Eighteenth-Century Fasola Tunebooks

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One of Allen Britton's major interests and scholarly contributions throughout his career has been related to the field of tunebooks. This is indicated from his doctoral dissertation of 1949, a pioneer study of theoretical introductions in eighteenth-century American tunebooks, right up to the 1990 publication of the American Antiquarian Society, American Sacred Music Imprints 1698-1810: A Bibliography, the result of a lifelong study by Britton and Irving Lowens completed in collaboration with Richard Crawford.1 According toBritton, "[the tunebook] represents the beginnings of music education in the United States. It is the stepon which rests the elaborate system we know today." He continues: "However many turns and grades the historical pathway takes from the methods and materials contained in the tunebook to the methods and materials used in modern classrooms, it is an unbroken one."2 My own interest in historical research and particularly my interest in early tunebooks has been influenced by Allen Britton, both through his writings and through his generosity in meeting with me on several occasions to discuss materials related to Maritime Canada. It is the topic of tunebooks, particularly two manuscript tunebooks which have occupied a great deal of my time over the past decade, that I wish to address in this paper.

It was in the winter of 1990 that I first came across "Mary Miller Her Book," a small artifact housed in the archives of the Colchester Historical Museum in Truro, Nova Scotia. This handmade tunebook,

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dated 1766, is one of the earliest examples of music manuscripts that I have found in the Maritime Provinces. Three years later in Nova Scotia, historian Jim Snowdon discovered a similar item bearing the name Robert Moor, now housed in the Ralph Pickard Bell Library at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. Although the provenance of both these items is unknown, there is strong evidence that the Miller book was in the possession of Robert Moor by 1800. The Moor book is undated and provides no such evidence, but its similarity to the Miller book in both content and format leads one to believe that it too dates from the latter half of the eighteenth century. Significantly, there were English-speaking Protestant settlers by the name of Moor in Nova Scotia during that time.

"Mary Miller Her Book" measures approximately 10 cm by 20 cm and is in the oblong "longboy" style of American tunebooks. It contains thirteen psalm tunes. Nine of the tunes are in two parts (melody tenor and bass); the other four have only the melody line. The titles of the tunes are: "French," "London," "York," "Dundee," "Elgin," "Martyrs," "Dublin," "Hundred Psalm Tune," "Abbyss," "Davids," "Newtown," "Marys," and "Southwell." The tunes are written on five-line staves in facsula notation with the facsula letters placed on the staff in place of note heads. Most of these tunes are common meter ones often found in Presbyterian psalters, and thus were probably used for singing the metrical versions of the psalms. No texts are included, but the titles are decorated and there are several child-like colored drawings throughout the book. The Robert Moor book is similar in size to the Miller book; it contains fourteen tunes written in facsula notation. Although the musical content is not identical, it is remarkably similar. The tunes, in order, are: "French Tune," "London," "York Tune," "Dundee," "Elgin," "Martyrs," "Dublin," "Abbyss," "Davids," "Newtown," "Marys," "Savoy to the Hundred Psalm," "Psalm 50," and "London New Tune." Nine of the tunes are in two parts (tenor and bass); the remaining five have only the melody line. This book also contains colored drawings, but instead of the child-like drawings of the Miller book, they are primarily designs made with a compass or ruler that include ornate calligraphy for the titles of the tunes. Both books contain short theoretical introductions with charts showing the gamut for the tenor and bass and a diagram of the Guidonian hand with solmization syllables.

The type of letter notation in these books is the same as that used by the Reverend John Tufts in his A Very Plain and Easy Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes, first issued in Boston in 1721. Allen Britton has commented on this notation, stating: "We do not know whether Tufts adopted this device, unique in the history of notation, in the belief that it would simplify note reading, or whether he used it only to reduce the expense of engraving the plates." He further suggested that "the work must have been very popular for the eleventh and last edition appeared in 1744." Although a few of the tunes found in the Miller and Moor books are included in Tufts' various editions, it does not appear to be the common source. Nor does a subsequent use of this notation, a 1760 printing of the untitled tune supplement "engraved print'd and sold by Thomas Johnston of Boston," seem to be the common source. Similarly, one might think of James Lyon's Urania as a possible source since he served as a Presbyterian minister in Nova Scotia in the 1760s, shortly after the publication of his tunebook in Philadelphia in 1761. However, as yet no copies of Urania have been found in the region, and I have been unable to find references to its use in Nova Scotia during that period. It also does not seem probable that Lyon's publication is related to these manuscript tunebooks because Urania is a much more

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*Britton, Lowens, and Crawford, American Sacred Music Imprints 1696-1810, 490.
sophisticated volume with selections in three or four parts and conventional round-note notation rather than fasola letters. The search for a common source, therefore, has been ongoing.

