



# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 34 DECEMBER 1996 NUMBER 4

## ROCKFORD LOVES TO SING



**MENDELSSOHN CLUB CHILDREN'S CHORUS**

**At Wild West Days, Midway Village, 1994**

- First row: Sara Milner, Amanda Makulec  
Second row: Katie Schutt, Kirsten Borst, Natalie Harden, Bristol Huffman  
Third row: Maureen Parker, Billie Callahan, Rachel Johnson, Emily Herdeman  
Fourth row: Aaron Burns, Stephanie Anderson, Laura Ferguson, Kristen Richards  
Fifth row: Eric Peterson, Kaitlin Zaumzeil, Desiree Johnson, Laura Selby  
Back row: Jerry Pratt, accompanist; Cathy Herdeman, director

*Courtesy Mendelssohn Club*

## FROM AN EDITOR'S DESK

Countless hours of research and interviews have produced a wealth of data about Rockford residents who love to sing. We've devoted this entire issue to brief histories of singing groups, both past and present. In limiting our scope, we've not been able to include choruses/choirs of individual churches, schools or colleges. At the Rockford Public Library, Rockfordiana Files provided clips of news articles pertaining to music activities. Here, we'll mention a few groups no longer existing.

We read of the 1915-1919 Singers and Players Club composed of actors and musicians. They presented annual benefit performances of works such as *Pinafore* and *Robin Hood* plus original vaudeville-type productions titled "Evening on the Old Plantation," and "Biff! Bang!" Some productions were staged for Camp Grant soldiers. Proceeds provided funds for vocal study scholarships.

During the World War I era, a Community Chorus merged with the City Singing Club. Arthur Nevin directed; Ralph Hinchliff served as president; Mrs. Chandler Starr (known as the founder of Mendelssohn Club) headed the nominating committee. Later, in an April 1930 account, we found mention of an 80-voice Mixed Chorus directed by Prof. Andreas Fughman, making its debut.

Mothersingers choral groups originated at John Nelson and Highland schools in the 1930s directed by Astrid Gustafson. Later they combined to form the Eastside Mothersingers under Mary Angus' direction. By 1945, membership was opened to mothers citywide under the name of Rockford Woman's Choral Club. Mention of the club disappears after celebration of a 25th anniversary dinner, 1958.

An April 1945 news item reported the second annual concert of the Coleridge-Taylor Chorus of Booker T. Washington Center. Ethel Riley Clark directed the 28-voice choir named after composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

"Sing Out Rockford," grew out of enthusiasm generated by the international goodwill group "Up With People" in its Rockford appearance, 1968. Fifty members--mostly teenagers--met in twice-weekly rehearsals directed by Michael Muller. He claimed to have been appointed because he at 26 he was the oldest.

Undoubtedly, Rockford residents have special memories of singing. Among them, Suzanne Crandall recalls singing with the Girl Scout Songsters in the late 1940s. Two girls from each local troop sang in the chorus. On Saturday mornings they not only rehearsed at the News Tower, but they sang on WROK radio. Each spring these uniformed girl scouts gave a concert at Rockford College, then on Seminary Street.

We'd be pleased to hear about your memorable singing experiences in Rockford.

*Peggy Jensen,* Editor

## ROCKFORD SINGERS RAISE THEIR VOICES IN SONG

### TO ENTERTAIN, TO INSPIRE, TO WORSHIP

**"IT IS THE BEST OF ALL TRADES, TO MAKE SONGS,  
AND THE SECOND BEST TO SING THEM."**

**Hilaire Belloc, "On Everything. On Song"**

### SVEAS SONER

January 23, 1890, marks the birth of the Sveas Soner Chorus. Its name translates to "Sons of Sweden." Founders pledged to preserve Scandinavian songs in their adopted country, America. Today's mission is to educate, to inspire, and to assist individuals to sing and to perform as a chorus. "A touch of Swedish music in each program sustains the borning pledge," says historian Kenneth Flodin.

Sveas Soner is deeply rooted in Rockford's cultural and social history. At the turn of the century, these "Singing Swedes" built a music hall in the heart of "Swedeville" at 326 Seventh Street.

