

Warren Kimsey and Community Singing at Camp Gordon, 1917–1918

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Abstract

During the Great War, the Commission for Training Camp Activities (CTCA) pioneered a program in which civilian song leaders were assigned to camps throughout the United States. These men (and a few women) were instructed to organize regular community singing, train officers as song leaders, and cultivate musical talent among the soldiers. They also worked as song leaders in nearby towns and cities, an activity that was intended to improve military–civilian relations and promote patriotism. This article examines the career of Warren Kimsey, the first song leader assigned to Camp Gordon, an army training camp located near the city of Atlanta. Kimsey organized community singing both in the camp and in Atlanta, where he led enormous crowds in the newly constructed Auditorium–Armory. This study presents Kimsey’s work as a product of the nationwide community singing movement and its progressive political agenda, while at the same time contextualizing it in Atlanta’s identity as an emerging cultural center. It also identifies Kimsey’s contributions to music education in Georgia and discusses the broader influence of wartime song leaders on community music initiatives throughout the country.

Keywords

twentieth century, music education history, social history, nationalism, biography

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*'Twas found they had some talent for instruments with strings,
So the boys got together and that's what started things.
They borrowed a banjo-mando for one of the boys to play,
And Sergeant Waite's mandola sure helped to save the day.
With violins and mandolins, they made the whole place ring;
They'd gather on the hatch at night and the rest of the gang would sing.*

—an excerpt from the poem “Navy Stew,” published June 5, 1919,
in a special edition of *Service Record* celebrating the return
of the 82nd division to Camp Gordon

On Saturday, September 15, 1917, Warren Kimsey arrived in Atlanta to take up a civilian post at Camp Gordon (Figure 1). In order to join the war effort, Kimsey left a career as a performer on the Chautauqua circuit, where he had been known as “The Bird Man” for his ornithological imitations and lectures.¹ Although his musical experience appears to have been limited to recital appearances as a baritone soloist, Kimsey’s task at Camp Gordon was to create a community singing program for the forty thousand enlisted men and officers stationed there. Kimsey belonged to a vast rank of newly appointed song leaders who were placed in training camps across the country shortly after the United States entered the Great War. Some of these song leaders met with considerable resistance from the military establishment, but Kimsey was fortunate to find that the commanding officer at Camp Gordon, General Swift, was “a great believer in singing soldiers.”² While Swift’s cooperation was doubtless invaluable, he had limited power to hamper Kimsey’s activities. Song leaders arrived under the auspices of the Camp Music Division of the Commission for Training Camp Activities (CTCA), which had been given authority over camp recreation by President Woodrow Wilson.

While scholars have examined the work of the CTCA in general and the activities of song leaders in particular, case studies are necessary to illuminate song leaders’ contributions to the war effort and to assess their long-term impact as advocates for community music. Warren Kimsey is an excellent candidate for such a case study because Atlanta’s leading newspaper, the *Atlanta Constitution*, exhibited an unusual degree of interest in his activities. As a result, we have a detailed chronicle of Kimsey’s work, both at Camp Gordon and in the city of Atlanta, that can be mined for insight into wartime community singing. This case study supplements the *Constitution* narrative with other documentary sources. Atlanta’s African American weekly, the *Atlanta Independent*, reported frequently on the conditions faced by Black soldiers at Camp Gordon and elsewhere, but never mentioned Kimsey or community singing. Details about Camp Gordon’s African American population, along with additional facts about

¹“Kimsey,” *Lyceum Magazine*, August 1916, viii. Warren Kimsey appeared on programs with his brother, Howard Wade Kimsey. Both men left the stage to become camp song leaders during the Great War.

²“Kimsey to Teach 40,000 Soldiers at Camp to Sing,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 16, 1917.

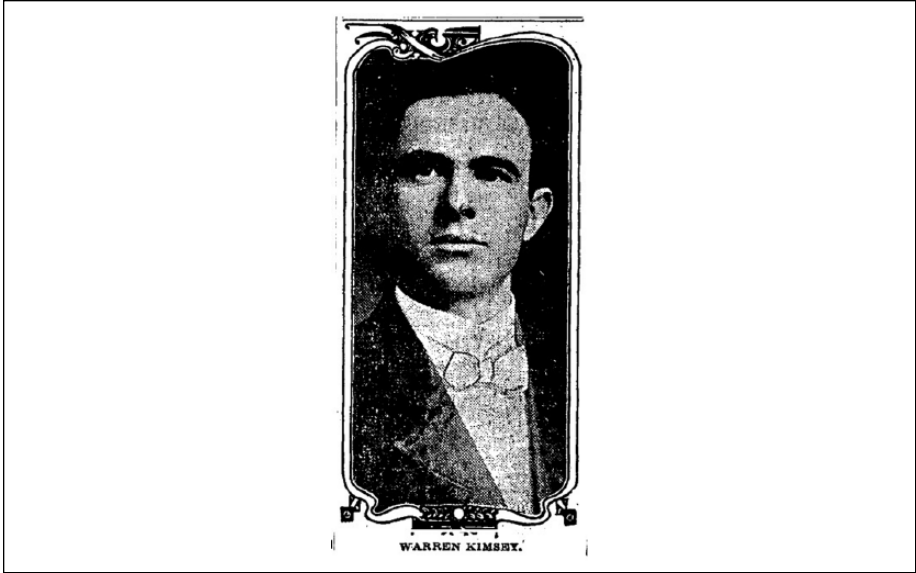


Figure 1. This photograph of Warren Kimsey appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution* on September 22, 1917, just a few days after he arrived at Camp Gordon.

Kimsey's life and work, have been pieced together from accounts in contemporary magazines and journals, along with the official CTCA propaganda.

This examination of Kimsey's labor, both at Camp Gordon and in the city of Atlanta, opens a window into the activities of wartime song leaders across the country, for they were all expected to provide the same basic services to their camps and communities. Most song leaders also shared an ideology, for they were inspired by the progressive ideals that had birthed the community music movement shortly before the war. At the same time, Kimsey's experience was unique to his geographical location, for his work in the city of Atlanta was greatly influenced by cultural developments that had taken place there over the preceding decade. This account of Kimsey's work, which was carried out both privately within the camp and publicly around the metropolis, must therefore take into account three great forces: the progressive politics that birthed both the community music movement and the CTCA; the policies and goals of the CTCA, in particular its community singing program; and a city that sought cultural prominence in a renewing South.

Wartime Song Leaders and the Community Music Movement

Although Kimsey was recruited and supervised by a government agency, his wartime role was defined by music educators and activists. Reform-minded composers, conductors,

teachers, and critics had been advocating for expanded access to art music since the early years of the century, and it was their efforts that launched the community music movement and inspired the architects of the CTCA. A number of seminal music reformers became camp song leaders, including Harry Barnhart, who had established community choruses in New York and New Jersey before the war, and Kenneth S. Clark, a critic who would later contribute to the development of community music in Baltimore.³ Those CTCA song leaders who had not been involved in the community music movement soon found themselves actively participating in its rhetoric and mission. Despite having no background in music education, Kimsey eventually leveraged his position as a song leader to organize community choruses for both adults and children, the latter of which could be found in every Atlanta school by 1919.⁴ Kimsey's wartime dedication to the community music mission was in keeping with his assigned role and the ideology that informed it, for Progressive-era values permeated both the government's war effort and the reformers' drive to spread the gospel of music "as a part of the great human uplift."⁵

The community singing movement predated the American entry into the Great War by several years. It was inaugurated in 1913 at the annual meeting of the Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC) in Rochester, NY. At that meeting, a paper read on behalf of Kansas music educator Frank A. Beach suggested that the MSNC adopt a list of twelve songs that every American should know and publish them in a standardized version for use in classrooms across the country. MSNC President and noted music reformer Henrietta Baker Low formed a committee on the spot to pursue the matter. She appointed Peter W. Dykema, another leading activist, to chair the committee; he would later join the effort to organize community music in training camps. The committee's selections were published later that year as *18 Songs for Community Singing*, with a preface that announced the MSNC's object of making "an immediate and effective start toward national community singing."⁶ This song book established a model for countless similar volumes that were to appear in the coming decade, including the MSNC's enormously successful *55 Songs for Community Singing* (1917), which sold over a million copies in a "Liberty Edition" during the war.⁷

³Jonathan Massey, "Organic Architecture and Direct Democracy: Claude Bragdon's Festivals of Song and Light," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65 (2006): 593; Kenneth S. Clark, *Baltimore, "Cradle of Municipal Music,"* anniversary ed. (Baltimore: City of Baltimore, 1941), 5.