A book similar to those found in Nova Scotia was brought to my attention through the writings of Dorothy H. Farquharson.1 It bears the inscription “Judith Humphrey—made by Francis Hughes, 1813.” It is housed in the Eva Brook Donley Museum in Simcoe, Ontario, but little is known about its origin. Although the date is much later, the music and art content are remarkably similar to that found in the Miller and Moor books. However, in this book there are also secular common meter verses written for each of the psalm tunes, commonly known as “practice verses.” The tradition of practice verses is explained in Millar Patrick’s study of Scottish psalmody:

The Psalm-book was held so peculiarly sacred that no irreverence in the use of its words must be permitted. It came to be thought as grave a sin to misuse its words as to take the name of God in vain. Not even the presence, when practising the two Psalms in which on Sunday he was to lead the people, was at liberty in his private rehearsal to use the sacred words; he must find some other medium for practising his craft. There was nothing sacrilegious about the tunes, but the words were not regarded as permissible for use except in the worship of God. Practising was not thought of as a religious exercise; so practice-verses to serve as substitutes for the purpose had to be found.2

Often these practice verses had a moral message, such as this one found on the verso of Jork in the Humphrey book:

Time calls loud be wise today
Yet we procrastinate
And that rare call against the call
And oft are wise too late.


you it find / please do return it to him again."

It has sixty-four pages containing thirty-two tunes written in fasola notation, practice verses, and numerous colored drawings. The first tunes are similar to the ones found in the other handmaiden tunebooks. Wolf comments that the book is "elaborately illuminated with designs and folk art drawings. The penann outlines of the many figures and drawings are filled with colored brushwork... the colors remain remarkably bright considering that the book is over two centuries old." He refers to it as "a unique example of early American folk art." James Starrett was born in Lancaster County in 1723; he died in 1808 and is buried in the churchyard of Donegal Presbyterian Church, one of the oldest Presbyterian congregations in the United States. The congregation dates from the early eighteenth century and was started by Scots-Irish settlers.

More recent discoveries of similar tunebooks include an item housed at the Winterthur Library in Winterthur, Delaware, as well as an item in Ohio. The music content of the book at Winterthur contains the same tunes as the Mary Miller book. Even the art work is similar and, like the Miller book, it does not contain practice verses. The names on the book are Robert Killgore and George Killigere, but the part of the title page that may have contained a date is missing. There is little available information on this item; it was acquired sometime in the 1950s and was catalogued in the Fakult Collection at Winterthur.

Reference to a fasola manuscript tunebook was found in the Allen


"Wolf, "The Convivial Side of Scottish Psalm Tunes," 142. The fate of the Starrett book is sometimes given as 1778 because it is difficult to read. When the writer had the opportunity to examine this item in person, she and the owner agreed that the date was 1770, not 1778.

"Richard K. MacMaster, DONEGAL PRESBYTERIANS: A Scots-Irish Congregation in Pennsylvania. Private printing by Nesthead Press, 1995. Evidence has come to light that indicates the compiler of the book located in Lancaster may also have been associated with the Donegal congregation. The spelling of this particular family name is found both as Starrett and Starrett.

Britton Papers housed in the Performing Arts Library on the College Park campus of the University of Maryland. This book, dated 1790, is now housed in the Ross County Museum in Chillicothe, Ohio, but the person who compiled the book (James English) was born in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. A recent examination of two similar items housed at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania revealed the earliest one yet found, dated 1755. All of these tunebooks are similar in music content, although some of them have many more tunes than the Miller and Moor books. Some contain art and some contain common meter verses, while others contain both art and practice verses. The theoretical introductions vary; some of them, like the Miller and Moor books, contain drawings of the Guidonian hand.