It provided a setting for community entertainment ranging from the stirring music of the Navy Band to the ageless drama of "The Merchant of Venice." Countless choruses, quartets, and soloists, along with gymnasts, dancers and dramatists made the Sveas Soner Music Hall the area's center for performing arts. (A fire in 1980 gutted the building and left the society homeless.)

Men--young and old--with a desire to sing are welcome. Members do not have to be Swedish nor do they need a trained voice to belong. Current membership runs about 30.

In 106 years of Sveas Soner history, many conductors have stepped to the podium. Longest tenure--35 years--goes to Dr. Bernhardt Westlund who succeeded Harry T. Carlson. Others in recent years have included Harold Livingston, Carl Nielsen, Reuben Johnson, and currently Scott Chachula. Maurine Staublin served as accompanist for more than 25 years, followed by James Angell, Jody Beach and now Mark Howerter.

An annual spring concert--to be held in April or May 1997--ranks as a highlight event. Now area guest artists join the chorus. But in former years, celebrities such as Wagnerian tenor Lauritz Melchior, Margaret Truman, the Lennon Sisters, and lyric soprano Marion Marlowe have appeared.

*Source: Kenneth Flodin, Assistant Director, Historian and Emcee.*

## ROCKFORD HARMONY SINGING SOCIETY

Thirteen male singers organized the Harmony Singing Society, November 23, 1923. The first meeting and rehearsal was held at the home of Frank Pettersen, the society's president. Today's 23 chorus members--average age 70-- includes five Norwegian-born singers. Others represent ethnic backgrounds such as Swedish, German and Italian. Requirements to join: a desire to sing with a chorus interested in folk songs. (Social membership now numbers 365 under leadership of Donald Cunitz, president.)

In 1925, the organization moved to permanent quarters at 1020 Broadway, above Bergren Plumbers. Next in 1942 Harmony bought the corner lot and two-family house at 15th Avenue and 7th Street. They rented the house until constructing a building in 1949. A 1996 addition increased the size to accommodate 530 persons.

The group's purposes are to promote and to foster songs of Scandinavian and American folklore, to retain affiliation with The Norwegian Singers Association of America, and to participate in biennial Sangerfests. The association traces its origin to 1891, holding its first Sangerfest in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1892. Harmony participated for the first time in Chicago, 1926. Memorable Sangerfests included those in Salt Lake City, Utah, when 600 voices sang in the dome-shaped Mormon Tabernacle;

New York City in 1946; and a 1996 gathering of 428 singers in Decorah, Iowa. Rockford Harmony has hosted three Sangerfests: 1940, 1956 and 1982.

Other highlights: two 1960s concerts at Jefferson High School with Norwegian Myron Floren, accordionist with the Lawrence Welk Show, as guest artist. Each year the chorus presents three concerts in its own hall and sings occasionally at nursing and retirement homes.

Directors have included Sofus Michelsen, Sr., John Roebuck, Oystein Kvernland, Sverre Forland, Arnold Alenuis, Carl E. Carlson, David Patterson and for the past 20 years, Duane Barker. Esther Erickson, assistant director and accompanist has been with the group for over 30 years.

*Source: Koll Harring, Harmony Chorus Marshall*

## LYRAN SINGING SOCIETY MALE CHORUS

Five Swanborg brothers--Claus, Oscar, Charles, Axel and Gust--organized an 11-member singing group in October 1893. Eventually, three generations of Swanborgs would sing in the Lyran Male Chorus. Associated with the American Union of Swedish Singers AUSS, the chorus existed as a division of the Lyran Singing Society. For instance, in 1965, the chorus numbered 25 members; the society, 350.

Incorporated in 1895, the society stated its purposes: to encourage Swedish singing, to assist in building character, and to assist members financially during times of crisis.

The Lyrans built a substantial brick hall, known as the Klubhus, at 1115 Fourth Avenue in 1911. The 70th anniversary, in 1963, prompted a \$20,000 remodeling project, including a new front. Besides the clubhouse, the society owned 35 acres of park land on the Rock River near the mouth of the Kishwaukee River. Here at Oak Hills, members and their families met for social outings. They erected a \$10,000 pavilion in 1954.

Frithiof Swenson heads a long list of chorus directors. Among them John Roebuck served the longest term: 35 years. Soon after the 75th anniversary, (according to recollections by former members), the chorus disbanded. But the Lyran Club exists today.

