History of LDS Hymn Singing

In 1824 Egbert Grandin, editor of the Wayne Sentinel in Palmyra included a quotation from Martin Luther writings on the back side of the page. It read:

Next to theology, I give a place to music: for thereby all anger is forgotten, the devil is driven away, and melancholy, and many tribulations, and evil thoughts are expelled. It is the best solace for a desponding mind.

The Excitement about Religion - 1820's

JS History 1:5-7

Revivals occurred so often in up state New York that the region took on the nickname “the burnt district” Contention was strong amount the Presbyterians, Methodists, and occasionally Baptists. Sometimes uniting in the camp meetings by vying for converts to their local congregations.

Two Philosophies of Church Singing in 1820's New York

Quakers, The Society of Friends

Settled in Farmington (adjacent to Palmyra) around 1790. The Friends were well know in this period for rejecting the unqualified praise of music that Luther had expressed. Their mentor George Fox had determined at a young age that the prevalence of psalm singing in Protestant congregations was a sacrilege. The only true singing, Fox felt, was “the melody the true Christians made, in their hearts to the Lord.” Later Quaker leaders called music “unfavorable to the health of the soul” and warned specifically against sacred music, which produced “an excitement mistaken for devotion.” The Society of Friends encouraged abstinence from singing and music-making of any kind, both in and out of their meetings. [Hicks p.2]

Baptists

In 1823 there were more Baptists in Palmyra than any other members of religious societies. Most seventeenth-century Baptists had considered singing in public “with conjoined voices” a false tradition, akin to saying form prayers and sprinkling infants. If the believer wished to praise God in song, they felt, he should go to his prayer closet.

Opposition to public singing began to give way during the Great Awakening, and in 1742 the Philadelphia Confession added a chapter on “the singing of psalms, etc.,” which said that “the whole church in their public assemblies (as well as private Christians) ought to sing God’s praises according to the best light they have received.” More over, the Confession added, public singing was instituted by Christ himself at the Last Supper, “as a commemorative token of redeeming love.” Nevertheless, many conservative Baptists refused to sing, maintaining their prejudice against the practice well into the nineteenth century. [Hicks p.3]
Methodism

Of all the denominations in upstate New York the Methodists were the most active in proselyting and the most avid in cultivating congregational music. The founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley, had authored several thousand hymn texts, believing that hymns were perhaps the best means of instilling doctrine in the minds of believers.

Peter Cartwright wrote in 1856 that the early American Methodist circuit riders carried only three volumes in their wagons: The bible, the Methodist discipline, and the hymnbook. More over three and a half pages of the Discipline instructed exhorters how to use “the Spirit and Truth of Singing.” The book scorned “formality” in music: too-slow singing, the use of new or difficult tunes (at least until the old were mastered by everyone), and singing too many verses at a time—five or six was the limit.

The Discipline called for the preacher to interrupt hymns often and request from the people” Now! Do you know what you said last? Did you speak no more than you felt?

It urged that no voices in the congregation, no matter how discordant, should refrain from singing. The Methodist evangelists discouraged the forming of choirs because they tended to cleave the congregations and make Methodists “like other heathen churches. However the Palmyra Methodist Church had a choir in the 1820's. The local Methodist chapel had been built with a singers’ gallery, which was presided over by a singing master who fascinated the children by clinking his tuning fork against his teeth to get the pitch.

Presbyterianism

Presbyterians appear to have favored choirs, and the chapel of the Western Palmyra Presbyterian Church, which most of the Smith family attended, boasted the preeminent choir among the local congregations. The Sentinel reported in 1824, that this choir “performed in a manner which we presume has never been equaled in this place. It is indeed a subject of felicitation that our singers, although their number be limited, are manifesting a laudable ambition to excel in this sublime and delightful part of public worship.”

The Smith Family

Lucy Smith may have been a member of the Palmyra Presbyterian choir. Joseph Smith Sr. has taught singing some years earlier. William recalled that Joseph Sr. had been at one time “a teacher of music by note to a considerable extent. It was from him I learned to sing Old hundred and Grunvik when I was but a child.”
As was customary among some Protestants, Joseph Sr. led his family in singing a hymn each evening. According to William, who found such nightly kneeling sessions “irksome,” the favorite family evening hymn was John Leland’s *The Day is Past and Gone*.

The day is past and gone,
The evening shades appear:
O may we all remember well
The night of death draws near.

Although vocal music held a place in public and private worship, instrumental music or accompanied hymn singing did not. In 1827 Elias Smith of Boston in an editorial in his *Morning Star* wrote: Christians in the New World, must worship “with their hearts and voices, instead of pipes, catgut, horse hair, and rosin.”

The violin [fiddle] was perhaps the most loathsome and yet the most desired. Brigham Young, who grew up about thirty miles from the Smith farm, recalled that he “never heard the enchanting tones of the violin, until I was eleven years of age; and then I thought I was on the high way to hell, if I suffered myself to linger and listen to it.” [JD 2:94] The problem was that “fiddles” usually accompanied dancing, and there were few religious folk who doubted the sinfulness of dancing. The waltz was considered ---- lascivious.

