

Music in Stoughton

A Brief Survey

by Roger L. Hall
Musicologist

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MUSIC IN STOUGHTON

THE MUSICAL heritage in Stoughton is one of the oldest in the United States. Beginning in the 18th century and continuing to the present day, the performance of music — especially singing — has been an important tradition.

The important events of this tradition have been told many times in print, but often incorrectly. The purpose of this booklet is to correct the most common errors and to highlight the 25 most significant events over the past two centuries.

Some of the information has already appeared in a series of three folders, completed between 1985 and 1988. They were printed and distributed as part of this ongoing research project. The project has been partly funded by Massachusetts Arts Lottery grants as administered by the Stoughton Arts Council. I thank them for their continued support and interest in the project.

For more information about the events listed, check the sources at the back of this booklet.

In his report about the Stoughton Musical Society's concerts at the World's Exposition in Chicago in 1893, President Sanford Waters Billings wrote the following glowing words about their participation:

What has this Society done? We may not recite all. But these things it has done ... it responded to the cordial invitation to present American music of the olden days to the gaze of the world. In this act it has surpassed every other musical organization in this country. In this act it stands alone in its presentation of that music which will be preserved for generations to come.

Hopefully the events listed here will be of some usefulness to students, musicians, historians and general music lovers in our day and "for generations to come."

Roger L. Hall
August, 1989

SINGING SCHOOL IN STOUGHTON

Complete list of pupils in the singing school taught by William Billings in Stoughton in January of 1774:

Treble (Sopranos) (18)

Chloe Bird
Keziah Bird
Mindwell (or Mendevill) Bird
Hannah Briggs
Irene Briggs
Bethiah (or Bertha) Capen
Hannah Capen
Rachel Capen
Waitstill Capen
Elizabeth Cummings
Patience Drake
Mary French
Eunice Holmes
Hannah Holmes
Jerusha Pope
Lucy Swan*
Meltiah (or Melatiah) Swan
Sarah Tolman

Tenors (21)

Dr. Peter Adams
Andrew Capen**
Susanna Capen
Jerusha Dickerman
Elizabeth Dickerman
Mary Fenno
Rebecca Fenno
Jacob French†
Lydia Gay
Abigail Jones
George Monk

Counter (Male Altos) (5)

Theophilus (or Theodore) Capen
Eliphalet Johnson
Isaac Morton**
Thomas Tolman
David Wadsworth**

Basses (5)

Jonathan Belcher
John Capen
William Tilden
Samuel Tolman**
George Wadsworth**

Lazarus Pope
Robert Swan, Jr.
Esther Talbot
Mehitabel (Mehitable) Talbot
Ruth Tilden
Elizabeth Tolman
Abigail Wadsworth
Hannah Wadsworth
John Wadsworth
Joseph Wadsworth

Note: It was customary in the eighteenth century for both men and women to sing the tenor line, an octave apart.

* Married her teacher, William Billings, in Stoughton, July 26, 1774.

** One of the singers who later joined the Stoughton Musical Society in 1786.

† A singer who later became a singing teacher and composer himself, like William Billings, French was born in Stoughton in 1754 and died in Simsbury, Connecticut in 1817.

18th Century

1762 First documented singing meetings in town.

1. The earliest surviving evidence of singing meetings are found in Captain Samuel Talbot's diary, written on the blank pages of a Nathaniel Ames almanac. Eleven meetings are recorded in this diary. The first meeting listed was on January 13 and reads: "Mr. Adam's Lecture Day . . . after Lecture have a singing meeting at Robert Capen's [tavern]." It was customary in those days for men to meet at the local tavern for singing and socializing.

1774 First singing school with pupils identified.

2. During the month of January a singing school was given in town by the Boston singing-master and composer, William Billings. An earlier singing school was reportedly given in 1760 by Elijah Dunbar, but none of the names of the singing pupils were listed. The school taught by William Billings is thus the first and only one with all the pupils given. There were 49 members in this school not 48 as has been often written. The extra pupil is one of the "Fenno girls" (either Mary or Rebecca). Of the 49 pupils, 31 were young women and 18 were young men. One of the sopranos in the school, Lucy Swan, married her teacher. They were married in Stoughton on July 26, 1774, and went to live in Boston. Contrary to common belief, Billings did not have any direct connection with the organization of a musical society twelve years later.

