

THE STRUGGLE

1959 - 1963

IT'S ONE thing to decide to start a new organization in a well-covered field when emotions and enthusiasm are high, and when adrenalin is flowing freely. It's quite another to knuckle down to all the nitty-gritty tasks involved, and to take responsibility for the success of the venture.

On February 26, 1959, the corporation was formed, the Articles of Association were approved by the State of Rhode Island and officers were elected to guide the new infant through its first months of life. The "incorporators" of Harmony, Inc. were Peggy Rigby, Charlotte Sneddon, Mary Avis "Pudge" Hedges, Jeanne Maino and Mary Perry.

Those elected to serve on the first Board of Directors were:

PEGGY RIGBY, *President*

CHARLOTTE SNEDDON,

Vice President

PUDGE HEDGES, *Secretary*

JEANNE MAINO, *Treasurer*

JOAN STOCKWELL, *Parliamentarian*

MAZELLE SHELLEY, *Historian*

ROSELLA BEAUPARLANT

BILLIE BRIGGS

RUTH KELLEY

MARGARET NEDEAU

LEONA PEDRO

MARY PERRY

MARY RAPOSA

JOANNE WILLETT

A month after the election, in March, the first issue of THE KEY-NOTE appeared, its cover proclaiming it to be the "1st OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF HARMONY, INC." It featured the winning logo design by Skidge Heath, who was to become a legendary and vital figure in Harmony, Inc. as our Official Design Chairman, responsible for designing pins, medals, certificates and awards for every occasion. Skidge's willingness to use her creative talent for Harmony, Inc. has never interfered with her work for and devotion to her own HARMONETTES Chapter of North Attleboro.



Elizabeth "Skidge" Heath, designer of our Harmony logo, was our 1962-1963 International President.

Since minutes of the first meetings are missing from our permanent files, we must depend upon that first issue of THE KEY-NOTE for a progress report. Our motto, "A Blend with Friendship," was introduced and President Peggy Rigby reported it was the brainchild of her own husband, Murray, who had won the motto contest hands down.



She also reported with humor that he also won "the right to pull the curtain at the show" as his reward, thus establishing a pattern for other helpful husbands, who would be called upon often to help get the fledgling organization on its feet.

THE KEY-NOTE was full of progress reports and upcoming events, including the April 18 Mid-Year Meeting and the first convention, scheduled for the weekend of October 17. The first issue also contained an arrangement of "My



August P. LaFrance, Rhode Island Secretary of State signs the Articles of Association for Harmony, Inc. on February 26, 1959. Looking on from left to right are Incorporators Charlotte Sneddon, Mary Avis "Pudge" Hedges, Mary Perry, Jeanne Maino, and Peggy Rigby (seated).

Country 'Tis of Thee/God Save the Queen" and the announcement that this song would be used to open all future Harmony, Inc. events. It was apparent from this issue that the founders were determined to get Harmony, Inc. off to a lively start and spared no efforts towards that goal.

The Mid-Year Meeting was held in North Attleboro, Massachusetts hosted by THE HARMONETTES. The CHAMPLAIN ECHOES Chapter from Burlington, Vermont received its charter as Harmony's sixth chapter on that occasion.

Despite Harmony's tiny size, our history books reveal that the individual chapters were big in accomplishment during those early years, working hard to keep their names before the public. They were supported in their efforts by local S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A., Inc. chapters, whose choruses often co-sponsored their shows. One of the most exciting events of 1959 was the show sponsored by the MELODY BELLES and the Providence Chapter, S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A., Inc. featuring none other than the famous Buffalo Bills, stars of the wildly-successful musical, "The Music Man."

Good news came from north of the border when the HARMONY BELLES Chapter announced it had swelled its ranks with the addition of the former Barrie Barbershop Chorus. The Orillia NOTE CRACKERS quartette was extremely active through their area, promoting Harmony, Inc. through television and other public appearances.

Although it was generally felt that Harmony, Inc. was off to a good start, some wondered if the 1957 upheaval had really boiled down to such a small effort in the barbershop scheme of things. Not so. Efforts were still being made by a few Sweet Adelines to effect a change of policy that would again unite all women barbershoppers. These efforts toward reconciliation primarily in the American midwest and some areas of Canada, were destined to fail and result in Harmony's future growth.

