Revised by John Garst

Author's Note. The *Sacred Harp* tradition is separate and distinct from other musical traditions. Accordingly, these rudiments are based on those of previous editions of the *Sacred Harp* by Paine Denson *(Original Sacred Harp, Denson Revision,* 1936), Joe S. James *(Original Sacred Harp, 1911),* and B. F. White and E. J. King *(Sacred Harp, 1844),* except where these are incomplete or where they conflict with actual practice.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1. **Sounds** are our perceptions of vibrations in the air, which are caused by vibrating objects. A **musical tone** is a continuous sound of pleasing quality and definite pitch, high or low. **Noise** is a harsh, irregular, and confused sound that lacks a definite pitch.

Musical tones are produced by vibrations of strings, wires, reeds, and diaphragms of musical instruments; of the lips in playing certain wind instruments; and of the vocal cords in singing. Vibrations of shorter or tighter strings produce tones of higher pitch, while those of longer or looser strings produce tones of lower pitch.

2. **Absolute pitch** is measured by the **frequency** of vibration, which is given in cycles (vibrations) per second. High pitch corresponds to high frequency. A person with good hearing can perceive tones with frequencies from approximately sixteen to nearly forty thousand cycles per second.

Relative pitch is used in the *Sacred Harp.* The relative pitches of two tones make an **interval,** which is defined technically as the *ratio* of the higher frequency to the lower one.

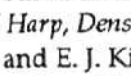
We can recognize intervals by ear, that is, by listening, and we recognize the same interval whether the absolute pitch is high or low. Whether "Happy birthday to you" is sung by a low voice or a high one, we recognize the tune by recognizing the same intervals between successive tones.

3. In addition to pitch, a musical tone has **accent** (degree of emphasis), **length** (duration in time), and **volume** (loudness).

4. In **music,** tones of various pitches, accents, lengths, and volumes are sounded successively **(melody)** or simultaneously **(harmony).** Accordingly, the description of music is divided into **rhythmics** (timing, length, and accent), **melodics** (pitch), **dynamics** (volume), and **harmony** (blending of tones).

5. The *Sacred Harp* uses **four-part harmony.** The parts, in order of increasing pitch, are **bass** (sung by men), **tenor** (men and women), **alto** (usually women), and **treble** (men and women). The doubling of the tenor and treble (and sometimes the alto) in the vocal ranges of men and women creates an effect of six-(or seven-)part harmony.

6. In **musical notation,** all aspects of melodics, rhythmics, dynamics, and harmony are represented by printed characters. To "note" a piece of music is to write it in musical notation. Hereinafter, following common usage, "music" refers to the notation, the sounds that it represents, or both.

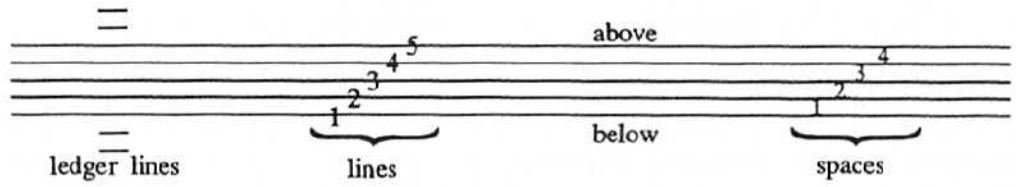
7. **Notes** () represent musical tones, including pitch, accent, length, volume, and sequence in time. Hereinafter, following common usage, "note" refers to either the printed character or the tone it represents, or to both.

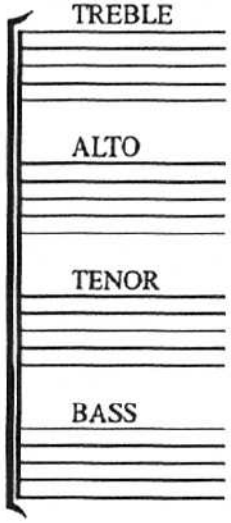
The **head** of each note is one of **four shapes.** Each shape denotes a particular **syllable.** A **triangle** (△) is **Fa** (pronounced "faw"), an **oval** (○) **Sol** ("sole"), a **square** (□) **La** ("law"), and a **diamond** (◇) **Mi** ("mee"). The shapes and syllables are related to pitch.

In conversation, syllables are sometimes called "notes" or "shapes." Thus, in **"singing the notes,"** one sings the syllables, as given by the shapes of the notes.

Rests are periods of silence or the characters that represent them. See Chapter II, Section 8.

8. Notes are placed on a **staff,** a series of five parallel, horizontal lines with spaces between them. The **lines** and **spaces** are counted upward, **1-2-3-4-5** (lines) and **1-2-3-4** (spaces). The **space below the staff** is immediately below line 1, and the **space above the staff** is immediately above line 5.





To represent pitch, the head of each note is placed at a particular **position** on the staff, that is, at a particular line or space. The positions adjacent to a line are spaces, and vice versa. A note with a higher position has a higher pitch. The staff is extended, above and below, by adding short **ledger lines** as needed to create positions for notes.

9. Each part has a separate staff. The staffs (or staves) for the parts are placed one above the other and joined at their left ends by a pair of vertical lines to make a **brace.** The figure shows the order of the parts. When there are only three parts, the alto is omitted.