Since first discovering the tunebooks in Nova Scotia, I have been seeking a common source for this particular collection of tunes. I am greatly indebted to Nicholas Temperley at the University of Illinois for his kindness in responding to questions concerning the tunes in these books prior to the publication of The Hymn Tune Index. The recent publication of this long-awaited resource has been of great assistance to me in this study. By converting each of the tunes in these fasola books to the numerical coding used in the Index, I have identified a publication that not only contains the tunes common to these books, but also has them in almost the same order. This is a work by William Dawson, published by him in Philadelphia in 1754: "The Youth's Entertaining Amusement, or A Plain Guide to Psalmody: Being a Collection of the most usual, and necessary tunes sung in the English Protestant congregations in Philadelphia, & c. In two parts. Printed at the German printing-office in Third-Street, and sold by the author." This book consists of sixty-three pages, including a rather lengthy


Preface and Introduction to Psalmody followed by a "Supplement... Of Psalms and Hymns adapted to the several different Meters... containing 50 compositions for two voices." It measures 9.5 cm by 9.5 cm and is "upright" in format rather than the longbody style. It is typset using conventional round notation. There seems to be only one copy extant, located in the Library Company of Philadelphia. It was acquired in the late 1960s and its provenance is unknown. Even though it does not employfasca letter notation, I am exploring the possibility that this may indeed be the common source I have been seeking.

Little is known about William Dawson and this publication. Evidence from the Pennsylvania Gazette of him working in Philadelphia in the spring of 1753 indicates that he was involved in teaching psalmody to young ladies:

On Monday, the ninth of April instant (by permission of Providence) will be open, A School to teach writing, in all the hands of use; arithmetic, vulgar and decimal; merchants accounts; psalmody, by a proper and regular method; for the amusement of such young ladies as are pleased to employ the summer evenings in those useful and necessary exercises, from the hour of 5 to 8; carefully taught, in Third Street, near the New Presbyterian church, by WILLIAM DAWSON.

N.B. The whole, or part of the time, may be employed in any of these exercises, which is discretionary to those who please to give encouragement, at Seven Shillings and Six pence a quarter. Those who desire instruction in psalmody, are to pay Five Shillings entrance, being intitlated to the use of a note book, and a new one at departure.  

The following spring another advertisement appeared, this one directed at both "young Gentlemen and Ladies":

On Monday, April the eighth, will be open an Evening school, to teach Writing, Arithmetic, vulgar and Decimal, Psalmody by an easy and regular Method, with Demonstrations of the Nature and Quality of Vocal Music in all its Parts; for the Amusement of such young Gentlemen and Ladies as are pleased to employ the Summer Evenings in these necessary and delightful Exercises, from the Hour a Five to Eight, at the Sign of the Hand and Pen, in Third Street, by WILLIAM DAWSON.

This time no mention was made about the cost of a notebook, perhaps because Dawson was bringing out his own publication that he intended to use in this class. On 11 July 1754, the following announcement appeared in the same newspaper:

Just published, (Price Two Shillings) and to be sold at Mr. David Chambers', in Arch street, Mr. John Blakley's, in Market street, Mr. William Henry's in Water street, and at the New Printing Office, in Market street, THE Youth's entertaining AMUSEMENT, or a Plain Guide to PSALMODY, being a Collection of the most usual and necessary Tunes sung in the English Protestant Congregations in Philadelphia, &c. in two Parts, viz. TREBLE and BASS, with all proper and necessary Rules, adapted to the greatest Capacities. By W. J. DAWSON, Writing master and Accomplisher, at the hand and pen, in Third street, Philadelphia.

The next week, the same advertisement appeared, but with an addition:

N.B. As several worthy Gentlemen of this City have, by Subscription, encouraged the Publication of this Collection of Tunes, 'tis hop'd it will meet with a general Encouragement, being calculated for the Advantage and pious Recreation of Youth and others.  

†Pennsylvania Gazette, 26 March 1754, p. 3.
‡Pennsylvania Gazette, 11 July 1754, p. 2.
§Pennsylvania Gazette, 18 July 1754, p. 2.
Dawson seems to have been neither a composer nor an accomplished musician, for in the Preface he states:

I have in some Measure treated, of Music in general, yet am particularly confined to the most Necessary Parts of Psalmody, as being unacquainted with any other, and but a Student in it. What follows is done with no Ambition of Appearing in Public; or Claiming any Right to the Composition of any of the Tunes or making, the least Alteration from what they are in the Best Authors I could find.\(^2\)

Little more seems to be known about this item, but the fact that it contains the tunes I have been seeking in almost the same order is most intriguing. Could Dawson’s “proper and regular method” have been the use of faszla letters on the staff for notation? Certainly these syllables were still well known as is evident in eighteenth-century tunebook introductions. Since the four shape-note system first printed in Little and Smith’s Easy Instrucor (1801)\(^3\) was based on the syllables fa, so, la, and mi, it does make one wonder if the use of these syllables on the staff was perhaps used extensively in that area. This theory, however, has yet to be proved.