*Sources: Rockfordiana Files, David Carlson, accompanist Esther Erickson.*

### **SVITHOID MALE CHORUS**

Albert Ulin organized the Svithoid Chorus in 1932 and continued as its director for more than 25 years. During that time the chorus achieved perfect attendance at annual regional and national festivals of the American Union of Swedish Singers (AUSS). Composed of men of Swedish heritage, the chorus rehearsed in Svithoid Hall, 1124 Fourth Avenue. They gave annual spring concerts as well as appearing at

retirement and nursing homes. In the 1940s, a quartet of Sexton Pearson, Leonard Wanfalt, Al Johnson and Ray Moberg would sing barbershop numbers for fun after regular rehearsals.

*Source: Rockfordiana Files*

### **ROCKFORD SWEDISH VETERANS GOODTEMPLARS**

In yet another opportunity to sing as a chorus, 16 men--all with over 20 years of membership in Swedish choral groups--gathered at the home of Esther Erickson in the 1980s. She describes them as an "overflow from other groups." They joined the AUSS in 1983 and participated in the national festival in Chicago, 1986. For the love of singing, they performed for others in nursing homes and highrises.

Swedish men singers also comprised the Goodtemplars. Affiliated with the AUSS, 1928 -38, they sang under the direction of Einar Pearson.

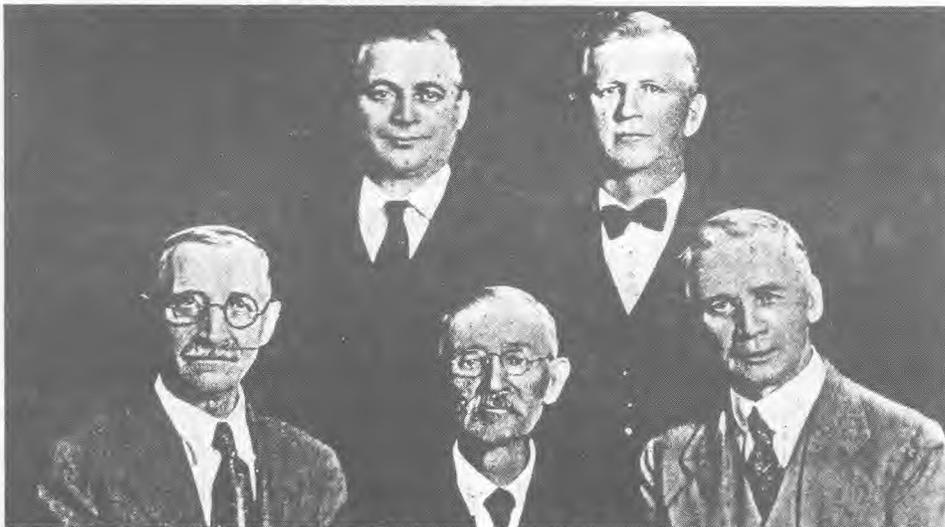
*Source: Esther Erickson*



Other ethnic choruses also existed, among them, the Germania *Sesang-Verien*, a 25-member German singing society built a Romanesque/Queen Anne clubhouse in 1890 at 121 S. Madison St. They vacated the building in 1971. It now houses the Rockford Rescue Mission. The Danish Brotherhood sponsored an Odin Chorus.



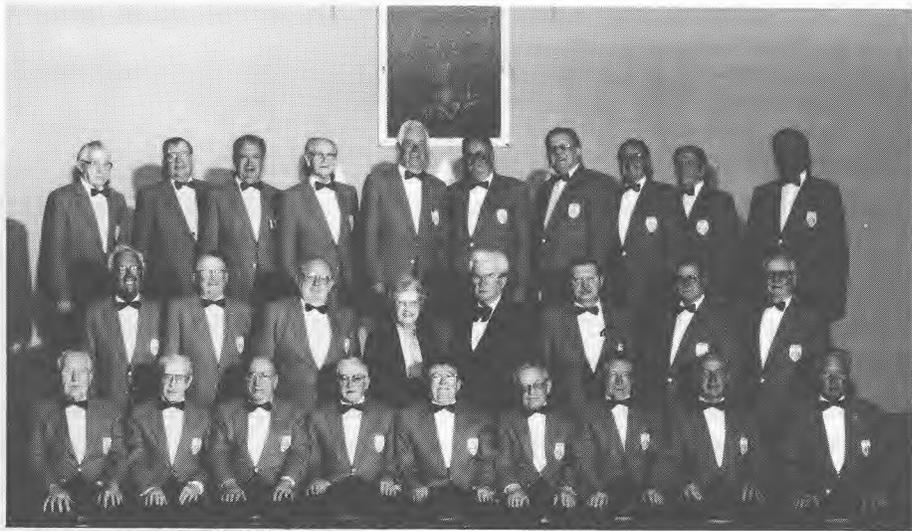
**Sveas Soner Chorus, 1995. Scott Chacula, director**  
*Courtesy Kenneth Flodin*