⁴Linton K. Starr, "Atlanta Expects to Have Greatest Musical Season in Its History," *Musical America*, November 15, 1919, 157.

⁵Edna Emery-Jones, "Community Development," *Musical Monitor*, December 1917, 158.

⁶"Explanatory Note," in *18 Songs for Community Singing*, ed. Peter W. Dykema et al. (Boston: C. C. Birchard & Company, 1913).

⁷Peter W. Dykema, "Report of Committee on Community Songs," *Journal of Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Music Supervisors' National Conference* 7 (1914): 103; Patricia S. Foy, "A Brief Look at the Community Song Movement," *Music Educators Journal* 76 (1990): 26-27.

The MSNC's commitment to community music was not driven exclusively by an interest in the future of the music education profession. Its mission was also predicated on the widely held belief that exposure to "good music" would improve morals, encourage democracy, quell social unrest, boost worker productivity, distract youth from the pursuit of vice, and disseminate middle-class values to European immigrants and working-class White Americans.⁸ Community singing was believed to be particularly effective in achieving these ends, for it required active participation and was accessible to the musically untrained. In a 1918 article promoting wartime singing, Dr. J. Lawrence Erb, director of the University of Illinois School of Music, described community singing as a "patriotic stimulant of the highest type" that could "quickly assimilate and Americanize our alien population," bring "all classes of society together for a common purpose," and promote "social and civic righteousness."⁹ The CTCA, which was founded and steered by progressive-minded reformers, sought to suppress vice and homogenize the ranks of new recruits, so it is no surprise that government agents borrowed the tactics of the community music activists. Government and music reformers also shared the "complicated mixture of humanitarianism and fear" observed by historian Gavin James Campbell in the spread of the community music movement.¹⁰ Reformers felt compelled to reach out to their brothers and sisters in need, but they also saw these populations as the source of social problems.

Community Singing and the CTCA

The population of young men who served in the United States military threatened social reformers with a specific brand of degeneracy: sexual immorality and the accompanying perils of venereal disease, which had decimated armies in Europe.¹¹ This threat was first observed and codified by social reformer Raymond B. Fosdick, who in 1916 was asked by Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to visit the military camps along the Mexican border and to report on the conditions therein. Fosdick found that not only were prostitution and alcohol widely available in the vicinity of the camps but that the soldiers had no alternative means of recreation with which to pass the time. He concluded that only a two-pronged attack could obliterate this dangerous threat: the sources of vice must on the one hand be eliminated, while on

⁸Gavin James Campbell, "'A Higher Mission than Merely to Please the Ear': Music and Social Reform in America, 1900-25," *Musical Quarterly* 8 (2000): 259; Peter W. Dykema, "The Relation of School and Community Music," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Music Teachers' National Association Forty-Second Annual Meeting*, ed. Karl W. Gehrkins (Hartford: The Music Teachers' National Association, 1921), 86; William R. Lee, "Music Education and Rural Reform, 1900-1925," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 45 (1997): 308-9.

⁹J. Lawrence Erb, "The Musical Awakening of Today," *Social Service Review*, July 1918, 7.

¹⁰Campbell, "A Higher Mission than Merely to Please the Ear," 262.

¹¹E. Christina Chang, "The Singing Program of World War I: The Crusade for a Singing Army," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 23 (2001): 19-20.

the other the men must be provided with wholesome and uplifting activities with which to fill their leisure hours.¹² In making this proposal, Fosdick followed in the footsteps of the prominent social reformer Jane Addams, who had been advocating wholesome recreation for young people since the late nineteenth century.¹³ In one oft-quoted passage from her 1909 publication *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, Addams placed responsibility for preserving the morality of America's children squarely on the shoulders of society: "To fail to provide for the recreation of youth, is not only to deprive all of them of their natural form of expression, but is certain to subject some of them to the overwhelming temptation of illicit and soul-destroying pleasures."¹⁴ When Fosdick recommended morally sound recreation for American soldiers, he was continuing a trend that had been set in motion by Addams and other early progressive reformers.

With the onset of the Great War, Fosdick and Secretary Baker took the opportunity to implement a large-scale recreation program. The global conflict bore an important characteristic that would aid the reformers in their work: the men were to be drafted. For President Wilson, this meant that the government had a sacred responsibility to meet their social and moral needs, and to return boys to their families in perfect spiritual condition. "The career," he wrote in 1918, "to which we are calling our young men in the defense of democracy must be made an asset to them, not only in strengthened and more virile bodies as a result of physical training, not only in minds deepened and enriched by participation in a great, heroic enterprise, but in the enhanced spiritual values which come from a full life lived well and wholesomely."¹⁵ He was supported by a concerned citizenry who associated the soldier's life with drinking and debauchery. Both parents and the residents of towns near the proposed training camps feared the worst, including "broken homes, vice, disease, illegitimate children, brutalized men, disgraced women, lowered standards and moral deterioration," and they were eager to see reforms in camp life.¹⁶

The Commission for Training Camp Activities (CTCA) was officially authorized on April 17, 1917, with Fosdick as chairman, and it immediately set out to provide a wide range of services to men in the Army and Navy training camps. The reformers who helmed the CTCA fervently believed that most soldiers would prefer uplifting and clean entertainment, and they hoped that prostitution and alcohol would largely

¹²Raymond B. Fosdick, "The Commission on Training Camp Activities," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 7 (1918): 163–64; Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 6.

¹³Shannon Louise Green, "'Art for Life's Sake': Music Schools and Activities in U.S. Social Settlement Houses, 1892-1942" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998), 198.

¹⁴Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 102–3.

¹⁵Woodrow Wilson, "Special Statement," preface to *Keeping Our Fighters Fit for War and After*, by Raymond B. Fosdick and Edward F. Allen (New York: Century, 1918).

¹⁶Emery-Jones, "Community Development," 158; Bristow, *Making Men Moral*, 1–2.

disappear once the men had alternatives.¹⁷ From the start, community singing was central to the CTCA's approach. Together, Fosdick and Secretary Baker developed the idea of installing a song leader in every training camp. This person—a citizen operating under the authority of the CTCA—would not only lead group singing as a form of diversion for the troops but would also train enlisted men as song leaders so that the activity could continue overseas. Song leaders were also invited by camp commanders to lead singing while the men were training or drilling, to organize singing competitions between companies, and even to train officers in the proper use of their voices so that they could give commands more effectively.¹⁸ Fosdick appointed Lee F. Hanmer to head the Camp Music Division, and it was Hanmer who was responsible for identifying and recruiting potential song leaders, such as Kimsey.