In 1960 a charter was granted to THE HAPPY TONES of Montreal, destined to become one of Harmony's most active and productive chapters. The newspaper stories about this event reported that Ilene Findlay was a former Sweet Adeline who, with co-founders Marg Hardie (Tait) and Phil Walcott, had worked for a year to start this new chorus. The continuing efforts of Ilene and Marge, down through the years, assured them both a permanent place in Harmony's history, of which we are reminded each year when the awards bearing their names are presented. As an example of their zeal, this infant chapter volunteered to hostess the 1961 convention.

The 1960 convention in Providence demonstrated the bravado and enthusiasm of the Harmony membership. It featured the first contests for quartettes and choruses, a very informal affair with no special eligibility requirements, but alive with excitement for all who participated. Winners of the quartette contest were the PITCH PIPE PALS from the hostess chapter, the MELODY BELLES. This chorus also won top honors among competing choruses. It seemed suitable that the MELODY BELLES, having set the organizational standards, should also set the musical standards, under the direction of the talented Margot Lum.

Hot on their heels were THE HARMONETTES directed by Bob Turcotte, a combination that would prove unbeatable in eight of the succeeding competitions. The second place KEYNOTES quartette would have to wait another five years to earn their crowns, but during those years they earned the admiration and affection of all Harmony members for their many musical efforts on behalf of the organization.

Among the guests at the 1960 convention attending Board Meetings were Ruth Geils and Mickey Hanna from Illinois, who were working to start a Harmony chapter in the midwestern United States. Ruth, a member of two Sweet Adeline championship quartettes and director of a medalist chorus, had resigned as Regent, in protest over International policies. Her own Waukegan chapter had split down the middle, so Ruth still had a small chorus, but the BELLE CHORDS were reluctant to affiliate with another organization after their painful experience, opting for independence. Mickey Hanna and Myra Crowe, members of another Sweet Adeline chapter, had joined with Ruth, Ginger Carpenter and Marilyn Novak in an uphill effort to start a new Harmony, Inc. chorus right in the heart of several large Sweet Adeline chapters. This new chorus, the VILLAGE VOCAL CHORDS (VVCs), was to charter the following spring.

Although Ruth had been in touch with Harmony's founders by



1960-1961 Harmony Queens, PITCH PIPE PALS, Providence, Rhode Island, (left to right): Shirley Munson, tenor; Phyllis Marsden, lead; Joan Cutler, bari; Dorothy Christiansen, bass.



Our first International Chorus Champions — MELODY BELLES (Providence, Rhode Island), Margot Lum, Director.

telephone for several years, the 1960 convention was her first chance to meet them face-to-face. So impressed was she with their glowing enthusiasm and monumental efforts that she was inspired to write the Harmony Creed as an expression of her admiration. So impressed with the Creed was the Board, that they promptly adopted it to replace the Code of Ethics.

Perhaps the most momentous decision made at the 1960 Convention was the addition to our Corporate By-Laws of the eight words that were to ensure Harmony's future:

"The duration of this Corporation shall be perpetual." This laid to

rest for all time the notion that Harmony, Inc. was little more than a "flash-in-the-pan" reaction by a small group of disgruntled women. It gave Harmony a sense of permanence, an added luster, a greater challenge to be met by those present and all who were to follow. These words gave the early disciples the momentum they needed to overcome the obstacles that lay ahead. They also provided the ready answer for those who might later wonder why Harmony, Inc. and Sweet Adelines, Inc. couldn't "get back together." Harmony, Inc. now had a commitment to the future, a promise to provide all the joys of barbershopping to all who would join.

— 1961 —

With the permanence of the corporation ensured, traditions began forming in 1961.

At the Montreal convention, the International Chorus was born when members from the different chapters were invited to sing together for the first time. It was the only way most of the members could enjoy the thrill of singing with a big chorus, since there were no restrictions on the number participating. No one guessed, however, that this chorus, with

some refinements, would become a highlight of every convention for years to come.

Also decided that year was that the winning quartette would be known as the "Harmony Queens" and would be adorned with lovely rhinestone crowns. Able seamstress Mickey Hanna also provided four beautiful red velvet capes and hand-tooled leather boxes in which to transport the crowns. First to wear those crowns and capes were the KEY CHORDS from Mickey's own chapter. They have been prized



Ruth Geils, author of our Harmony Creed, was instrumental in making Harmony, Inc. successful.