**Lyran Chorus organizers: the Swanborg brothers**  
*Courtesy David Carlson*



**Lyran Male Chorus, 1951. Dr. Robert Ekstrom, director**  
**Esther Erickson, accompanist**  
*Courtesy Esther Erickson*



**Harmony Singing Society, circa 1985.**  
**Duane Barker, director - Esther Erickson, accompanist**  
*Courtesy Esther Erickson*



**Rockford Swedish Veterans, 1981.**  
**Esther Erickson, director and accompanist**  
*Courtesy Esther Erickson*



**International Order of Goodtemplars, circa 1930.**  
**Einar Pearson, director**  
*Courtesy Esther Erickson*

## ROCKFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CHORALE

On occasion, a chorus joins a symphony orchestra in concert during major choral/orchestral works. Each season, the local chorale performs once or twice with the orchestra, often with guest artists. Recent appearances by the present chorale include performances of Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony," Mozart's "Coronation Mass," and selections from Prokofiev's "Alexander Nevsky" cantata. Membership in the 75-125 voice organization is determined by audition.

The chorale originated in the 1960s (according to recollections by symphony personnel). Prior to that time, the orchestra had invited local community groups to perform with them. Although Arthur Zack receives credit for founding the Rockford Symphony Orchestra, Prof. Andreas Fugemann and Joe Copland had directed earlier Rockford orchestras.

Chorus directors under symphony director Dr. Crawford Gates, included Joel Ross, Gordon Olson, Andrew Koebler and Reuben Johnson. Next, Dean Durst and Joel Ross worked with Charles Z. Bornstein. Currently, Dean Durst directs the chorus; Steven Larsen leads the orchestra.

*Source: Carol Rice, Secretary of the RSO Chorale.*



## A CLASSIC CHORALE

When the late Reuben Johnson, Minister of Music at Bethesda Covenant Church, founded A Classic Chorale in 1987, he envisioned a city-wide choir of seniors. They would gather in a spirit of caring, love and enthusiasm, not only to sing old, loved hymns, but also to rise to chorale challenges. Subsequent directors Mrs. Reuben (Irma) Johnson, Dell Simon and Fred Hubbell have retained the essence of Reuben's spirit and motivation, i. e. Seniors in Song - Soothing the Soul.

This group's ministry brings music to nursing homes and retirement homes, and church outreach programs two or three times per month. Other events include performing on stage with Art Linkletter in 1988; annual appearances at Rockford's Interfaith Thanksgiving Service; and choir-in-residence designation at a five-day conference in 1990 sponsored by the Covenant Church of America in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Today's 55 members range in age from early retirement to mid-80s. They represent 24 churches and 11 denominations: Roman Catholic, Covenant, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical, Congregational, Seventh-Day Adventist, and Reformed. Accompanists include Vi Gibson, Irma Johnson and LaVona Kline. Dixie Simons serves as narrator.

*Source: Dorothy Pearson, Secretary.*

## DIOCESAN CHORALE

Organized to sing in 1969 for the ordination of Bishop Arthur J. O'Neil, the Diocesan Chorale continues to perform sacred music at liturgical functions and concerts. Most members, eighty-plus strong, come from area parish choirs, but a few non-Catholics also join. John B. Fichtner of Mount Morris served as the first director followed by Mary Hanson and then Scott Chachula. He resigned late in 1996.

Among highlight events, Hanson recalls directing Haydn's *The Creation* in a joint concert with the Rockford Lutheran Choral Union at Holy Family Church. Another stirring event occurred, she says, when Lutherans and Catholics sang "A Mighty Fortress" as a processional hymn during a joint service at St. Peter's Cathedral. The two denominations observed not only the 400th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his then-controversial theses to the cathedral door in Wittenberg but also contemporary Lutheran/Catholic reconciliation.

