction. While he may have hoped to gain financially from the publication of his music, Thomson appears to have published the work to have his music available for singing perhaps in his local church and in any singing schools he may have taught. Thomson himself is unknown except for this tunebook. His music does not appear in any earlier or later compilation.

11. Another type of musical memorial was published in Boston in 1800 to commemorate the death on 14 December 1799 of George Washington. *Sacred Dirges, Hymns, and Anthems*, published anonymously but usually attributed to Oliver Holden, contains nine compositions.

12. Allen Britton, Irving Lowens, and Richard Crawford, *American Sacred Music Imprints, 1698-1810* (Worcester, 1990), No.530, lists only three extant copies at the Connecticut Historical Society, Yale University, and the American Antiquarian Society. It is reproduced in the Readex Corporation's Early American Imprints series as Evans number 39140.

13. For more information on Benham, see Frank Metcalf, *American Writers and Compilers of Sacred Music* (New York, 1967, repr. of 1925 ed.), p.90-93. Woodruff is mentioned by Metcalf only in connection with Benham.

14. For a complete list of Woodruff's compositions, see the appendix at the end of this article.

15. The exact cost of the publication is unknown, but even if Benham contributed his editorial services gratis, the cost of engraving the music, printing the plates, and binding the sheets into a book must have been fairly substantial. Vinson C. Bushnell estimated the cost to Daniel Read of publishing 500 copies of Read's *The Columbian Harmonist No.1* (New Haven, 1793), a slightly smaller tunebook than Woodruff's, at \$148.50. Using Bushnell's formula to gauge the inflation factor between 1793 and 1978, that amount would be about \$3000 in 1978 dollars. Woodruff's tunebook was probably not issued in that quantity (perhaps 200 copies at most), so the cost of printing and binding would be less, but for Woodruff's larger size, the cost of copper plate and engraving, the most expensive items, would be more. On this basis, a total cost of \$100 (\$2000 in 1978 dollars) does not seem out of line for Woodruff's tunebook. See Vinson C. Bushnell, *Daniel Read of New Haven (1757-1836): The Man and His Musical Activities* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1978), p.205-211.

16. Pritchard, *Ancient Burying-Grounds*, p.231, lists Isaac Woodruff's date of death as March 31, 1782, at the age of 35.

17. Watertown was formed of two parishes in the town of Waterbury which were joined in 1780. "Previous to 1780, Westbury and Northbury were independent ecclesiastical societies only. It was ... proposed to form them into a district township. In May [1780] ... the societies ... were incorporated, receiving the name of Watertown." (Henry Bronson, *The History of Waterbury, Connecticut* [Waterbury, 1858], p.275). Bronson (p.566) gives the 1790 population of Watertown as 3170, but by 1800 it had fallen to 1615. In the 1990 U.S. census, Watertown is listed as having fewer than 6000 people. It is overshadowed by neighboring Waterbury, which has a population of over 100,000.

18. Two churches served the Watertown population during Woodruff's life: an Episcopal church, with Rev. Chauncey Pringle (1753-1833) as pastor, and a Presbyterian church, with Uriel Gridley (1762-1820) as pastor. Pringle, a 1776 graduate of Yale College, began his ministry in Watertown in 1788 and served there until at least 1808. Gridley, 1783 graduate of Yale College, became a colleague pastor of the Presbyterian church in 1784 with Rev. John Trumbull and took over the pastorate in 1787 when the latter died. We do not know if Woodruff actually studied with Pringle or Gridley, but the clergy often supplemented their income by tutoring students in preparation for college entrance. ("Many of the early ministers in Litchfield County were teachers of young men preparing for college or a professional life. Frequently there would be several students boarding in the family." Arthur Goodenough, *The Clergy of Litchfield County* [Litchfield, CT, 1909], p.24) In any case, it seems likely that Pringle or Gridley wrote the biographical sketch of Woodruff published in the tunebook. See Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (New York, 1907), v.4, p.275-276. See also the biographical note to Chauncey Pringle, *Connecticut Towns: Watertown in 1801* (Acorn Club of Connecticut, 1961), p.[28]. My thanks to Marie Lamoreaux of the American Antiquarian Society for supplying this information.

