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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**ARCHIVES DEBUTS NEW TEMPORARY EXHIBIT**  
***SWEET COMMUNION: THE JOHNATHON KELSO ALABAMA SACRED HARP COLLECTION***

Montgomery, AL (12/18/2017) – The Alabama Department of Archives and History announces the opening of a temporary exhibit, *Sweet Communion: The Johnathon Kelso Alabama Sacred Harp Collection*. The exhibit of 29 images is on display in the Archives Milo B. Howard auditorium and first floor lobby through March 2018.

Sacred Harp singing is among Alabama’s most distinctive musical traditions. Also called *shape-note singing* or *fasola*, the style dates back to an eighteenth-century New England simplification of the standard eight-note vocal system. Shape-note singing employs only four syllables, *fa, so, la, and mi*, which correspond with shapes in written music, collected in hymn books. Singers position themselves in a hollow square, facing inward, divided by the four voice parts: tenor (melody), treble, alto, and bass. A rotating leader directs songs with the rhythmic, vertical strokes of his or her arm.

Shape-note singing reached the Deep South in the mid-nineteenth century. An 1844 songbook titled *The Sacred Harp* lent its name to the singing style as it became increasingly popular among both white and black congregants.

In 2010, Atlanta-based professional photographer Johnathon Kelso began documenting the people, events, and customs of the Sacred Harp tradition in Alabama and Georgia. “From the moment I stepped foot in the hollow square at my first Sacred Harp singing, I knew I wanted to photograph what I was seeing,” Kelso said. “As a photographer, I felt a strong sense of duty to share its rich cultural and spiritual beauty.”

The photographs featured in this exhibit were taken between 2010 and 2015. For more information about Johnathon Kelso and his work, visit his website at [www.johnathonkelso.com](http://www.johnathonkelso.com).

The Alabama Department of Archives and History is located in downtown Montgomery, directly across the street from the State Capitol. It is the state’s government records repository, special collections library and research facility, and is home to the Museum of Alabama, the state history museum. The Archives and Museum are open Monday through Saturday, 8:30 to 4:30. To learn more, visit [www.archives.alabama.gov](http://www.archives.alabama.gov) or call (334) 242-4364.

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