1786 Oldest choral society in America organized.

3. On November 7, 25 men were listed in a book of "Rules and Regulations" and the Stoughton Musical Society was officially organized, which continues today as the oldest musical organization of its kind in America.

4. Four officers were elected at the second meeting on November 22 at Robert Capen's tavern:

- President: Elijah Dunbar
- Vice President: Capt. Samuel Talbot
- 1st Treasurer: Joseph Smith
- 2nd Treasurer: Andrew Capen

Women were not invited to join the singing society until over fifty years later in 1844.

1787 First Constitution of the Stoughton Musical Society approved.

5. On October 8, it was voted to accept the Constitution as written by three members of the musical society: Lt. Samuel Capen, Maj. Peter Crane, and Capt. Samuel Talbot. In the Preamble to this Constitution, it is written that the society should "be established on solid and lasting foundations and be governed by good, wholesome and prudent laws."

1790 First singing contest in America held.

6. According to early accounts, the first singing contest in America was held about this year between the "twenty selected male voices" of the musical society, directed by Elijah Dunbar, and a chorus from the First Parish Church in Dorchester, Massachusetts. The Stoughton male chorus won the contest after singing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" from *Messiah* from memory and without any instrumental accompaniment. "The Dorchester singers acknowledged defeat . . . So endeth this incident of the olden time." (1878 tunebook, p. 4).

STOUGHTON COLLECTION OF CHURCH MUSIC.

SELECTED AND ARRANGED BY THE

STOUGHTON MUSICAL SOCIETY.

BEING A COMPILATION OF THE MOST APPROVED SACRED MUSIC, BY ANCIENT AND MODERN AUTHORS.

PRESERVED AS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN.

The Stoughton Musical Society, composed of members from the towns of Stoughton, Sharon, Canton, and Randolph, was instituted A. D. 1786. First President, ELIZAH DUNBAR, Esq.

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High." Psalm xcii. 1.

BOSTON:

MARSH & CAPEN, NO. 362 WASHINGTON-STREET.

WALT & DOW, Printers.

1820.

19th Century

1802 Second musical society organized.

7. A second musical society was organized on January 1. The name given to this new organization was The Musical Society in Stoughton, which only accepted residents of the town. The earlier musical society of 1786 accepted singers from many of the surrounding towns. Both musical societies can trace their roots back to the first singing meetings in 1762, but neither of them were organized until years later. The officers of this new musical society were:

President: Capt. Samuel Talbot

Vice President: Abram Capen

Treasurer: John Dickerman, Jr.

This musical society was disbanded in 1982 and its assets given to the [Old] Stoughton Musical Society.

1829 First tunebook published.

8. Because of the need for more music to sing, it was voted by the Stoughton Musical Society to compile a collection of favorite tunes, which was titled: *The Stoughton Collection of Church Music*. The collection included music by such local favorites as William Billings and Jacob French, who was a Stoughton native and had been a tenor in the 1774 singing school.

1878 Second tunebook published.

9. A second collection of early New England music was published under the title: *The Stoughton Musical Society's Centennial Collection of Sacred Music*. There were 62 American and European composers represented in the collection and description of the singing contest, plus a biographical section of 26 New England composers at the back of the tunebook.

1886 Stoughton Musical Society Centennial.

10. On June 9, the musical society celebrated its centennial. A full day of activities took place, ending with an evening concert featuring Haydn's *The Creation*. Both Gov. George D. Robinson and Lt. Gov. Oliver Ames were in attendance at the concert which took place in Stoughton Town Hall.

Title page of the first tunebook published by the Stoughton Musical Society in 1829. 328 pages + 80 pages supplement at the back of the book.

Stoughton's Tribute

To the Sufferers by the
Pennsylvania Flood.

Town Hall, Stoughton,
Friday Eve'g,
JUNE 14, 1889.
AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.

Programme of Entertainment :

1. PRELUDE. Concert piece for Horn and Orchestra, soloist, Mr. E. M. Toomey, STOUGHTON DRAMATIC ORCHESTRA.
2. OPENING ADDRESS, MR. W. I. HURDICK.
3. SONG, "Ave Maria" Winkler
EVIE A. DRAKE.
4. READING, Selected
E. HARRIOT CURTIS.
5. SONG, "The heart bowed down" Halfe
REV. C. R. TENNEY.
6. PIANO SOLO, "Gondoliera" Moszkowski
MISS MINNIE W. BRETTE.
7. RECITATION, "Jim Bludso" MR. IRA F. BURNHAM.
8. SONG, "Meditation," Chenery
WILLIAM ATHERTON.
9. QUARTETTE, "Vacant Chair" Arranged
MRS. COOK, MRS LUNT, REV. C. R. TENNEY, MR. S. F. CAPEN

PART II.