19. The number and type of books found in a typical New-England home varied, of course, with the location and status of the family. Upper class, urban homes were likely to have more books than lower class, rural ones. In most cases, at least two books could be found in nearly every household: the Bible and a collection of metrical psalms and hymns. These might be supplemented with various volumes on religion, politics, history, and husbandry as appealed to the interests and needs of the family. They rarely included works of high literary art. See Louis B. Wright, "Books, Libraries, and Learning," in his *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies* (New York, 1957), p.126-153.

20. Britton, Lowens, and Crawford, *American Sacred Music Imprints*, p.616. They also suggest that the New Haven engraver, Amos Doolittle, may have done some plates.

21. The probability that Woodruff composed more tunes than were published is supported by two facts: two of his published pieces did not appear in *Devotional Harmony* and, as will be discussed later, the poetic meters of the music are so well balanced. They seem to point to the existence of a larger group of settings from which Benham chose the forty items in the tunebook.

22. Britton, Lowens, and Crawford, *American Sacred Music Imprints*, Nos. 89-94. Benham's *Federal Harmony* is perhaps best known for introducing the music of Justin Morgan into the repertory. Several of Morgan's pieces, including MONTGOMERY, HUNTINGTON, and JUDGEMENT ANTHEM, gained considerable popularity over the next two decades.

23. Staggered repetition in the fuge of the fuge-tune is a device found mostly in the music of composers active in the western parts of Connecticut and Massachusetts. Instead of all voices beginning the repeat of the fuge at its outset, where the voices would enter again individually, the composer sets the repeat sign at the beginning and somewhere toward the end of each fugal voice. When the line is repeated, none of the initial rests are included; it starts with the first note of its fugal entry, maintaining thereby a continuous four-part counterpoint. Several tunes by Benham and Woodruff employ the device.

24. The term "tune with extension" was coined by Richard Crawford in his *Andrew Law, American Psalmist* (Evanston, 1968), p.16, to distinguish between plain, syllabic settings of a text and more elaborate settings where "some portion of the text either is repeated to new music or is stretched so that the text does not, as in the plain tune, provide the sole basis of the composition's musical form." Other musical forms discussed here use terms widely familiar in Woodruff's day.

25. The source of the poetry is unlocated, and it may be Woodruff's own. His ability to work in this meter has already been demonstrated, and the poem's subject—a meditation on the passage of time and death—shows an introspective focus similar to the prefatory poem discussed earlier. The two-part setting, giving only the main melody and bass, may have been an editorial emendation by Benham. Several fugal passages in the piece are presented in such a way as to suggest that the setting was originally in four parts, but to save space the editor omitted the accompanying treble and counter. It was rare but not unusual for a four-part piece to be published in two parts -- melody and bass--in some tunebooks of the era.

26. The absence of modulation in eighteenth-century America anthems and set pieces is not unusual; some, like Billings's *Anthem for Easter*, achieved considerable popularity without changing key. However, the composer often changed the musical mode even if not the tonic pitch, allowing for a more poignant expression of sadness or penitence. That Woodruff does not even change moods in a piece that sings of aging and death suggests that he was not yet sensitive to this expressive possibility and had not mastered the craft of key change.

27. The regular meter and line length of poetry permitted the composer easily to align musical and textual accents and gauge the regular progression of cadences in his melody. With prose, on the other hand, with its irregular accents and line lengths, the composer could not rely upon the regularity of the text to assist him. Thus, even some of the best American psalmodists—William Billings and Daniel Read, for example—had considerable problems with setting prose texts early in their careers.