1961-62 Harmony Queens, KEY CHORDS, Oak Park, Illinois, (front left to right): Ginger Carpenter, bari and Ruth Geils, lead; (back left to right): Linda Laben, tenor and Mayme Laben, bass.

adornments for all succeeding Harmony Queens during their championship year.

Winning the first of their long string of blue ribbons in the chorus contest were THE HARMONETTES. Close behind were the MELODY BELLES, with the tiny new VVCs placing third. Although there were no qualifying rounds as there are today, both competitions held all the excitement of a "real contest" and Harmony members were elated enough to stay up all night and listen to the champion and medalist quartettes.

Another significant event at the Montreal convention was the charter presentation to the second midwest chapter, the BELLE CHORDS of Waukegan, who had finally decided to give up their independent status. Several of their members had also joined the VVCs in order to compete and had convinced the others that Harmony, Inc. really was the right organization for them.

At that very early stage of development, there was rarely more than one bid for the next convention. The bid for the 1962 convention came from the VILLAGE VOCAL CHORDS, and even without another

option many members were pessimistic about financing a trip "all the way to Illinois." When the VVCs sang their musical bid and pointed out that "it's no farther from here to there than it is from there to here (and here we are!)" the membership meeting erupted with approval. Fears were allayed and ways and means projects undertaken as soon as the members got home.

With two chapters, the Harmony Queens and a medalist chorus, not to mention a convention coming up, the midwest members were determined to promote Harmony, Inc. by becoming traveling ambassadors. Among their many visits to neighboring towns were several to North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where a chapter was forming with the help of Peggy Streblov. Peggy was soon to become one of those members famous for the many Harmony hats she wore. Soon she was singing in the Second Place Medalist BARBER CHORDS quartette, editing THE KEY-NOTE and using her artistic and creative talents in countless other ways to benefit Harmony, Inc.

Happily, Harmony, Inc. was to continue throughout its history to



Peggy Streblov helped form the BARBERETTES Chapter in North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

benefit from those members who, like Peggy, were willing to tackle whatever job needed to be done at the moment. This attitude is personified in the profiles of our International President and our three new Certified Judges in this commemorative booklet.

Minutes of the Board Meetings from that year reflected the growth of Harmony, Inc. with eleven chapters (plus seven Associate Members) having renewed, for a total of 335 members. New chapters



1961 International Chorus Champions — HOMETOWN HARMONETTES (North Attleboro, Massachusetts), Bob Turcotte, Director.

not previously mentioned were GARDEN CITY with 15 members and MELLO TONES with 32. The Associate members represented areas where contacts had been established and new chapters were forming.

— 1962 —

The elation at the prospect of each new chapter was reflected in International Secretary Billie Brigg's bulletin headed "ATTENTION!!! — GOOD NEWS!!!" which urged all chapters to send a letter or wire to our first Wisconsin Chapter, the BARBERETTES of North Fond du Lac. Later the same month, another exciting announcement from Billie informed us that the BERKSHIRE TANGLE-AIRES of Pittsfield, Massachusetts were also coming aboard.

Although the BELLE CHORDS, the TANGLE-AIRES and the BARBERETTES have long since disbanded, each was responsible for successors of great achievement. The BELLE CHORDS moved their rehearsal location to Libertyville, changed their name to the DO-RE-MI's and have been three-time winners of the coveted MacIntosh Award for small choruses. Their SOUND RELATIONS

quartette also won the Findlay Plaque in 1980 and member Jean Noll has served on the International Board in several different capacities, as well as in Area IV. This tiny chapter has been an inspiration to all small choruses with their gallant and creative competition performances.

Likewise the TANGLE-AIRES did not disappear entirely, having produced one of Harmony's most popular and long-standing champion quartettes, the PINKERTONES (1969), now retired.

The BARBERETTES were succeeded by the CHORD-A-LETTES of Plymouth, Wisconsin which has produced two championship quartettes, REFLECTIONS (1976) and CRYSTAL COLLECTION (1981). At the 1983 convention this small chorus won both the MacIntosh Award and the Tait Trophy under the direction of their superb director, Freddie Noordyk, who also sang in both champion quartettes. Charlotte Berndt, a Harmony Queen herself, served as THE KEY-NOTE Editor for the last decade.

This chapter has also hosted several Area events. Like the DO-RE-MI's, the CHORD-A-LETTES have proven that dedication, loyalty and hard work go a long way toward

successful barbershopping.