The most apparent purpose for singing in the camps was summed up in the CTCA propaganda volume *Keeping Our Fighters Fit*: “A singing army is a cheerful one, and, other things being equal, a cheerful army is invincible.”¹⁹ CTCA song leaders ascribed a wide variety of benefits to community singing, including improved unit integration and teamwork, enhanced memory, heightened powers of concentration, and increased circulation.²⁰ They also reported great success in using song to teach English to immigrant troops, who at the same time were “Americanized” by the experience of singing patriotic and war-themed repertoire.²¹ Music industry professionals also weighed in on behalf of community singing. “No boy can be homesick,” reported Edna Emery-Jones for the *Musical Monitor*, “and fearful, and depressed, and overpowered by the weighty thoughts of the grim war business while he is trying to outsing the chap beside him.”²²

From the start, music educators and reformers actively engaged with the CTCA's work. They sought to leverage government support for the arts, which had been brought about by the temporary condition of war, to make fundamental changes to music education in the United States. In May 1917, several leading reformers, including community singing organizer Arthur Farwell and Dykema, founded the National Association for Community Music (NACM) for the purpose of “unifying the community music projects of the United States.”²³ The new organization's first activity was to provide music in the training camps, but its larger purpose was soon laid bare by

¹⁷Raymond B. Fosdick, “The War and Navy Departments Commissions on Training Camp Activities,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79 (1918): 131; Bristow, *Making Men Moral*, 98–112.

¹⁸Chang, “The Singing Program of World War I,” 20–21; Frances F. Brundage, *Music in the Camps* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 26–27.

¹⁹Raymond B. Fosdick and Edward F. Allen, *Keeping Our Fighters Fit for War and After* (New York: The Century Co., 1918), 67.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 79.

²¹Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 23–24.

²²Emery-Jones, “Community Development,” 159.

²³*Ibid.*; Thomas Stoner, “‘The New Gospel of Music’: Arthur Farwell’s Vision of Democratic Music in America,” *American Music* 9 (1991): 194–96.

Farwell. Shortly after he became president of NACM, Farwell published a letter that he had written to Major General J. Franklin Bell, commander of the Eastern Division of the United States Army. In it, he expressed doubt that community singing could succeed in the training camps under the present circumstances, for he observed that the soldiers did not share a common repertoire and could sing only a few words of the songs they did know. Farwell made clear, however, that this problem was “rooted in the universally prevalent American condition as regards community singing,” and that it could be solved only with systemic reform—or, as he put it, “a national awakening.” Farwell concluded his letter with a plea: “Will this war wring from us at last the high appreciation and initiative needed to bring us together in song, for the first time in the history of the country, and so give the nation a voice and the Army a divine and irresistible sword of the spirit?” While his patriotic rhetoric appealed to the immediate concerns of a nation at war, his letter made it clear that war had revealed a “fundamental deficiency of American life” that would outlast the conflict if it was not immediately corrected.²⁴ A few months later, *The Musical Monitor* summed up the situation for its audience of music club members: “The wave of Community music which is sweeping the country may be simply an emotional experience that will die out in a year or two, or, it can be the greatest initial step in a national movement to make America a music reading people and thereby an intelligently receptive people.”²⁵ Reformers like Farwell and Dykema emphatically pursued the latter path.

Kimsey at Camp Gordon

There is no evidence that Kimsey shared in the larger agenda of NACM or its leaders, but he arrived at Camp Gordon full of enthusiasm for his mission—and he faced a formidable task. As the *Atlanta Constitution* put it, “The conductor of the Metropolitan Opera chorus never dreamed of a job as big as that which Warren Kimsey will undertake at Camp Gordon.”²⁶ The camp served the forty thousand men of the 82nd division of the national army, and Kimsey planned to teach every one of those men to sing (Figure 2). At first he had to make do with the existing Y.M.C.A. buildings that dotted the camp, but it was immediately obvious that these were inadequate for the purpose. Within days of his arrival, Kimsey and General Swift announced plans to construct an enormous open-air stage, fifty feet square, on a site surrounded by hills. This natural amphitheater—equipped with electric lights for night use—would serve five thousand men at a time and be available for a variety of entertainments, such as boxing, wrestling, vaudeville, and theater.²⁷

²⁴“Mass-Singing Impossible under Present Conditions, Says Mr. Farwell,” *Musical America*, July 14, 1917, 24.

²⁵“Community Music from the Educational Viewpoint,” *Musical Monitor*, September 1917, 25.

²⁶“Kimsey to Teach 40,000 Soldiers at Camp to Sing,” 12.

²⁷“Leaders of National Army Will Cooperate in Plans to Encourage Men to Sing,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1917.



Figure 2. This photograph of Kimsey leading community singing from a ladder appeared in the November 1917 edition of *Town Development*.

Even if he conducted community singing on the massive scale permitted by the new amphitheater, Kimsey had an enormous organizational task on his hands. He wasted no time in establishing weekly meetings with the commanding officers of each infantry brigade, as well as field artillery and engineers. Regular contact with the upper echelon allowed him to organize sings and ensure that he saw every enlisted man in camp. Kimsey was responsible for both the White and African American soldiers housed at Camp Gordon, where a strict policy of segregation was enforced. African American men served in the First Provisional Regiment and were provided with separate facilities and services. While the CTCA claimed to provide recreational opportunities for all soldiers, regardless of race, class, or creed, it often ignored the needs of African Americans. The program at Camp Gordon has been recognized as a rare success, however, and it seems probable that Kimsey took his work with the African American recruits seriously.²⁸ Kimsey also held weekly sings for officers (Figure 3). These events allowed him to cement his relationship with those in command and to train them as song leaders for action in the field and overseas. In 1917 the idea that officers would lead singing in Europe was still nascent, but Kimsey forged the way by teaching them songs for use on long hikes.²⁹

²⁸Bristow, *Making Men Moral*, 150–51.

²⁹“Officers of 163rd Infantry Brigade Take Their First Lesson in Singing,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 4, 1917.



Figure 3. This photograph of Kimsey teaching songs to officers at Camp Gordon appeared in the March 1918 edition of *The Rotarian*.

Kimsey was described as an inspiring figure: lacking in height but full of energy and movement, and with an excellent voice.³⁰ He offered formal instruction to regiments and units, but he was also known to initiate spontaneous singing whenever he came across a group of idle soldiers.³¹ Kimsey's basic pedagogical method appears to have been rote learning. On one occasion, he began by playing the songs on the gramophone, after which he sang them through himself. Only then was the class encouraged to join in, with the aid of printed lyric sheets.³² At training-camp sings, words might be read from song books, pamphlets, newspapers, easels, or projected slides, and melodies were quickly memorized.

Kimsey's most important contribution was to keep the men together. In addition to conducting with a rolled-up newspaper, he employed a full-body technique that was visible from a great distance. He described his approach for the benefit of other song leaders in the first edition of the weekly newsletter *Music in the Camps*:

Keeping time with the arms plays a very small part. If the song is in march time, I march back and forth before the men; if it is in waltz time, I use a waltz step, and thus by an active use of my feet I am able to carry them through the songs that they are inclined to

³⁰"Kimsey's Singing Classes," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 30, 1917.

³¹"Leaders of National Army Will Cooperate."