28. The caption title of many anthems indicate their special purpose: "Anthem for Fast Day," "Anthem for Thanksgiving," "Funeral Anthem," &c. In the normal course of the Sunday services in the eighteenth-century New-England church, there was apparently no place for a piece of elaborate music sung only by a choir. Indeed, the typical service of public worship, handed down from the Puritan church of the seventeenth century, excluded any singing that was not performed by the whole congregation. Only in the latter part of the eighteenth-century was the choir again permitted a place in the church, and then often reluctantly by the minister. Thus the place of the anthem in the church service was not regularly established until into the nineteenth century, when Puritan traditions had declined sufficiently to permit acceptance of previously proscribed activities. See Ralph T. Daniel, *The Anthem in New England Before 1800* (Evanston, 1966), p.37-39.

29. The number of syllables per line distinguished the poetic meters. Common Meter had four lines of 8.6.8.6. syllables in iambic meter; Long Meter, four lines of 8.8.8.8. syllables; and Short Meter, four lines of 6.6.8.6 syllables, both in the same meter. The designation Particular Meter (sometimes called Peculiar Meter) included all other line lengths and accent patterns and was not usually distinguished further.

30. Several tunes are set in 7.7.7.7 and 8.7.8.7 meters, commonly found in the hymns of Wesley and other poets in the Methodist orbit. These meters are not found in the metrical psalms and hymns Isaac Watts or the psalms of Nicholas Brady and Nahum Tate, the most common text sources for Congregational church hymnody.

31. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the most common keys in psalmody are C major and A minor. Keys, however, were chosen more often to keep the principal melody within the compass of the treble staff than for musical or aesthetic reasons. While key signatures of more than three sharps or flats are sometimes found, the composer normally employed fewer, since the six simpler signatures plus C major cover keys on all of the lines and spaces of the staff. Thus, a psalmodist desiring to pitch a major key on A would usually chose three sharps rather than four flats. An exception to this is B minor, which is one of the rarer key centers in psalmody. Similarly, B-flat minor is almost never found.

32. See the last paragraph of the biographical sketch quoted above.

33. For a discussion of the compositional method employed by early American psalmodists, see *The Complete Works of William Billings* (Boston, 1977-90), v.3, p.xxxix-xli.

34. This tunebook, published near Trenton, NJ, should not be confused with its more famous and popular sibling, *The Easy Instructor*, first issued in Philadelphia in 1801 and compiled jointly by William Little and William Smith. The same William Smith was probably involved with both tunebooks, but other than the title and the use of shaped notes, there was little connection between

them. See Irving Lowens, "*The Easy Instructor (1798-1831): A History and Bibliography of the First Shape-Note Tune-Book*," *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York, 1964), p.128-129.

35. For example, Bartholomew Brown (1772-1854) and Nahum Mitchell (1769-1853), both active composers of psalmody in eastern Massachusetts during the 1790s, collaborated with Benjamin Holt to compile *Columbian and European Harmony* (Boston, 1802; 2d ed., 1804). They seem to have composed or compiled little, if anything, after this tunebook appeared. Brown, a lawyer, continued his interest in sacred music through the Boston Handel and Haydn Society (he was its president in 1836-1837). Mitchell, later a well-known Massachusetts politician and jurist, also maintained a connection with psalmody through active participation in Boston's Brattle Street Church. See Britton, Lowens, and Crawford, *American Sacred Music Imprints*, p.200, and Metcalf, *American Writers*, p.167-171.

36. For a fuller discussion of the reform movement, see Richard Crawford, "Ancient Music and the Europeanizing of American Psalmody, 1800-1810," in *A Celebration of American Music: Words and Music in Honor of H. Wiley Hitchcock*, ed. by R. Crawford, R.A. Lott, and C.J. Oja. (Ann Arbor, 1990), p.225-255.

37. The term, "scientific musician," was widely used during the 1810-1840 period to identify those church musicians who understood and practiced "correct" harmony and composed music with "approved" taste. It was popularly believed that music was both a science and an art. As a science, it followed certain natural laws embodied in thoroughbass harmonic procedures, but as an art, it had the inexplicable capacity to move human emotions. The term was applied to distinguish the younger, reform-minded musicians from the older, largely self-trained American psalmodists. See Samuel Worcester, *An Address on Sacred Music* (Boston, 1811), p.4, for a contemporary discussion of the idea. Worcester, pastor of a Congregational church in Salem, Massachusetts, was a leader in the reform movement in psalmody.



