



## America's Second Composer

Lyons Farms as most of this area once was known was named for Henry Lyon, one of the first settlers, and his sons, Benjamin, Joseph, Samuel and Ebenezer.

While the name Lyons Farms is rapidly disappearing in usage in this area, one of Henry Lyon's great grandsons today is considered, by musicians, to be the nation's second composer.

He was Rev. James Lyon who was apparently born in Lyons Farms on July 1, 1735. His parents were Zopher and Mary Wood Lyon.

Little is known about Zopher Lyon except that he was listed as a "yeoman" in Newark which at that time controlled a portion of Lyons Farms.

Zopher Lyon was the son of Capt. Henry and Mary Roberts Lyon of Lyons Farms. Capt. Lyon was the son of Samuel and Sarah Beach Lyon and the grandson of Henry and Elizabeth Bateman Lyon, who settled Newark in 1666.

Rev. Mr. Lyon's father died in 1744 and his mother must have died within six years after that date because on July 18, 1750, the court appointed Isaac Lyon and John Crane as his guardians until he was 21 years old.

He entered Princeton University and the first hint of his talent for composition or poetry is found in the New American Magazine published at Woodbridge in September 1759, which printed an ode, "Louisberg Token," by him.

Another ode set to music by Rev. Mr. Lyon concluded the commencement program at Prince-

ton University on September 26, 1759. He received his bachelor of arts degree that day. He was in the same class as Rev. James Caldwell of the Battle of Springfield fame.

He subsequently received his master's degree, either the following year or two years later. His biographers do not agree.

At any rate, one of his works was performed on the same program with an ode by Francis Hopkinson, who is considered the first American composer and was a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

In this same period, the Lyons Farms native lived in Philadelphia for awhile and was active in singing schools. Several advertisements appeared in the Pennsylvania Journal for his "Urania," a collection of psalm tunes, anthems and hymns in two, three and four parts.

Some of these were derived from "The Divine Musical Miscellany" printed in London, England in 1754. Others were original. It is considered to be the first music book to be published in America.

It also was considered an unusual achievement for so young a man. Copies of the book were sent to many of his classmates in Princeton University and it was widely used in the colonies.

The book was published in at least four editions. The second of these was in 1767, the third in New York in 1773 and the fourth in New England at a date not given.

Meanwhile Rev. Mr. Lyon left Philadelphia for New Brunswick where he was licensed to preach in 1762 and ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1764. He was assigned to Nova Scotia.

The following year he returned to the Colony of New Jersey to marry Martha Holden of Cape May and they moved to Onslow, Nova Scotia.

Apparently he served more than one parish while there. The parishes were described as very poor and his salary was meager. The young minister was reported to be delighted when he received

a call from the new settlement at Machias, Me. in 1771 to serve there for 84 pounds annually.

During the Revolutionary War, he was described as an ardent patriot. On one occasion he sent General George Washington a letter outlining a plan to capture Nova Scotia for the colonies.

A Canadian historian subsequently wrote that it was fortunate for Nova Scotia that General Washington failed to follow Rev. Mr. Lyon's plan.

At another time, he attempted to keep the attention of a British captain who attended Sunday service at the Meeting House in order to enable his townsmen to capture the British sloop of war, "The Margareta," anchored in the harbor.

Unfortunately, according to the story, the pastor's servant saw the approaching townsmen and not knowing the reasons for their sudden appearance let out such screams that the captain was alerted.

However, two trading vessels, the "Unity" and the "Polly," under Capt. Ichabod Jones, captured the "Margareta" 10 days later in a sea battle June 12, 1776.

Even in Machias, life was not easy and for a time the minister went unpaid. He had to fish and clam to support his wife and eight children.

He also established a plant to extract salt from sea water when the town's supply of salt was cut off. The little island where the plant stood retains the name "Salt Island" today.

He was described as being a mild mannered man who was so color blind that once after he journeyed a considerable distance to get some black cloth for a ministerial frock, his wife discovered that the cloth was as scarlet as the coats of the British officers.

He continued to compose music in Maine, but apparently none of his music made as much of an impression as the "Urania."

When the Congregational Church was organized in Machias, September 12, 1782, he was named

minister although until that time he had been a Presbyterian.

He apparently made several visits to his home state but continued to reside in Machias until his death December 25, 1794. One New Jersey resident recalled spending an enjoyable evening with Rev. Mr. Lyon at a friend's home and wrote that he sang some original tunes for them.

His directions for singing were as follows: "Get assistance of some person acquainted with the tones and semitones; choose part you can sing with greatest ease and make yourself master of that first; round all high notes as soft as possible but low ones hard and full and pitch your tone so highest and lowest notes may be sounded distinctly.

The life of Rev. James Lyon was an exception for the time in which he lived.

During this Revolutionary period, a man was limited to either ministry or teaching as occupations following graduation from college.