In his study of theoretical introductions in American tunebooks, following a discussion of Conrad Biesel and the publication of music at the Ephrata Cloister in Pennsylvania, Britton concludes that “there is no evidence that the religious music of the Germans nor the singing schools they organized had any effect on the psalmody of the English settlers. Indeed, in the first half of the nineteenth century we find evidence of the reverse—the Germans began to show signs of English influence.”\(^4\) While this still seems to hold true today in regard to the music of English psalmody in America, in light of these findings I wonder if we have indeed discovered evidence that German settlers did have an influence on the artistic aspect of psalmody books produced by some of the English settlers.

It is interesting to note that in her study of hymnody in Eastern Pennsylvania German Mennonite communities, Suzanne Gross discusses a style of manuscript used in sacred music songbooks compiled in Eastern Pennsylvania during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. “As part of an effort to maintain their German culture, the late eighteenth-century Mennonites of Eastern Pennsylvania instituted hymn-singing instruction in the elementary community schoolhouse curriculum. Beginning in 1780 (or perhaps earlier), much of the hymn-tune repertoire, previously an oral tradition, was recorded in musical notation in manuscript songbooks (Notenbüchlein) compiled by local schoolmasters in Mennonite communities north of Philadelphia.” These manuscript tunebooks were “intended for teaching the skills of singing from notation” and were often given by the teacher to diligent singing students, a practice, which continued until 1835 or later, according to Gross. The beautiful title pages of these music booklets have been studied as examples of Fraktur. “This type of art, popular throughout the Pennsylvania German culture during the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was child-oriented and education-related.”\(^5\) Although the music in the fraktur tunebooks discussed in this paper is not related to German traditions, the illustrations suggest influence of the Pennsylvania Germans. Some fraktur experts believe that these books are folk art, but not necessarily German folk art; yet, over and over again individuals who have examined these books make the point that the art resembles Pennsylvania German fraktur.

I have now had the opportunity to examine all of these faszla manuscript tunebooks except the one in Ohio, and I am currently...

\(^{1}\)Dawson, The Youth’s Entertaining Amusement or A Plain Guide to Psalmody, Preface.

\(^{2}\)The copyright for this system was issued in Philadelphia on 10 March 1796. These are the same shape-note symbols that Britton selected for use on the cover of early issues of the Journal of Research in Music Education.

\(^{3}\)Britton, "Theoretical Introductions in American Tune-books to 1800," 75.
undertaking a detailed study and comparison of the contents of these items. This includes a comparison of the versions of the tunes and their harmonizations, an examination of the various drawings and illuminations, a study of the practice verses, and an investigation into the genealogy of the various family names. I have attempted to find watermarks on the paper used for these books in an attempt to help identify origins. In addition, I am searching for more information about William Dawson and his activities in Philadelphia and nearby areas during the mid-eighteenth century.

Many of the tunebooks I have examined thus far seem to have a Pennsylvania connection, although Starrett's is the only one we know for certain is from that region. Furthermore, Scots-Irish settlers went to Nova Scotia during the eighteenth century; many had connections in Philadelphia and also in Londonderry, New Hampshire, which was closely associated with the Presbyterian church in Philadelphia. So the questions remain. What is the origin of the Miller and Moor books, and when did they arrive in Nova Scotia? What were the origins of the other tunebooks? Did they all originate in Pennsylvania, and are they related to William Dawson's publication? Was William Dawson the same person who is listed as associated with one of the Presbyterian churches in Philadelphia? Or did these books originate in Britain, as some individuals still believe? How many other similar tunebooks of this style still exist and are yet to be discovered? Perhaps someone reading this report of a "study in progress" will be able to provide further information in this "quest for the fasola."

If our music education profession has failed in attempting the impossible but succeeded in accomplishing the possible, that's pretty good. Let's not complain. Rather let us study the means by which success has been achieved and seek to utilize such means in carrying out our long-term aims, which can only be to bring more music to more of the American people. Remember that we have been most successful when we have been true to music itself.