## THE COMPOSITIONS OF MERIT N. WOODRUFF IN TUNEBOOK ORDER

## DEVOTIONAL HARMONY (1801)

Tunename	Lgth	Key	Type	P.Meter	Collection	First line	(Source)
Youth	21m.	Am	X	LM	Woodruff DH, p.9	Now in the heat of youthful blood	(Watts, Hymns I, #91)
Beaufort	13m.	Am	P	CM	Woodruff DH, p.9	How vile are all things here below	(Watts, Hymns II, #48)
Amelia	58m.	Am	XA	LM	Woodruff DH, p.10	Lord, I am vile, conceiv'd in sin	(Watts, Psalm 51, Pt.2, v.1-3)
Oronoke	18m.	Dm	X	SM	Woodruff DH, p.11	Our days are as the grass	(Watts, Psalm 103, Pt.2, v.7)
Pomfret	24m.	Am	FI	8.8.8.8.8.	Woodruff DH, p.12	Think, mighty God, on feeble man	(Watts, Psalm 89, v.1)
Tolland	26m.	Am	X	CM	Woodruff DH, p.13	Teach me the measure of my days	(Watts, Psalm 39, Pt.2, v.1-2)
Whitfield	23m.	AM	FI	6.6.4.6.6.4.	Woodruff DH, p.14	Come thou, almighty king	(John Cennick)
Walsal	16m.	Em	X	CM	Woodruff DH, p.15	Come, holy spirit, heav'nly dove	(Watts, Hymns II, #34, v.1)
Clio	20m.	GM	X	7.7.7.7.7.7.	Woodruff DH, p.15-16	Come to Jesus, come away	(Unlocated)
Swabia	15m.	GM	X	8.7.8.7.	Woodruff DH, p.16	Far above the glorious ceiling	(Unlocated)
Phantom	22m.	Am	PA	7.6.7.6.7.7.6.	Woodruff DH, p.17	Rise my soul and stretch thy wings	(Robert Seagrave)
Justification	23m.	Am	FI	SM	Woodruff DH, p.18	I shall behold the face	(Watts, Psalm 17, v.4-5)
Kensington	31m.	FM	X	7.7.7.7	Woodruff DH, p.19-20	Now begin the heav'nly theme	(John Langford)
Concord	24m.	GM	XA	7.7.7.7.D	Woodruff DH, p.20-21	Hail the day that saw him rise	(Charles Wesley)
Equity	26m.	GM	X	CM	Woodruff DH, p.22	Rise, great Redeemer, from thy seat	(Watts, Psalm 9, Pt.2, v.7-8)
Weymouth	21m.	GM	X	8.7.8.7.8.7.	Woodruff DH, p.23	Lo, he comes in clouds descending	(Charles Wesley)
Cradle Hymn	21m.	Em	FI	8.7.8.7.D	Woodruff DH, p.24	Hush my dear, lie still and slumber	(Watts, DMS, v.1-2)
Fluvanna	50m.	EM	FC	CM	Woodruff DH, p.25-26	The Lord descended from above	(Sternhold, Psalm 18, v.9-10)
Consolation	41m.	EM	XA	7.7.7.7.D	Woodruff DH, p.27	What good news the angels bring	(William Hammond)
Norway	28m.	AbM	FI	10.10.11.11.	Woodruff DH, p.28	O praise ye the Lord, prepare your glad voice	(T&B Psalm 149, v.1)
Rowland	36m.	GM	FC	CM	Woodruff DH, p.29-30	Lord, we have heard thy works of old	(Watts, Psalm 44, v.1-2)
					Bushnell MS		
Danvers	30m.	Em	FI	CM	Woodruff DH, p.30	Let Pharisees of high esteem	(Watts Hymns I, #133, v.1)
Captivity	31m.	EbM	FC	10.10.10.10.	Woodruff DH, p.32	Along the banks where Babel's current flows	(Barlow Psalm 137, v.1)
Hesperus	29m.	Am	FI	CM	Woodruff DH, p.33	My thoughts on awful subjects roll	(Watts, Hymns II, #2, v.1-2)
Wayn	25m.	GM	FI	HM	Woodruff DH, p.34	Upward I lift my eyes	(Watts, Psalm 121, v.1)
Eugenio	41m.	GM	X	10.10.10.10.	Woodruff DH, p.35-36	What is the blushing beauty of a skin	(Unlocated)
New Year's Thought	194m.	DM	S	10.10.10.10.	Woodruff DH, p.37-40	When in revolving course the glowing sun	(Unlocated)
Montville	19m.	Am	FI	CM	Benham SH, p.57	Oh, the sharp pangs of smarting pain	(Unlocated)
					Woodruff DH, p.41		
					Smith EI-II		