The Book of Mormon

As the restoration became a reality, the Book of Mormon shed light and knowledge on many topics. One of them was music. Sacred singing was virtuous, and was spoken of in distinctly revivilist terms, such as singing “redeeming love” or chanting words into the manuscript the book described a vision of “numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing.”

*Alma 5:9*
9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

*Alma 5:26*
26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

*Alma 26:8*
8 Blessed be the name of our God; let us sing to his praise, yea, let us give thanks to his holy name, for he doth work righteousness forever.

*Alma 26:13*
13 Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of
hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not great reason to rejoice?
Ether 6:9
9 And they did sing praises unto the Lord; yea, the brother of Jared did sing praises unto the Lord, and he did thank and praise the Lord all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord.
Moroni 6:9
9 And their meetings were conducted by the church after the manner of the workings of the Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Ghost; for as the power of the Holy Ghost led them whether to preach, or to exhort, or to pray, or to supplicate, or to sing, even so it was done.

Unlike the Bible however the Book of Mormon had nothing to say about instruments. About dancing the Book of Mormon is ambivalent. At times dancing is mentioned without censure, in several instances however it seems to be linked to degeneracy, especially on the voyage to the promised land. 1 Nephi 18:9

1 Nephi 18:9
9 And after we had been driven forth before the wind for the space of many days, behold, my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and also their wives began to make themselves merry, insomuch that they began to dance, and to sing, and to speak with much rudeness, yea, even that they did forget by what power they had been brought thither; yea, they were lifted up unto exceeding rudeness.
2 Nephi 23:21
21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.
Mosiah 20:1
1 NOW there was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance, and to make themselves merry. Mosiah 20:2
2 And it came to pass that there was one day a small number of them gathered together to sing and to dance.
Mosiah 20:5
5 And when there were but few of them gathered together to dance, they came forth out of their secret places and took them and carried them into the wilderness; yea, twenty and four of the daughters of the Lamanites they carried into the wilderness.
Ether 8:10
10 And now, therefore, let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that he will desire me to wife; wherefore if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.
On 29 March 1830, three days after the *Sentinel* offered the bound Book of Mormon to the public, Joseph’s mother and his brothers Hyrum and Samuel were abruptly disfellowshipped from the Presbyterian Church. [Hicks p. 9]

**April 6, 1830**

On the day of organization, Joseph read the “Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ” [D&C 20]. The document treated many of the standard items of the operation of the Church but does not mention music. While the account of this meeting does not mention singing, it does state that they “praised the Lord, and rejoiced exceedingly,” which may imply singing.

June 9th, 1830 Conference. At the Whitmer’s farm Joseph indicated that the meeting opened with singing. Also at two of the next few conferences (26 Sept. 1830, 4 Aug. 1831) Oliver records the singing at these conferences in the minutes. In the 4 August meeting Oliver recorded the song as “Glorious Things”[Hymn #4 in 1835 Hymnal].

**Hymnal #1**

**D & C 25**

The early saints felt a need for a distinctive hymn tradition that would reflect their unique theology. In July 1830 Emma Smith received the commission through D&C 25 to “make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church.” [D&C 25:11]

Settled Two Questions
1. Whether or not to sing in church and
2. Selection should be a “song of the heart” and a “song of the righteous”. This idea of selection was to be made from the current hymn tradition of the day.

For the next three conferences the Hymn “Zion” [Glorious things] was sung. **LDS HYMN # 46**

It being very popular with the saints. The concept of Zion was principle in the teachings of the early church.

**New Hymns Called For:**

In the 25 October 1831 Conference newly baptized member Sydney Rigdon quoted Old Testament prophets as calling for new songs about Zion. It was clear that the new church wanted its own set of hymns to sustain its particular doctrine.

By the end of April 1832 the leaders ordered that “the Hymns selected by sister Emma be corrected by Br. William W. Phelps” and then printed in the new paper, *The Evening and the Morning Star*. In June of 1832 the paper came forth with the first instalments of Hymns.
Many of the current hymns of the day were edited or revamped by W. W. Phelps. For example Joseph Swain’s Hymn “O Thou in Whose presence my Soul Takes Delight”

**Overhead Example**  Evening and Morning Star Hymn Printed

Persecution led to the delay of printing the first Hymn Book for the Church.
14 September 1835, W. W. Phelps was directed by the Kirtland High Priests to revise and adapt hymns for the Church.
The work was completed in the end of 1835. In January 1836, the Kirtland print shop issued the Hymnal - about 1000 copies.

**Overhead Example**  Title Page to 1835 Hymnal

The name of the church reflects the change made from Church of Christ to The Church of the Latter Day Saints reflects the prior to the Hymn book being published.