³²"Officers of the 163rd Infantry Brigade." There was never an emphasis on music reading in the camps, but the second edition of *Song for Soldiers and Sailors*, published in 1918, included notation in response to demand from song leaders (Chang, "The Singing Program of World War I," 35).

go to pieces on. Indirectly, I consider the feet the most important—next, the sway of the body, and last, the motion of the arms, and by combining these three I get the best results. For this work the leader must turn himself into a human metronome.³³

His singing classes were unaccompanied, but the glee clubs that he later organized at Camp Gordon used a piano. Other song leaders employed portable folding organs.³⁴

There was consensus in the press when it came to Kimsey's repertoire. "He likes songs that are full of red blood," stated one article.³⁵ "Any sort of good rousing songs with plenty of red blood in them," agreed another.³⁶ Several contemporary sources reported that soldiers had no interest in sentimental songs. "The words matter little," reported the music editor for women's magazine *The Delineator*, "but it is the tune, the swing, the lilt, the rhythm of the music which catches their ears."³⁷ The CTCA was quick to confront the notion that singing was not an appropriate activity for soldiers. One characteristic and oft-reprinted defense came from Major General Leonard Wood:

It is just as essential that the soldiers know how to sing as it is that they carry rifles and know how to shoot them. Singing is one of the things they should all learn. It sounds odd to the ordinary person when you tell him every soldier should be a singer, because the layman cannot reconcile singing with killing. But when you know the boys as I know them you will realize how much it means to them to sing.³⁸

When the press described Kimsey's repertoire as red-blooded—as opposed to hymns or maudlin fare—it endorsed the idea that singing was a manly activity. Kimsey himself was not shy about promoting his line of work. When a contest was held in 1918 to name the 82nd division, Kimsey optimistically proposed that they be called the "Singing Division." (The name "All-American" was chosen instead.)³⁹

Specific song titles were seldom mentioned in connection with camp singing. Instead, newspaper accounts reported the performance of "patriotic songs of honored memory, songs borrowed from the English, [and] the new war songs that have sprung into popularity since America entered the scrap."⁴⁰ Some knowledge of Kimsey's repertoire, however, can be gathered from the *Constitution* and from more general sources. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," rumored to be a favorite of General Swift, soon became the

³³Chang, "The Singing Program of World War I," 30.

³⁴"Can You Spare a Piano?," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 29, 1917; Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 11.

³⁵"Officers of the 163rd Infantry Brigade."

³⁶"Kimsey to Teach 40,000 Soldiers."

³⁷Theodor A. Hoeck, "Why They Sing—What They Sing, and How The Army and Navy Sing It," *Delineator*, March 1918, 25.

³⁸Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 9–10.

³⁹O. B. Keeler, "How The Eighty-Second Became The 'All-American,'" *Service Record*, June 1919, 18.

⁴⁰"Kimsey's Singing Classes," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 30, 1917.

official marching song of Camp Gordon. This was in fact one of four songs “for patriotism” that all soldiers were required to learn; the others were “America,” “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and “La Marseillaise.” Troops everywhere also learned four songs “for American tradition:” “Old Black Joe,” “Old Folks at Home,” “My Old Kentucky Home,” and “Roll, Jordan, Roll.”⁴¹ Other standard repertoire can be found in the CTCA’s pocket-sized *Army Song Book* (1917), which was made available to enlisted men at cost and to citizens for a slightly higher fee. The selections were modelled on those made by the MSNC committee in 1913, with the addition of popular songs concerning military life and the national anthems of the Allied Powers.⁴² CTCA leaders made it a priority to ensure that all American soldiers “will have the same songs on their lips when they meet in the trenches,” and music educators played a role in standardizing the repertoire for camp singing.⁴³ All the same, divergent repertoires developed within the ranks. Some African American soldiers sang from the volume *National Jubilee Melodies* (ca. 1916), which was distributed by women of the Benevolent Mission Society who “want the boys to sing the songs of our foreparents.”⁴⁴ It was also widely reported that soldiers created and sang their own parodies, such as the popular “They Made It Twice as Nice as Paradise and Called It Dixieland,” which came into existence at Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia.⁴⁵

Kimsey in Atlanta

Kimsey and the CTCA sought to provide such a quantity and quality of entertainment that men would no longer desire to visit nearby towns, thus eliminating the threat of illicit behavior. There is evidence that leave-taking did indeed diminish, but most soldiers still desired to get away from camp, enjoy local entertainment, and meet young ladies. As one Camp Gordon soldier wrote to his grandmother just two weeks after Kimsey’s arrival, “It is a very hard matter to fill a letter with anything of interest as there is nothing of interest going on.”⁴⁶ The young man went on to relate that at least payday was coming soon and, for a round-trip cost of sixty cents, he would be able to go into Atlanta—exactly the behavior that Fosdick wished to mitigate. To keep soldiers out of trouble during their visits to nearby towns and cities, the CTCA established the War Camp Community Service (WCCS), which was assigned to monitor and provide recreation opportunities outside of the camps (Figure 4).⁴⁷ This organization worked with local civic and church leaders to ensure that there was plenty of wholesome entertainment available to visiting soldiers. In addition to a host of other activities, the WCCS organized public community singing

⁴¹“Officers of the 163rd Infantry Brigade,” 8; Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 13.

⁴²Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 12; Chang, “The Singing Program of World War I,” 36–38.

⁴³Blanche Newell, “For American Community Music,” *Town Development*, July 1917, 143.

⁴⁴“Jubilee Songs for Soldiers,” *Atlanta Independent*, November 17, 1917.

⁴⁵“The Fighting Man a Singing Man,” *Town Development*, November 1917, 81.

⁴⁶Anna R. Jordan Papers, MSS 128, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

⁴⁷*Commission on Training Camp Activities* (Washington, DC: The War Department, 1917), 21.

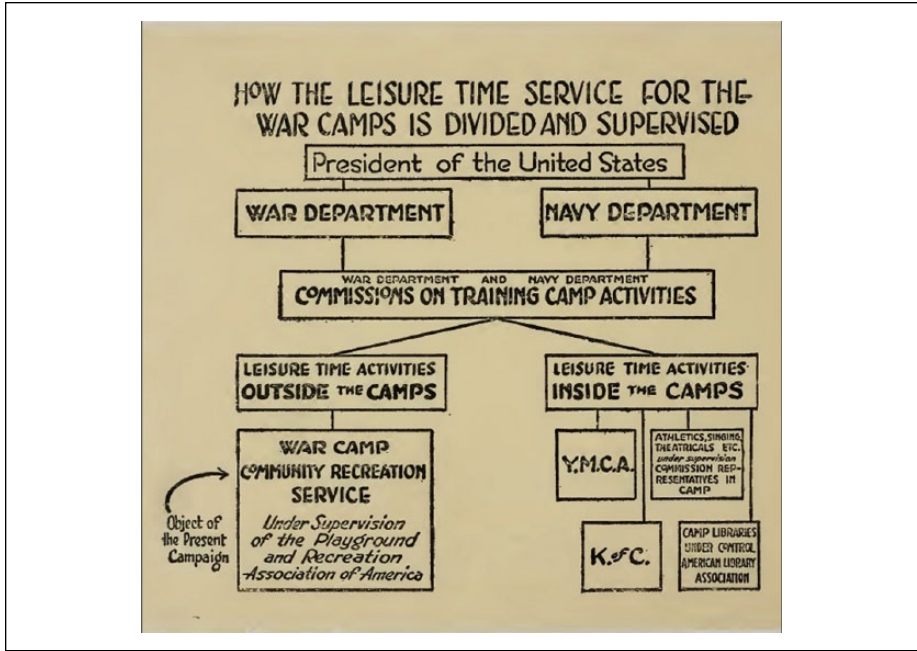


Figure 4. This chart appeared in the 1917 publication *Commission on Training Camp Activities*. It illustrates both the various activities of the CTCA and the organization’s hierarchy of governance.

events in major urban venues. These were headed by the camp song leader and intended for the entertainment of soldiers and townspeople alike.⁴⁸

While every song leader had to cater to local tastes when entertaining the public, Kimsey was in a unique situation, for he served a city that had recently manufactured a cultural renaissance. At the turn of the century, Atlanta was still reeling from the Civil War—a conflict that had severely damaged the city’s infrastructure, undermined the regional economy, and introduced devastating racial conflict. As a result, White residents of Atlanta felt that their city had lost its national status and influence. Advocates for the “New South” were soon pushing for the economic and cultural rebirth of Atlanta, and the arts played an indispensable role in their mission to prove that Atlanta was not only the leading city of the South but also the equal of northern cities. To host elaborate performances and enormous audiences, however, Atlanta needed a grand performance space. In 1909, construction was completed of the Auditorium-Armory, a complex that housed both the 5th Georgia Regiment of the National Guard and a six-thousand-seat arena (Figure 5).⁴⁹

⁴⁸Robert Bertrand Brown, *War Camp Community Service Calls* (New York: War Camp Community Service, 1919), 39–40.