## THE COMPOSITIONS OF MERIT N. WOODRUFF IN TUNEBOOK ORDER, cont.

Tunename	Lgth	Key	Type	P.Meter	Collection	First line	(Source)
Sinai	34m.	CM	FC	LM	Benham SH, p.58 Woodruff DH	Lord, when thou didst ascend on high	(Watts, Psalm 68, v.1-2)
Worship	18m.	GM	FI	SM	Smith EI-II Benham SH, p.59 Woodruff DH	Let Israel bless the Lord	(Watts, Psalm 106, v.6)
Florence	32m.	FM	XA	LM	Benham SH, p.60 Woodruff DH, p.44	Sweet is the work, my God, my king	(Watts, Psalm 92, Pt.1, v.1-2)
Sunday Morning	32m.	DM	X	CM	Woodruff DH, p.45	Early, my God, without delay	(Watts, Psalm 63, v.1-2)
Submission	28m.	Bm	FC	CM	Woodruff DH, p.46	Vain are the hopes the sons of men	(Watts, Hymns I, #94, v.1-2)
Phalia	47m.	Am	FC	CM	Woodruff DH, p.47-48	In pleasure's flow'ry path to stray	(Unlocated)
Zenith	38m.	CM	FI	LM	Woodruff DH, p.48-49	Awake, my soul, to joyful lays	(Samuel Medley)
Thessaly	58m.	FM	S	LM	Woodruff DH, p.50-52	Now let the Lord, my saviour, smile	(Watts, Hymns II, #50, v.1-3, 6)
Sheffield	51m.	DM	FC	LM	Woodruff DH, p.53-4	Stand up, my soul, shake off thy fears	(Watts Hymns II, #77, v.1-2)
Newtown	39m.	GM	X	LM	Woodruff DH, p.55-56	People and realms of every tongue	(Watts, Psalm 72, v.5-6)
Come Lord Jesus	88m.	GM	S	LM	Woodruff DH, p.56	Now let our cheerful eyes survey	(Watts H.I., "Come Lord Jesus" v.8-12)
Cytheria	30m.	FM	P	10.10.10.10.10.11.11.	WoodruffDH, p.60	The God of glory sends his summons forth	(Watts, Psalm 50, v.1)
<b>FROM BENHAM'S SOCIAL HARMONY (1798)</b>							
Watertown	27m.	FM	X	SM	Benham SH, p.24	Let earth and ocean know	(Watts, Psalm 149, v.7-8)
Sincerity	15m.	DM	P	CM	Benham SH, p.47	My never ceasing song shall show	(Watts, Psalm 89, v.1)

FC = Fuging Chorus  
 FI = Integrated Fuging Tune  
 P = Plain Tune  
 PA = Antiphonal Plain Tune

S = Set Piece  
 X = Tune with extension  
 XA = Antiphonal Tune with extension

## ABBREVIATIONS

CM = Common Meter (8.6.8.6.)  
 HM = Hallelujah Meter (6.6.6.6.8.8.)  
 LM = Long Meter (8.8.8.8.)  
 SM = Short Meter (6.6.8.6.)

M = major key  
 m = minor key