**Hymnal #2**


**Hymnal #3**  Ellsworth Hymnal

A Mormon missionary serving in New York Benjamin Ellsworth published his won solution to the hymnbook problem in 1839. [Whether Emma was the only one to gather Hymns]
Hymnal #4
The Manchester Hymnal. [1840] Collected and Brigham Young

The missionaries, especially Brigham Young, P. P. Pratt, Wanted to publish a hymn version in England. In July of 1840 it was discovered that there were many errors in the 3,000 copies that were printed.

Emphasized because of the Hymn selections the important restored doctrines of
1. Priesthood
2. Second Coming of Christ
3. Gathering of Israel

Samuel Medley’s hymn “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.” was adapted by the Hymns committee.

Hymnal #5
The Nauvoo Hymnal [1841]

This work, again compiled by Emma Smith, saw a retreating form the string doctrinal stances that came out in previous Hymnals.

Returned to Revivalist, Grace oriented Phraseology.

1. Grace Oriented Phraseology
2. An intimacy with Jesus and the Cross
3. A Personal rather than communal tone

This work contained Watt’s and Newton’s widely known but heretofore shunned titles:

Amazing Grace, and others such as:
Am I a Soldier of the Cross?
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

This retrenchment implicit in Emma’s 1841 selection came at a moment when Mormon doctrine was becoming more expanded. 1842-1844 saw some of the greatest doctrinal outpouring from the Prophet Joseph.

Joseph began teaching publicly, such things as:
1. Vicarious ordinances for the dead
2. An emphasis on the literalness of the resurrection
3. Constant presence of departed spirits
4. The institution of special “higher” ordinances from the Temple
5. The endowment
6. Celestial Marriage, and the sealing of man to wife(s)
As these new doctrines became more well known among the saints, Emma’s 1841 Hymnal became more obsolete. Many of the saints arriving almost daily to Nauvoo came from England. They had been converted and reared on the Manchester Hymnal of 1840.

Seeing that the 1841 Hymnal was out of touch, Emma, in 1843, called for a newly adapted hymnal. It was never produced. The quorum of the 12 was in control of the press and the 2nd Edition of the Manchester Hymnal, 1,500 copies, was just coming off the press.

Hymnal #6

In 1844 Jesse Little and G. B. Gardner published a collection of Hymns for the use of the Saints in the East. “A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Use of Latter Day Saints”. This was the first hymnal to include tunes and bass lines to some of the Hymns. It contained two pages of scales, solmization syllables, key signatures, and note values. As many Hymn book of the day were in minor modes, all of Little and Gardner’s tunes were in Major.

As the Saints left Nauvoo after the death of the Prophet Joseph, Emma’s Hymnal was basically discarded in favor of the British [Manchester] hymnal.

By the time the church left Nauvoo, [it was only 16 years old] the DOCTRINE that was to be found in the Hymn Texts was of a distinctive essence and would influence Hymn singing in the LDS Church for the next 150 years.

The Manchester Hymnal continued to be published in England until 1890. It went through 25 editions by 1912.

In the history of early Latter-day Saint hymnals, many private individuals undertook at various times to print hymnbooks for the use of Latter-day Saints; the line between “official” and “ unofficial” hymnbooks was sometimes a vague one.
Hymnal #7
In 1886 President John Taylor called a committee together to provide a musical supplement to the Manchester Hymnal. The “Latter-day Saints’ Psalmody” which first appeared in 1889. It went through 6 editions.

Auxiliary Song Books
As the auxiliary organizations expanded they too printed song books for their organizations. In 1880 under the direction of Eliza R. Snow, the Primary published “The Children’s Primary Hymn Book” and the “Tune Book for the Primary Association of the Children of Zion”.

Four years later the Sunday School published the “Deseret Sunday School Union Music Book” which was replaced latter by the “Deseret Sunday School Song Book”. This book was later replaced by the “Deseret Sunday School Songs”.

Northern States Mission Hymn Book
First published in 1908, it went through 11 editions until 1925. It was very popular with the saints. Its compiler, German Ellsworth, surveyed all the mission presidents then serving in the Church to find out their favorite hymns. Then he supplemented these choices with other selections, most of which appeared also in the 1909 Deseret Sunday School Songs.

Hymnal #8
Latter-day Saint Hymns, published in 1927 was intended to replace the Manchester Hymnal, the Psalmody, and the unofficial Songs of Zion. It was to be used in conjunction with the Deseret Sunday School Songs. These two volumes represented two still-identifiable streams in Latter-day Saint sacred music:

1. The “true hymns,” the more dignified and traditional sacred music from Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint sources and
2. The gospel songs, characterized by energetic rhythms and exhortative texts, such as many of the hymns in Deseret Sunday School Songs
Hymnal #9

In 1948 the Church published *Hymns: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, which was intended to replace both the 1927 hymnbook and Deseret Sunday School Songs. It included many standard Protestant hymns that had not previously been an official part of the Latter-day Saint hymnody. It was replaced by a new edition in 1950, which dropped some of the borrowed hymns and added instead some of the best-known of the gospel songs that were not part of the 1948 hymnal.

Hymnal #10

*Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985* was published in 1985, marking the 150th anniversary of Emma Smith’s first hymnal.