10. SONG, "Marguerite" Gounod
MAY A. THAYER.
11. RECITATION, "Shamus O'Brien" MR. HENRI L. JOHNSON.
12. WHISTLING SOLO, "Mocking Bird" PROF. F. E. HANSELL
To conclude with the charming comedietta in one act entitled

"A CUP OF TEA,"

with the following cast of characters:

SIR CHARLES SEYMOUR	C. FARRELL
SCROGGINS	W. B. DICKERMAN
JOSEPH	M. T. DICKERMAN
LADY CLARA SEYMOUR	MISS A. F. CAPEN

14. POSTLUDE, ORCHESTRA

OUR OBJECT IN OFFERING THE ABOVE PROGRAMME IS TO GIVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ALL TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FUND FOR THE SUFFERERS BY THE LATE PENNSYLVANIA FLOOD BY THE PURCHASE OF AS MANY TICKETS AS THEIR MEANS WILL PERMIT.

During the evening the audience will be requested to choose a Treasurer, to whom will be given the entire receipts to be placed in the hands of Messrs Kidder, Peabody & Co.

Tickets, - 25c.

For Sale at the Drug Stores, A. L. Holmes' and Monk's Cash Store and by ALFRED UPHAM, General Ticket Agent.

Doors open at 7:30; Concert at 8 o'clock. Retain this programme for use at the Hall.

End of 19th Century

1887 First oratorio by a local composer.

11. The first performance of a new oratorio for soloists, chorus and orchestra was given at Town Hall on April 11. The title of the work was *Easter Anthem*, composed by Edwin Arthur Jones, who was a violinist and had his own orchestra in town. The oratorio was published in 1890 in Boston under the revised title: *Easter Concert*.

1887 First music instruction in High School.

12. According to John Flynn, this year the first music instructor, Elizabeth M. Cook, gave singing lessons in the High School.

1889 First performance of a string quartet in Boston.

13. At one of the concerts of the Manuscript Club at Mrs. J.L. [Isabella Stewart] Gardner's home, 152 Beacon Street in Boston, the first performance of a new string quartet by Edwin Arthur Jones was given on February 28. The title of the quartet was *Prelude and Fugue in G minor* and was performed by the noted Kneisel Quartet. In the *Stoughton Sentinel* newspaper of March 2, a brief review of this concert noted the "piece was very well received and drew much attention to Stoughton's favorite composer." Other composers featured in that concert were Clayton Johns, J. Phippen, Margaret Ruthven Lang, Edward MacDowell, and Horatio W. Parker.

1889 Johnstown Flood Benefit Concert.

14. The headline in the *Stoughton Sentinel* of June 22 reads: "Well Done. Stoughton Responds Liberally to Johnstown, The Town Hall Filled at the Benefit Concert." The story continued to describe the evening's entertainment and mentioned that the "orchestra did well, their music was excellent and Mr. [E.A.] Jones can be assured that his efforts and those of his musicians added in no small measure to the pleasures of the evening." The receipts of the evening totaled \$238.62 and since all the expenses had been donated "the entire sum" was sent to assist the victims of the Johnstown Flood in Pennsylvania.

1893 Only early New England music group at World's Exposition.

15. Over 100 members of the Stoughton Musical Society performed at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Two concerts were given on August 14 and 15, with several thousand people in the audience and according to the *Stoughton Sentinel* of September 2: "the attendance at the two concerts was a matter of surprise to the Exposition people. It was larger than had been attracted to the Theodore Thomas concerts."

Johnstown Flood Benefit concert program in 1889 for the victims of the Johnstown Flood which had occurred only a few weeks earlier in Pennsylvania.

20th Century

1908 [Old] Stoughton Musical Society incorporated.

16. January 1, the Old Stoughton Musical Society is incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In the first article, it is stated that the object was "the preservation, cultivation, and practice of the music of the earlier native composers, together with general musical and antiquarian activity."