⁴⁹Gavin James Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 14.

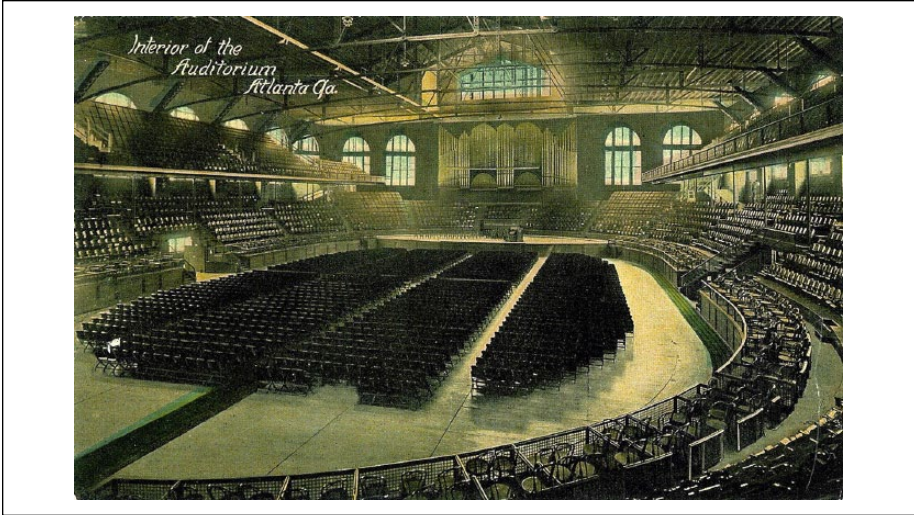


Figure 5. This undated postcard shows the inside of the Atlanta Auditorium-Armory.

During the war years, Kimsey and his capacity crowds (reports of eleven thousand seem to have been exaggerated) would fill this space with community singing on a weekly basis.⁵⁰ In 1909, however, the Auditorium-Armory was used by the newly formed Atlanta Music Festival Association (AMFA), a civic organization that planned to bring some of the greatest living performers to the city. A successful opening program inspired a bold venture the following year: a one-week “opera season” put on by the New York Metropolitan Opera Company. Opera week immediately became a highlight of the social calendar for White middle- and upper-class citizens, while the visiting opera stars brought a sense of cultural significance to the city. Northerners’ glowing reviews of Atlanta were trumpeted throughout the South.⁵¹

Opera week made the most conspicuous use of the Auditorium-Armory, but the AMFA arranged for other performances throughout the year. One concert series, inaugurated on Sunday, August 7, 1910, would become particularly significant for Kimsey and his community singing efforts. This was the series of free Sunday afternoon organ recitals featuring municipal organist Dr. Percy J. Starnes, who performed upon “one of the biggest organs in the country”—a clear point of pride for all those who attended.⁵² Occasionally Dr. Starnes was joined by prominent guest artists, including “Atlanta boy” Herbert Dittler, a violinist who had been “pronounced a genius by the most competent critics in Europe.”⁵³ The *Atlanta Constitution* described Dittler’s meteoric rise

⁵⁰“Atlanta Sings,” *Eastern Music Supervisors’ Bulletin*, April 1918, 8.

⁵¹Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South*, 49–56.

⁵²“Free Concert Great Success,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1910.

⁵³“Herbert Dittler Appears at Free Concert Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 18, 1912.

to fame in prophetic terms and pointed out that Kentucky was the only other southern state to produce a star in the field of classical performance. For “New South” enthusiasts, Dittler’s success proved the limitless potential of Atlanta.

During the war, Kimsey would take over the Sunday afternoon spot to stage concerts by enlisted men and conduct community singing. In doing so, he had to suit his entertainment to the habits of the Atlanta audience, who had grown to expect programs with high artistic standards that could still “appeal strongly to the popular ear.”⁵⁴ Kimsey’s sings were accompanied by Charles A. Sheldon Jr., who became municipal organist in 1916.⁵⁵ Upon assuming the position, Sheldon continued his predecessor’s practice of soliciting audience requests—a tactic that allowed the audience to feel included while keeping the balance of power in the hands of the organist, who could ensure a quality program.⁵⁶ Sheldon also upheld the tradition of programming music that was “calculated to please the most exacting and fastidious musical tastes, as well as those who love music for music’s sake.”⁵⁷ This balance between edification and entertainment was characteristic of public organ recitals at the Auditorium-Armory; it also suited the ideological goals of the CTCA and of the music reformers who sculpted its community singing program. When Kimsey set out to make Atlanta sing, he also had the advantage of a preexisting community chorus tradition. In the spring of 1912, the AMFA organized the Atlanta Music Festival Chorus, a volunteer ensemble that frequently appeared on the Sunday afternoon recitals. There was strong interest from the start, and the chorus reached its “full size” of nearly five hundred in less than a year.⁵⁸

Upon arriving in Atlanta, Kimsey was quick to make inroads into the city’s social life. His first documented activities outside of Camp Gordon involved leading community singing for local clubs that wanted to express their patriotism and show solidarity with the enlisted men. Just a week after first setting foot in Camp Gordon, Kimsey was the guest of honor at the first fall luncheon of the Ad Men’s Club, where he led the club men in a program of community singing that included another favorite of General Swift, “Long Boy.”⁵⁹ Kimsey’s sings also became a regular feature at the Monday gatherings of the Atlanta Women’s Club, where he led the members in patriotic songs for fifteen minutes before each meeting.⁶⁰ Lastly, Kimsey got Rotary club members “into the habit” when he led singing at luncheons during the fall Liberty

⁵⁴“Famed English Organist Plays at This Afternoon’s Concert,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 17, 1913.

⁵⁵“Last Free Concert Sunday Until After Grand Opera,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 1912;

“Festival Chorus Will Sing Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 9, 1913; “Free Concert Will Draw Great Crowd to The Auditorium,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 4, 1916.

⁵⁶“Organist Kraft Announces Fine Program Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1914.

⁵⁷“Free Concert Will Draw Great Crowd.”

⁵⁸“Last Free Concert Sunday Until After Grand Opera”; “Festival Chorus Will Sing Today”; “Free Concert Will Draw Great Crowd.”

⁵⁹“Warren Kimsey Guest of Honor of the Ad Men,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1917.

⁶⁰“Atlanta Women’s Club,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 11, 1917; “Atlanta Women’s Club,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 25, 1917.

Bond campaign.⁶¹ In addition to his club work, Kimsey also made special appearances at fundraisers, public celebrations, and other events in the city.

While Kimsey continued to have a presence in club and social life, his most important work in Atlanta took place at the Auditorium-Armory, where he regularly led a massive crowd in community singing. Like the organ recitals to which they were attached, Kimsey's programs were understood to further contribute to the development of Atlanta's cultural stature. When the weekly journal *Musical America* published a 1919 account of Atlanta's "distinguished musical season," for example, Kimsey's work as a song leader and community chorus organizer was described alongside performances by the Metropolitan Opera and visiting artists of international renown.⁶² Although this account dates from after the war, it demonstrates that Kimsey was successful in integrating himself into the musical life of the city. His work was viewed as a part of Atlanta's larger cultural mission.

