

JAMES R. LEMON

The originator and founder of Benton's Big Singing, James R. Lemon, was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, April 10, 1848. In the summer of 1852 he came with his parents in a covered wagon across the Appalachian Mountains to Marshall County, Kentucky. Tucked away in the wagon, along with children and household goods, was a copy of *Southern Harmony*, the remarkable old song-book written and published in 1835 by "Singin' Billy" Walker. The Lemons were a singing family and the book was doubtless one of their highly-prized possessions. The elder Lemons settled on a farm in Marshall County and sent their children to the rural school to be educated. James R., the oldest of the six Lemon children, possessed an exceptionally fine tenor voice and early became a "singing master," or teacher of singing schools, popular throughout the rural regions of the South at that time. He used the *Southern Harmony* book both in the singing schools and in the "literary" schools which he taught for many years. In 1874 he entered the drug business at Benton, later becoming a traveling salesman. Lemon was married to Cora A. Wilson in 1873, and after her death, to Lucretia C. Thompson. He was the father of six children, four sons and two daughters, all of them but one now living (1939). In 1890 he became the proprietor and editor of the *Benton Tribune*, and in 1892 served as postmaster under President Cleveland. After selling the *Tribune*, he bought the *Mayfield Daily Messenger*, which he operated until his death in December, 1919.

James R. Lemon is said to have possessed a distinguished personality and an unusual gift for inspiring others to follow his leadership. This, and his fine voice were largely responsible for the success of the institution which he established.