1926 Both musical societies in Stoughton's Bicentennial.

17. As part of the Bicentennial of the Town of Stoughton, both the Old Stoughton Musical Society and the Musical Society in Stoughton performed on Sunday afternoon, August 22. There were 150 singers and 35 musicians in the orchestra, under the direction of F. William Kemp, for this special concert at the Pageant Grounds.

1932 George Washington Bicentennial Concert.

18. On Sunday afternoon, November 20, a concert celebrating the bicentennial of the birth of George Washington was held at Town Hall. According to a story in the *Boston Globe*, "more than 1200 persons crowded the hall, while others heard the music in their automobiles outside. This is believed to be the greatest congregation gathered there since the dedication in 1881." Featured in the concert was music by local composers Laura Gebhardt, Edward French, E.A. Jones, and F. William Kemp.

1964 High School band reorganized.

19. In his first year as music director, Donald LeGrow reorganized a high school band, which completed its first year "as a band consisting of entirely high school members." He also directed the High School chorus.

1978 High School music programs.

20. Under the direction of Donald LeGrow (Chorus) and Ronald Christianson (Bands), the high school music program includes six groups: Stage Band, Marching Band, String Ensemble, Girls Chorus, Mixed Chorus, and Jazz Choir. The last three of these groups had been established for the first time during the 1975-76 school year.

1978 First Fall Music Festival.

21. A music festival sponsored by the Old Stoughton Musical Society was held in Bridgewater, Massachusetts on October 14 and 15. The theme of the festival was "Musick in Old New England." In addition to a music exhibit, there were a series of lectures, and two concerts featuring early New England music.

20th Century

1981 Town Hall Centennial Concert.

22. In honor of the centennial of Stoughton Town Hall, a special concert was held on November 22 at the First United Methodist Church. The concert featured music by Supply Belcher, William Billings, William Selby, E.A. Jones, Franz Joseph Haydn, Samuel Barber, Roger Hall, and Randall Thompson.

1985 High School music groups awarded.

23. In May, at the Newport Heritage Festival, the High School Concert Band, Jazz Band, Jazz Choir and Show Choir all received first place awards in the music competition. The bands were under the direction of Ronald Christianson, the choirs directed by Donna Teper.

1985-6 Old Stoughton Musical Society Bicentennial Season.

24. Between November of 1985 and 1986 the musical society celebrated its bicentennial with a series of exhibits, lectures and concerts. The highpoint of the year was the 200th anniversary concert, held exactly two centuries later on November 7 in the High School Auditorium. As in the Centennial Concert, the featured work was Haydn's *The Creation*. Congratulations were received from President Ronald Reagan, Governor Michael Dukakis, Hon. Joseph Moakley and other dignitaries.

1987 Old Stoughton Musical Society Constitution.

25. On October 8, exactly 200 years after it was approved, a program was presented in the Stoughton Public Library to celebrate the bicentennial of the musical society's Constitution. An official citation was presented by State Senator William Keating. The program included selected readings, music and an original one act play titled: "Old Stoughton and The Grand Constitution." The program was videotaped and later shown on local cable television. A copy of this program was given to the public library for its Stoughton Collection.

MOST PERFORMED AMERICAN TUNES (1879-1979)

The first year that complete concert music was listed in the Old Stoughton Musical Society records was in 1879. The below listing was compiled from the musical society's records, volumes III (1875-1920) and IV (1920-1980).

<i>Name of Tune</i>	<i>Composer</i>	<i>Number of performances</i>
1. NEW JERUSALEM	Jeremiah Ingalls, 1764-1838	76
2. MAJESTY	William Billings, 1746-1800	75
3. CHESTER	William Billings	74
4. VICTORY	Daniel Read, 1757-1836	66
5. INVITATION	Jacob Kimball, 1761-1826	64
6. TURNER	Abraham Maxim, 1773-1829	64
7. EASTER ANTHEM	William Billings	54
8. CONFIDENCE	Oliver Holden, 1765-1844	42
9. ODE ON SCIENCE	Jezaniah Sumner, 1754-1836	42
10. NEW BETHLEHEM	Edward French, 1761-1845	39

Music Directors: Hiram Wilde, 1879-81/1883-89
John B. Thayer, 1881-83
Leander Soule, 1889-94
Nelson Mann, 1894-1910
George W. Porter, 1911-14
Howard A. Baker, 1915-18
George E. Wales, 1919-20
George S. Dunham, 1921-49
Carl L. Smith, 1950-66
William J. Childs, 1967-79