

## HOMEMADE MUSIC: How the Music and Instruments of Your Ancestors are Relevant to Family History Research

Prepared and Presented by Jean Wilcox Hibben – PhD, MA, CG<sup>sm</sup>; Riverside County, CA;  
home: 951-780-1799, cell: 909-268-5326; email: <jean@circlemending.org>  
blog: <www.circlemending.blogspot.com>; website: <www.circlemending.org>

CG & Certified Genealogist are service marks of the Board for Certification of Genealogists, used under license, and the board name is registered in the US Patent & Trademark Office

© 2010, 2013, J. W. Hibben  
(no reproduction without written permission)

### Purpose of Music and Instruments

- Worship
- Instruction
  - History
  - Warnings
- Entertainment – Play Party
- Lullabies
- Chaperoning
- Work songs

### Types of Instruments

- Band (e.g., horns – trumpet, tuba, etc.; percussion – drums; reed – oboe, saxophone, etc.)
- Orchestra (some of the above plus string – violin, viola, cello, etc.; piano)
- Parlor (e.g., harpsichord, piano-forte, melodeon, organ, etc.)
- Portable (e.g., banjo, guitar, zither, recorder, mandolin, harmonica, jaw harp, etc.)

### Regional Instruments

Some of the above are more common in some areas of the country than in others. When people migrated, they took their instruments with them.

### Finding What Ancestors Owned

- Items in the estates
  - Musical instruments
  - Song books/sheet music
  - Music instruction books
- Ephemera
  - Programs
  - Awards
- Diaries/Journals
- Wills (inventories)
- Tax lists
- Census records (for music-related occupations)
- Photographs

#### CHALLENGE:

Did your ancestor(s) play instruments, have musical professions, or spend time singing or enjoying concerts? Using the checklist here, see what you can find out.

- Family Stories
- Death certificates (for music-related occupations)

### **The Folk Process**

Songs brought over from “the old country” are often changed to fit the audience, singer, and circumstances in the new country. Learning the old, as well as the new, versions will give insight into the values, interests, and cultural nuances of your ancestors.

### **Finding songs**

Know part of a song but can't find the title or the lyrics? Try “Googling” some of the words, contained in quotation marks (“I see by your outfit”). If you know the title but can't find the lyrics, “Google” part of the title (a version on the Internet may not use the same wording that you remember) and the word “lyrics” (“Streets of”, lyrics). Try different combinations, options, etc. Even the most obscure songs are finding their way to the Internet.

### **Using the Information**

Once you find information about the music of your ancestors' culture(s), include some of that data in your explanation of your heritage. Even if your forebears did not play instruments, sing songs, or have music in their personal backgrounds, it was part of the lives of those in the community. If the village had a Christmas festival, your ancestor probably attended and may have sung the holiday songs that were popular in that time and place; if there was a band shell in the home town, your multi-great-grandparents probably spent the Fourth of July listening to the patriotic songs that were common then; if your ancestors came from the hills of Virginia, there is a good chance that they attended (and maybe played and sang at) the gatherings in their respective communities. Learn about these elements and include them in the “notes” about the ancestor or his/her culture.

### **Warning**

If you are fortunate enough to have copies of the song sheets or music books of your ancestors, treat them as you would any precious books: keep them in a temperature-controlled environment (away from excessive heat, moisture, bugs, etc.). If you are blessed to have instruments of your ancestors (even instruments constructed in the last year), do not store them in garages, attics, basements, or other locations where the temperature and humidity are extreme. Wooden instruments thrive when exposed to slight moisture (not a rain forest, but a humidifier if you are in a dry climate – individual, instrument humidifiers can be purchased for a nominal cost and kept with the instrument in the case). Fragile instruments (this includes most of them) should be kept in cases (the original cases may have fallen apart and are often made of a heavy cardboard; consider purchasing modern cases that will provide protection from the elements and other potential dangers).