During the war, the Sunday afternoon recitals became a space for mediated encounters between citizens and soldiers, who visited from Camp Gordon and nearby Fort McPherson. Kimsey's work in Atlanta was moderated by the WCCS, which sought both to quell local concern about the presence of training camps and to provide recreational activities for soldiers who visited the city.⁶³ Community singing was an ideal tool in the pursuit of these goals, for it brought soldiers and civilians together in literal harmony. Kimsey almost always led sings that included a large number of soldiers, but he also did a great deal to enrich the lives of civilians, which improved relations between the camp and the city and built support for the CTCA. His work also addressed the problem that, although Atlanta was a major metropolis, there was not enough "genuine entertainment" in the city—at least on Sundays, when the largest number of men entered the city. As a result, officials found that the soldiers "have gone back to camp feeling the worse for their holiday."⁶⁴ Kimsey's task was to remedy this situation and thereby ensure that the men of Camp Gordon would not be tempted by less-wholesome activities.

Kimsey made his first appearance as part of the free organ recital on Sunday, October 28, 1917. He was introduced to the crowd of three thousand by Colonel W. F. Peel, after which he led the audience in singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and other songs, apparently with a degree of success that surprised and delighted those present. The author of the *Constitution* article divided the crowd into three categories: citizens who regularly attended the recital, an equal number of citizens drawn by the curiosity of community singing, and a large number of soldiers.⁶⁵ All uniformed men were seated

⁶¹"Rotary Campaign Success Assured," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1917.

⁶²Starr, "Atlanta Expects to Have Greatest Musical Season," 157–58.

⁶³The *Atlanta Constitution* usually described Kimsey as working under the auspices of the CTCA, but this is incorrect. His appearances in Atlanta were in fact directly moderated by the WCCS.

⁶⁴"Plans to Entertain Soldiers Sunday," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 25, 1917.

⁶⁵"Thousands Enjoy 'Community Sing' Sunday Afternoon," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 29, 1917.

in a reserved section and treated with the utmost courtesy.⁶⁶ In sum, this inaugural public sing promised great potential both for entertainment and reconciliation.

Kimsey drew his repertoire for the Auditorium-Armory from the body of camp songs, but he intentionally selected numbers with the greatest patriotic or military spirit. The knowledge that these songs were “Camp Gordon favorites” appeared to contribute greatly to their appeal.⁶⁷ The citizens of Atlanta must have delighted at participating in the rituals and pleasures of military life, and the experience of singing camp songs connected them more directly to the war effort. The selections were divided between American classics, such as “My Old Kentucky Home,” and military-themed popular numbers, such as “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” “Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag,” and “There’s a Long, Long Trail.”⁶⁸ At these performances, Sheldon and a variety of guest artists offered music in a light classical vein, calculated to appeal to a wide audience without betraying the ideals of art. The programs were always diverse and none of the selections too long.

The social connections fostered by the Sunday recitals were as important as the musical experience. A columnist for the *Constitution*, echoing the rhetoric of the WCCS, described the recitals as first and foremost “a time when people from town and men from the camp may come to know and understand each other for the mutual benefit of both parties.”⁶⁹ The WCCS was committed to promoting positive social interactions between soldiers and civilians—or, in other words, connecting soldiers with the right class of citizens while keeping them away from disreputable girls. One of the organization’s tactics was to arrange for soldiers to enjoy home-cooked meals with local families. In Atlanta, the WCCS asked patrons of the Sunday organ recital to extend invitations for dinner or other entertainment to the men in uniform, while Kimsey encouraged the members of the Atlanta Women’s Club to sing the favorite songs of the soldiers in their homes when the men were present as guests.⁷⁰

Less than a month after Kimsey first appeared at the Auditorium-Armory, the WCCS expanded the Sunday afternoon recital into a program of continuous entertainment that ran from 2:30 to 11 P.M. The first such program, presented on December 2, 1917, began just as it had for many years, with an organ recital by the municipal organist. Sheldon took special care to program music that would both “catch the soldier’s ear” and satisfy “the demand of musical Atlanta.”⁷¹ In practice, this meant popular songs, well-known

⁶⁶“The Constitution’s Swing Around the Big War City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 27, 1917.

⁶⁷“Kimsey to Direct Community ‘Sing’ Sunday Afternoon,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 9, 1917.

⁶⁸Hansell Crenshaw, “Cordial Reception Is Given New String Quartet Sunday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1917; “Kimsey to Direct Community ‘Sing’ Sunday Afternoon”; “Organ Concert,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 18, 1917.

⁶⁹“Kimsey to Direct Community ‘Sing’ Sunday Afternoon.”

⁷⁰Brown, *War Camp Community Service Calls*, 24–25; “Women Are Urged to Sing Favorite Songs of Soldiers,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 11, 1917; “Kimsey to Direct Community ‘Sing’ Sunday Afternoon.”

⁷¹“Two Feature Pictures to Entertain Soldiers,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 9, 1917.

classical themes, and operatic excerpts. This was followed by community singing of “patriotic and popular marching songs, as well as the old favorites,” led by Kimsey and accompanied by Sheldon.⁷² The remainder of the program consisted of motion pictures interspersed with musical entertainment provided by soldiers from the camp. The WCCS was always exceedingly careful in the selection of appropriate films. Those exhibited in Atlanta were “of the highest grade and new. . . . Special features and short subjects that are sure to entertain.”⁷³

Citizens were welcome at these programs, but soldiers continued to receive special treatment. By mid-December the six-thousand-seat Auditorium-Armory was packed to capacity every Sunday, and citizens who did not arrive early were turned away.⁷⁴ Soldiers, however, were offered priority seating.⁷⁵ When the number of soldiers in attendance surpassed five thousand (this includes those who came late or left early), the entire orchestra section had to be reserved for servicemen, with citizens restricted to the dress circle and balcony.⁷⁶ The *Constitution* estimated the total attendance at these events to range from five thousand in early December to eight thousand at the end of the month. Order was maintained, in part, by a squad of Boy Scouts who served as ushers.⁷⁷

Although the Sunday afternoon entertainment expanded to include far more than community singing, Kimsey remained central to its appeal. One columnist described Kimsey’s sings as “an almost indispensable part of the program, so far as the soldiers are concerned.”⁷⁸ Reviewers reported that soldiers joined in the singing of wartime songs with great energy, and that Kimsey’s fifteen-minute sessions were always a success. On one occasion, it was reported that “the small boys of the street became so enthusiastic that the voices of the soldiers were almost drowned.”⁷⁹ It seems that the practice of segregation extended to the Sunday afternoon entertainment, for African American soldiers were allotted a specific portion of the program. Their community singing was paired with musical talent provided by twenty-five Black churches.⁸⁰

Kimsey’s repertoire at the Auditorium-Armory was almost never reported in the press, although there is no reason to expect that it had changed since his first public

⁷²“Plans to Entertain Soldiers Sunday.”

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴“Vaudeville Stars, Now Serving in U.S. Army, Entertain Big Crowd,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 17, 1917.

⁷⁵“Camp Gordon Talent at Auditorium Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1918; “Soldiers to Entertain at Auditorium Sunday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 27, 1918.

⁷⁶“Floor of Auditorium Reserved for Soldiers,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 3, 1918.

⁷⁷“‘God Help Kaiser Bill,’ Sing Soldiers from Camp at Auditorium on Sunday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 10, 1917; “Soldiers Do Part in Entertaining Auditorium Crowd,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 24, 1917.