Despite the poor prognosis for attendance at the 1962 convention, over 200 Harmony members converged at the beautiful Moraine-on-the-Lake Hotel in Highland Park, Illinois. It was to be a unique convention experience and the least expensive ever.

The package price included accommodations, food, tips and all events. The entire staff was at the disposal of our members and guests, who took over the entire hotel. The rooms were large and airy, many with a beautiful view of Lake Michigan. With no souvenir shops within walking distance, Harmony members used their spare moments to wander through the lovely woods down to the lake. Chorus competition was held in a high school auditorium, a short 2-block walk from the hotel, made pleasant by the perfect fall weather in early October. Many members, as they checked out, expressed their pleasure in going home with all the money they had brought!

Chorus competition brought forth the same three medalists from the previous year. The CHORD JILLS quartette created the most excitement by jumping from their 1961 third place standing into the capes



1962 International Chorus Champions — HOMETOWN HARMONETTES (North Attleboro, Massachusetts), Bob Turcotte, Director.



1962-1963 Harmony Queens, **CHORD JILLS**, North Attleboro, Massachusetts, (left to right): Jo Nyzio, lead; Marie Chabot, bass; Florence Valade, bari; Delores Pinsonnault, tenor.

and crowns of the Harmony Queens. In second place were the very proud BARBER CHORDS from our new Wisconsin chapter.

A sticky question was raised at this convention: what to do about the expenses for the wives of judges who accompanied their husbands to convention. It was decided that Harmony, Inc. assume the expense this year, but it was not to be construed as a precedent!

Arrangements had also been made, for the first time, to record the competitions with the hope of producing a record. This however, would not happen for several more years.

To demonstrate the perpetual optimism of the Board Members, it was decided to post a sign at the registration desk announcing that anyone interested in trial judging could start that year; this despite the lack of funds, lack of training facilities and lack of qualified personnel to train our members. The record does not show if there were any takers, but it would be more than twenty years before our first certified judges emerged.

The first of many theme song contests was also announced that year. Only lyrics were to be submitted, so another contest could be held later for music to go with the winning lyrics. Little did we know in those optimistic days that it would

take almost as long to find a theme song as it would to develop a judges training program!

— 1963 —

As Harmony, Inc. embarked on its fifth year, we were facing the fact that we had, indeed, undertaken a herculean task. Many of our chapters were small, or in isolated areas where it was difficult to find a good director. There had not been time to develop a training program for our members, which the Board realized was essential, since we were cut off from the previous educational opportunities in Sweet Adelines. Our growth was being stifled because our members were becoming discouraged and some chapters were fading. Our finances did not permit us to hire the much-needed Society educators that we now enjoy.

Undaunted, the Board wrestled with these problems, never doubting that somehow they would be solved.

In 1963 a crisis erupted in Canada that took our minds off such problems and galvanized us into action. A Sweet Adeline chapter in Ottawa, Ontario had accepted a Negro woman into membership and had been threatened with expulsion. The hue

and cry over this had reached the Canadian press, which blazoned the news to its outraged readers. A famous editorial writer for the Toronto *Telegram* had written a caustic account entitled "The All-White Choir."

All newspapers were deluged with Letters to the Editor taking Sweet Adelines to task for its previously-unknown discriminatory policies. Some shows were picketed, others boycotted. When the Harmony Board of Directors was alerted about all this by our Canadian chapters, plans were quickly made to hold the Mid-Year Meeting in Toronto immediately. It seemed imperative that we let the press and the people in Canada know of Harmony's existence.



Charlotte Sneddon, one of Harmony, Inc.'s incorporators, became our 1959-1960 International President.



Margaret Tait, 1963-1964 International President.

Executive Secretary Ruth Geils arrived early in Toronto in order to contact the press. Mr. Tumpane, who had written the editorial, immediately suggested that an organizational meeting for a Toronto chapter be held, promising to publicize it. Edna May, a local television commentator, interviewed some of the Board members when they arrived and later gave Harmony, Inc. a fine tribute on her program.

The organizational meeting-rehearsal was well-attended and prospects for a Toronto chapter seemed bright. The Board had agreed that no purpose would be served by exhibiting bitterness over events of the past and a "Statement of Policy" was drawn up as a guide for our members who might be interviewed. Eileen Arnold, Associate Member and former HAPPY TONE now living in Toronto, was on hand, as was Joan Stockwell, also now a Toronto resident who had transferred to Associate Membership. Also present were two members of the Ottawa CAPITAL CHORDETTES, who were ready to join Harmony, Inc., since they refused to oust the lovely black woman who had been the cause of this furor, and who was their director when they became a Harmony chapter.