### **Internet Music Sources (very limited list)**

America Singing. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amsshtml/amsshhome.html>  
 Celtic MP3s Music Magazine. <http://celticmp3s.com/>  
 Children's Music Web. <http://www.childrensmusic.org/>  
 Civil War Music. <http://www.civilwarmusic.net/>

Cowboy Music Roundup. <http://www.cowboymusicroundup.com/>  
Jewish Music WebCenter. <http://www.jmwc.org/>  
The Mudcat Café. <http://www.mudcat.org/>  
Music from 1800-1860. <http://www.pdmusic.org/1800s.html>  
Name That Hymn. <http://www.namethathymn.com/>  
Popular Songs in American History. <http://www.contemplator.com/america/>  
Sheet Music Web. <http://sheetmusicweb.com/>  
What is Celtic Music? <http://www.standingstones.com/celtmusic.html>

## For Further Reading

- Blood-Patterson. *Rise Up Singing*. Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Publications, 1988.
- Bohlman, Philip V. *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988.
- Botkin, B. A. (Ed.). *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions of the People*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1944.
- Charlton, James, & Gilson, Barbara, (eds). *A Christmas Treasury of Yuletide Stories & Poems*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2002.
- Collins, Ace. *Stories behind the Best Loved Songs of Christmas*, Philadelphia: Running Press, 2001.
- Crawford, Richard (compiler). *The Civil War Songbook: Complete Original Sheet Music for 37 Songs*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977.
- Curtis-Burlin, Natalie. *Negro Folk-Songs: The Hampton Series Books I-IV, Complete*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001.
- Davidson, Karen Lynn. *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988.
- Dorson, Richard M. *American Folklore*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977.
- Erbsen, Wayne. *Railroad Fever: Songs, Jokes & Train Lore*. Asheville, NC: Native Ground Music, Inc., 1998.
- . *Rousing Songs and True Tales of the Civil War*. Asheville, NC: Native Ground Music, Inc., 1999.
- . *Singing Rails: Railroadin' Songs, Jokes & Stories*. Asheville, NC: Native Ground Music, Inc., 1997.
- Grant, George, & Wilbur, Gregory. *Christmas Spirit: The Joyous Stories, Carols, Feasts, and Traditions of the Season*, New York: Gramercy Books, 1999.
- Lingenfelter, Richard E., & Dwyer, Richard A. *Songs of the American West*. Berkeley, CA: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1968.
- Lomax, Alan. *Folk Songs of North America*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1960.
- Marcatante, John J. *American Folklore and Legends*. New York: Globe Book Co., 1967.
- McNeil, Keith, & McNeil, Rusty. *Civil War Songbook with Historical Commentary*. Riverside, CA: WEM Records, 1999.
- Nelson, Esther L. *Dancing Games for Children of All Ages*. New York: Sterling Pub. Co., Inc., 1984.
- Poston, Elizabeth. *The Penguin Book of Christmas Carols*. London: Penguin, 1965.
- Studwell, William. *The Christmas Carol Reader*, New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995.
- Rodeheaver, Ruthella (compiler). *Christmas Customs and Carols*. Winona Lake, IN: The Rodeheaver Hall-Mack Co., 1941.
- Saltman, Judith. *The Riverside Anthology of Children's Literature, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985.
- Seeger, Pete, *The Incomplete Folksinger*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.
- Silber, Irwin, compiler and editor. *Songs of the Civil War*. New York: Dover Pub., Inc., 1995.
- Silber, Irwin. *Songs of the Great American West*. New York: Dover Pub., Inc., 1995.
- Silber, Fred and Silber, Irwin. *Folksinger's Wordbook: Words to over 1,000 Songs*. New York: Oak Publications, 1973.
- Silverman, Jerry. *Songs and Stories of the Civil War*. Brookfield, CT: Twenty-first Century Books, 2002.
- Smith, H. Augustine (ed.). *The New Hymnal for American Youth*. New York: The Century Co., 1930.
- Vansina, J. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Wessells, Katharine Tyler. *The Golden Songbook: 60 Favorite Songs and Singing Games*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945.
- Wier, Albert E. (ed.). *Songs the Whole World Sings*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1915.
- Wilentz, Sean, and Marcus, Greil. *The Rose & the Briar: Death, Love and Liberty in the American Ballad*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005.
- World Charts. *The American Songbook*. New York: California Music Press, Inc., 1975.