⁷⁸“Boys from Gordon Star in Big Show at The Auditorium,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 18, 1918.

⁷⁹“Boys from Gordon Help to Entertain Thousands Sunday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 7, 1918.

⁸⁰Martha Candler, “The Better Cities Which the War Camp Community Service Is Building,” *American City*, October 1918, 263.

appearances. His selections were described variously as “popular,” “patriotic,” or “old favorites.”⁸¹ His presentation style, however, received attention on several occasions. “‘Pep,’ and a whole lot of it,” wrote one columnist, “is the only way to express Warren Kimsey’s manner of leading songs.”⁸² Another observed that Kimsey had borrowed a characteristic technique from gospel song leader Homer Rodeheaver: that is, asking the two sides of the auditorium to sing alternating lines of the text.⁸³ The most vivid description of Kimsey in action, however, appeared in a review of a Red Cross benefit concert at Loew’s Grand Theater (Figure 6):

Then Warren Kimsey danced out on the stage. His costume is that prescribed by “U.S.” . . . He moves about the stage quicker than Billy Sunday; he throws handfuls of leaflets, carrying the words of the songs he wants the audience to sing and then—he makes them sing. If they don’t suit him, he’ll stop them in the middle of a verse with no compunction, and he illustrates the “expression” he wants in a song both muscularly and vocally.⁸⁴

By all accounts, Kimsey possessed the qualities that were most important for a successful song leader: energy, enthusiasm, and persistence.

But song leading was not Kimsey’s most significant contribution to the Sunday entertainments. He was also responsible for the soldier talent that appeared onstage throughout the show, and it was this element that proved to be the most popular with both enlisted men and locals. Soldiers first appeared on the Auditorium-Armory stage as part of “an informal musical hour with the men from the camp, under the supervision of Warren Kimsey.”⁸⁵ The audience quickly discovered, however, that there was genuine talent lurking in the ranks. It became known that several of the men at Camp Gordon had in fact been professional entertainers before the draft was enacted, and that these men had formed the Camp Gordon Entertainer’s League in order to continue their work. Among them were Murray Friedman, formerly of the Ziegfeld Follies; Morton Beck, a vaudeville star; Jerry Martin, a contortionist with Barnum & Bailey; and Milton Gross, a cartoonist from New York who offered a popular onstage demonstration. These men—along with countless other talented soldiers who played instruments, sang songs, rendered dramatic readings, and told camp stories—became local celebrities and weekly headliners for the Sunday entertainment.⁸⁶

⁸¹“Plan to Entertain Soldiers Sunday.”

⁸²“Boys from Gordon Help to Entertain Thousands Sunday.”

⁸³“Unexpected Features of the Program Delight Great Crowd at Auditorium,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 1, 1918.

⁸⁴“Atlanta Theatrical Benefits for Red Cross a Big Success,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 8, 1917. Billy Sunday, a famous evangelist, was known for his energetic sermons. Homer Rodeheaver served as Sunday’s song leader for nearly twenty years, in which capacity he employed both his voice and a trombone.

⁸⁵“Two Feature Pictures to Entertain Soldiers.”

⁸⁶“Soldiers Do Part in Entertaining Auditorium Crowd”; “Boys from Gordon Star in Big Show at the Auditorium”; “Vaudeville Stars, Now Serving in U.S. Army, Entertain Big Crowd.”

LOEW'S GRAND
 Continuous..... 1 to 11 P. M.
 Vaudeville..... 3:30, 7 and 9 P. M.
 Afternoons 10 and 15c; Nights, 10, 20 & 30c
 (Including War Tax)

10--HOOSIER GIRLS--10
 Melange of Mirth and Melody

THE LEIGHTONS
 In "Party of the Second Part"

JUNE CAPRICE
 In Photoplay. "Miss U. S. A."

RED CROSS BENEFIT!
 Friday Morning, 11 O'Clock.
 All Seats 30 cents.

326th Infantry Band
Warren Kimsey
 Two Big Camp Gordon Features.

Entire Regular Show

Figure 6. This advertisement for the Red Cross benefit appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution* on December 6, 1917.

The Sunday programs also featured camp ensembles, such as the jazz band (drawn primarily from two field artillery divisions), the 325th Infantry Band, the 157th Depot Brigade Band, the 319th Field Artillery Band, the 321st Field Artillery Band, the 307th Signal Battalion vocal quartet, and the Camp Gordon harmony trio.⁸⁷ Several of these ensembles were main attractions and offered full-length concerts. One special Sunday program featured performers from nearby Fort McPherson, including the band from Base Hospital Unit No. 28 and a vocal quartet from Unit No. 13.⁸⁸

Finally, there was always a place in the Sunday show for local and visiting talent, such as Grace Riheldoffer of Pittsburgh, who was "touring the south for the purpose of

⁸⁷"Soldiers Do Part in Entertaining Auditorium Crowd"; "Floor of Auditorium Reserved for Soldiers"; "Final Concert Today Held under Auspices of War Camp Service," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1918; "Fine Program Today at The Auditorium," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 10, 1918; "Unexpected Features of the Program Delight Great Crowd at Auditorium."

⁸⁸"McPherson Soldiers Entertain Thousands at City Auditorium," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 25, 1918.

singing to soldier boys.”⁸⁹ The most interesting appearance of an outside group took place in April 1918, when the WCCS sought to welcome a large number of new recruits from the North and West. With the intent of producing a program that had a “distinctly Southern flavor,” the organization arranged for “a negro male chorus, which is to sing some of the old negro melodies.”⁹⁰ The recital was thirty minutes long and the titles of the spirituals, which included “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Down by the Riverside,” were published beforehand.⁹¹

On May 19, 1918, the *Constitution* announced that the coming Sunday’s program at the Auditorium-Armory was to be the last until autumn. Sheldon would resume his program of free afternoon organ recitals, while the community singing and other entertainment offerings were to be hosted by various city parks. The primary reason for the move appears to have been the Auditorium-Armory’s lack of air conditioning, but the new outdoor setting also removed attendance restrictions and eventually allowed the WCCS to reach citizens in all parts of Atlanta.⁹²

Kimsey led the first open-air sing one week later in Grant Park. These programs were meant to replace those offered at the Auditorium-Armory, but several distinctive differences were in evidence from the start. To begin with, films could not be exhibited outdoors in broad daylight. Second, Sheldon could no longer participate, as he was engaged with his organ recitals. The bill still included special acts, but the *Constitution* stated clearly that, where these park programs were concerned, “the singing will always constitute the main portion of the entertainment.”⁹³ The first Grant Park event drew more than three thousand participants.⁹⁴ Just days later, however, Kimsey was called up by the draft board and announced his departure from Camp Gordon. Kimsey must have been very dear to the people of Atlanta, for the *Constitution* published a thorough update on his activities in January 1919. At this point, he had left enlisted service and was working for the WCCS in Chattanooga, where he was consumed with the task of establishing community singing in factories and labor centers.⁹⁵

The Sunday sings in Grant Park were immediately suspended upon the announcement of Kimsey’s departure, with the promise that they would be reinstated when the CTCA had settled on a suitable replacement. Even before the new song leader was brought in, however, Loren G. Jones took charge of the Grant Park sings. Jones was already in place as the YMCA song leader at Camp Gordon, and had former experience as director of music for the revival meetings of evangelist Bob Jones. He appears

⁸⁹“Vaudeville Stars, Now Serving in U.S. Army, Entertain Big Crowd.”

⁹⁰“Excellent Program at Auditorium Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 28, 1918.

⁹¹*Ibid.* The second of these spirituals was billed as “Study War No Mo’.”