The end result of all this was similar to what happened in Miami in 1957, with one big difference: there was a person involved. If Harmony members needed anything to strengthen their convictions at that time, it came in the person of Lana Clowes. That any organization could deny membership to such a charming, beautiful and talented woman was unthinkable. More than anything else that had happened, Lana justified our existence and gave us the courage to go on.

The only chapter we gained out of this controversy was the CAPITAL CHORDETTES. All other Canadian Sweet Adeline chapters decided to remain. Some went underground, meeting in private homes to avoid the press. Some made statements to the press that they had no choice but

to abide by the rules made by those American southerners, for which Canadians were blameless. Harmony members interested in this part of our history can read the newspaper accounts in our history book for that year.

It was agreed that the Executive Secretary should go on to Ottawa to meet with our new prospective chapter, and then to Montreal to help THE HAPPY TONES take advantage of the publicity that had appeared in the *Gazette*: a large front-page picture of Lana Clowes, Ruth Geils and Beverly Perkins, President of the Ottawa chapter. THE HAPPY TONES scheduled a special rehearsal and party. They also appeared, with Ruth, on a local television program and were interviewed about Harmony, Inc.

In a short time, it was all over. The press went on to other issues and forgot about the whole thing. Sweet Adelines emerged from their hiding places and their audiences came back. Harmony, Inc. went on with the business of building their beloved organization the hard way.

The 1963 convention was notable in that the first meeting of chapter delegates (presidents) took place. The main purpose of their meeting was to elect a Nominating Committee for the International Board of Directors.

The convention, held in Boston, was hosted by the outgoing championship chorus, THE HARMONETTES, who won the competition for the third consecutive year. Although no one begrudged this fine chorus its repeated success, questions were being raised about the possibility of having the winning chorus "sit out" after one or two wins. Until now, all choruses were needed in competition to make a good show for the public.

The HARMONY HONEYS from Bristol, Rhode Island were crowned Harmony Queens. Their lead singer, Pearl Klingbiel, was a transplanted charter member of the VVCs, who had started a new chapter, the BARNACLE BELLES, when she moved east.

The first Corporate Business Manual was approved and the deci-



1963-64 Harmony Queens, HARMONY HONEYS, Bristol, Rhode Island, (left to right): Elaine Peters, tenor; Pearl Klingbiel, lead; Jill Cole, bari; Pauline Alves, bass.



sion made that the Executive Secretary should be a paid employee, rather than an elected Board Member. Applicants for the position were being sought for the stipend of \$50 per year plus "reasonable traveling expenses." With the secretarial position open on the Board, it was decided that the Parliamentarian should fill this spot and that it be elective rather than appointed.

The director of the new DO-RE-MI Chapter, Ginger Carpenter, was presented the charter at the Annual Meeting, Ginger being a member of the KEY CHORDS, 1961 Harmony Queens. It was decided that membership requirements for charter be raised from 12 to 14 members. It was also agreed that every effort should be made to get our judges training program under way as quickly as possible.

The original theme song contest had not produced a suitable song,

although three members had submitted entries. At the membership meeting, the members voted to encourage all interested members to compose a song so that a theme song could be chosen at the 1965 convention.

Some delegates at the Annual Meeting complained that they weren't given enough information about the activities of Harmony, Inc. to take back to their chapters, nor did they feel they were truly participating in those decisions, since no business had come before them. Motions were made and carried by the delegates that they be given a resume of Board decisions and actions at future Annual Meetings, and that an agenda be sent to all chapters prior to convention for consideration by all chapters. It was clear, at this very early stage, that the members of Harmony, Inc. fully intended to take an active part in their organization!

With the 1964 convention slated for Orillia, Ontario, the BARNACLE BELLES and MELODY BELLES bid to co-hostess the 1965 convention. With two conventions now in the planning stage, we had taken another step up the ladder of success.

Harmony, Inc. was now five years old. Though its growth had not lived up to expectations, those who had brought it this far were proud of having provided a solid foundation for those who would come later. They could also take satisfaction in the strength of character that had caused them to sacrifice what they had known and loved for what most people would consider an impossible dream. They had, indeed, proved it possible to combine the joy of barbershop harmony with fair and equitable government in which all members could participate. It is not an exaggeration to call them pioneers.