⁹²“Final Concert Today Held under Auspices of War Camp Service.”

⁹³“Kimsey to Conduct Community Singing in Open Air Sunday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1918.

⁹⁴“Warren Kimsey Will Report for Service,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 29, 1918.

⁹⁵“Warren Kimsey Leads Singing in Chattanooga,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 22, 1919.

to have met with great success, attracting crowds of three to five thousand each Sunday with his selections of “patriotic and popular marching songs.”⁹⁶ By early July the CTCA had selected Reese F. Veatch as the new Camp Gordon song leader. Veatch had previously been the song leader at Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and was well known at the music festivals of Michigan. Jones, however, remained at Grant Park on Sunday afternoons, while Veatch inaugurated a new singing program at Piedmont Park.⁹⁷ This policy of expansion continued, and by mid-August the WCCS was able to offer community singing in five Atlanta parks simultaneously. Veatch directed the singing in Grant and Lakewood Parks, while three other local WCCS song leaders took charge at the Piedmont, Maddox, and Oakland City Parks. The Sunday park entertainment often featured vocal soloists, quartets, and municipal band concerts. Once there was even a mandolin club present to lead the chorus. Combined weekly attendance across the parks was reported to top ten thousand.⁹⁸

In June 1919, following the sudden resignation of the most recent Camp Gordon song leader, the directors of the Atlanta WCCS unanimously reelected Kimsey to the position.⁹⁹ A brief announcement published on the occasion recalled that Kimsey was “one of the livest wires that the world of music has produced. . . . Under the magic spell of his baton Kimsey can make people sing who never sang before; and he can manage to abstract [*sic*] out of a bunch of gloomy and forbidding looking old business men a rollicking soldiers’ chorus that shakes the roof.”¹⁰⁰ By that time, however, the war was long over and the process of demobilization underway. While the needs of the camp and the city had changed, Kimsey’s triumphant return to Atlanta indicates that interest in community singing was still very much alive. Kimsey spent his final months as Camp Gordon song leader working with the citizens of Atlanta. His primary activities included an outdoor concert series—complete with community singing—at the WCCS pavilion and a string of public celebrations to honor returning soldiers.¹⁰¹ In September 1919, Kimsey resigned from Camp Gordon for a second time to take the position of state organizer with the Kiwanis Club.¹⁰²

⁹⁶“Community Singing Today at Piedmont and at Grant Park,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 14, 1918.

⁹⁷“Grant Park Singing Postponed on Account of Kimsey’s Leaving,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1918; “Noted Evangelist Speaks at Gordon,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 26, 1918.

⁹⁸“Community Sings in Five City Parks,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 16, 1918; “Sings and Concerts at City Parks Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1918; “Community Sings at Three Parks Sunday Afternoon,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 15, 1918; “Community Music in Five Parks of Atlanta Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 18, 1918.

⁹⁹“Potter Is Here to Stimulate Community Singing in City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 8, 1919; “W.C.C.S. Songleader Is Organist at Trinity,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 13, 1919; “Atlanta Secures Warren Kimsey, Song Organizer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 4, 1919.

¹⁰⁰“Warren Kimsey Returns to Make Atlantans Sing,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 11, 1919.

¹⁰¹“Community Singing Will Start Tonight,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 20, 1919; “Neighbors Pay Honor to Returning Heroes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 3, 1919.

¹⁰²“Harry Whittier Succeeds Kimsey as Song Leader,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1919.

Kimsey's Impact on the Community Music Movement

Kimsey's name disappears from the record after 1920, but his work contributed to the proliferation of community singing throughout the state of Georgia. The first person to build on his legacy was Mrs. Armand Carroll, state chairman for community music under the Council of National Defense. In July 1918, she began to solicit the appointment of song leaders for all parts of the state, with the result that 110 cities and towns not served by the WCCS soon held regular community singing activities, some of which took place in public school houses. Carroll sought out the cooperation of other parties who could expect to benefit from community singing, including educators and music industry professionals. The Cable Piano Company, for example, cheerfully provided song sheets in return for advertising—a practice that the organization would continue well into the 1920s. Although Carroll's main concern was the war effort, she envisioned a growing role for community singing after the conflict had ended. "Georgia is a most fertile field for singing," she wrote in 1919, "and it is expected that the work will be continued as a big community feature as the directors and chairmen will continue their enthusiastic co-operation."¹⁰³ Music educators shared her enthusiasm and were quick to incorporate community singing into their official activities; the annual convention of the Georgia Educational Association and the Georgia Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations regularly featured the activity for several years after the war.¹⁰⁴ At the end of 1922, the chairman of the music division of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs was able to state that "this excellent form of Americanizing our people by closer contact through song is continued throughout the state."¹⁰⁵

Taken as a whole, the efforts of Kimsey and other CTCA song leaders transformed the American musical landscape. After the community singing movement had been revitalized, musicians, educators, and members of the music trade all took advantage of its widespread popularity. Music reformers redoubled their efforts to encourage participatory music making and literacy, a labor that culminated in 1924 with the first celebration of National Music Week.¹⁰⁶ Community singing also found a home in factories, department stores, and mining camps, where it was believed to act as "a safety valve for the release of social unrest and economic discontent."¹⁰⁷ Music educators continued to take advantage of the community singing habit, which one music professor described as a "musical awakening" that paved the way to an

¹⁰³"Community Singing," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 3, 1919; "Community Singing," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 28, 1918.

¹⁰⁴"State Teachers Open Convention with Big Dinner," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1921; "Georgia Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers Meet Here," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 1, 1921.

¹⁰⁵"Miss Polk's Report as Music Chairman," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 31, 1922.

¹⁰⁶Charles M. Tremaine, *The History of National Music Week* (New York: National Bureau for the Advancement of Music, 1925), 11.

¹⁰⁷Archibald T. Davison, "Good Music for Community Singing," *Playground*, April 1922, 455.

enlightened and modernized system of education.¹⁰⁸ “The effective work done by Government song leaders during the War caused music to be recognized as a necessity and no longer a luxury,” proclaimed the *Eastern School Music Herald* in late 1919. The editors then laid out a comprehensive plan for the promotion of community music in all of its forms by a newly established Community Music League. The national music education organizations also plunged into the task. The 1918 meeting of the Music Department of the National Education Association featured a “Lively Discussion” on the topic of popular music as community singing fare in the schools, while MSNC leaders encouraged educators “to engage vigorously in musical endeavors calculated to benefit the adult population as well as the children”—a reference to the community music movement.¹⁰⁹ Both organizations made community singing a regular feature of their meetings.

At the same time, community singing was increasingly exploited for its commercial value. Music industry representatives regularly joined with reformers in promoting community music—but for the potential sales in instruments and sheet music, not for the personal and societal benefits. The popularity of community singing also made it attractive to professional entertainers. In movie theaters, organists—acting in direct contradiction to the values of reformers and educators—led audiences in singing the latest popular hits. These sing-alongs were usually comical and lacked pedagogical value. In this way, the community singing movement was almost too successful: participants forgot that it was supposed to be good for them. By the late 1920s, Americans still remembered the heartfelt war-era sings, but often with a cynicism that was far removed from the committed sincerity of Kimsey and his colleagues. While the impact of the CTCA’s singing program on a decade of education, advertising, and leisure could not be disputed, the spirit of the war was gone.

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¹⁰⁸Erb, “The Musical Awakening of Today,” 6.

¹⁰⁹“N. E. A. MUSIC—June 30-July 5,” *School Music*, May 1918, 20–21; Kenneth S. Clark, “Community Service and School Music,” *Music Supervisors’ Journal*, February 1923, 21.