*Source: Mary Hanson, former director.*

## BACH CHAMBER CHOIR

The repertoire of the Bach Chamber Choir centers around--but does not exclude others--the choral works of J. S. Bach. The 1996-97 season, for instance, includes two short Bach masses, a Mendelssohn concert psalm, a Handel Chandos Anthem, Faure's

"Requiem" and Mozart's "Ave Verum Corpus." Such a repertoire not only challenges performing musicians and audiences alike, but also sustains choral music lovers and cultivates new enthusiasts locally.

"Authoritative musical interpretation, first rate musicianship, and well-defined audition criteria have been the hallmarks of the Bach Chamber Choir ... from the beginning," says founding (and current) director Wayne Hatwich. Typical performances include not only the choir but also 12 - 24 member orchestras and up to four guest soloists. Current choral membership numbers 46.

Besides two annual concerts--scheduled this season at St. Peter's Cathedral, the choir participates in community events. They've sponsored "Bach-a-thons" (all-day marathon concerts); choral workshops with guest clinicians; and an Arts Development workshop. In addition, the choir has appeared in collaborative concerts with the Rockford Symphony Orchestra and Kantorei--the Singing Boys of Rockford. They've participated at Beattie Is and the Rockford Air Show as well as First Night and programs at Rockford College and Mendelssohn Club.

Proud of its high quality art, available to the community at affordable ticket prices, the Bach Chamber Choir affirms the Rockford Area Arts Council's focus: "Arts for Everyone."

*Source: Wayne Hatwich, Director.*

## ROCKFORD LUTHERAN CHORAL UNION

Breaking tradition in 1996, the Rockford Lutheran Choral Union's annual presentation of Handel's *Messiah* moved from Emmanuel Lutheran Church to Trinity Lutheran Church. For fifty years the chorus had presented its stirring Advent concert at Emmanuel. Ever popular with area audiences, these free performances had increased to three by 1950. This year's schedule, however, included only Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon performances. Soprano Diane Ragains, mezzo soprano Cynthia Anderson, tenor Scott Chachula and bass-baritone Paul Geiger appeared as featured soloists.

At its first concert, the choral union presented Faure's *Requiem* in the spring of 1946. The inaugural Advent presentation of *The Messiah* followed during the weekend after Thanksgiving. Other concert works have included Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* and *Christ Lay at Death's Door*; Brahms's *Requiem*; and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. The 150-plus chorus and orchestra have performed with distinguished local and national soloists directed by Allen Elmquist, David Burmeister, Gordon Olson, Jonathan Chell and Marti Bein.

In November 1945, Linden Lundstrom, Victor Lund and Elmquist had acted as catalysts in organizing The Lutheran Guild of Church Musicians, forerunner of The Rockford Lutheran Choral Union. Organizers stated a three-fold

purpose: to provide music for annual Luther Day services, to contribute a Christian service to the community through sacred concerts, and to promote a higher spiritual level and improvement in church music. The current constitution's preamble reads in part, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we members of the church of Christ, desiring to manifest our unity in praising God through the medium of sacred music do unite."

Not exclusively Lutheran, membership today includes singers from 56 Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in the Rockford area. Among these, five Charter Members--those who've sung continuously up to and including the December 1948 *Messiah* concert--remain on the roster. They are sopranos Margaret Bargren and Vivian Hansen; altos Elsie Lundvall, Margery Nelson and Adah Sorenson. Other categories: Active Members who sing at least one concert per year, and Sponsor Members who contribute toward expenses. Freewill offerings at concerts aid the budget also.

Executive officers, a governing board composed of two representatives from each participating Lutheran church, up to three representatives-at-large from each section, and ten standing committees attend to business matters.

*Sources: First president John Hoaglund, charter members Vivian Hansen and Elsie Lundvall, and items from the chorus' history files.*



**Rockford Lutheran Choral Union, 1965.**

**Allen Elmquist, director**

*Courtesy Vivian Hansen*



**Bach Chamber Choir, 1994**

**Wayne Hatwich, director**

*Courtesy Wayne Hatwich*

## MENDELSSOHN CLUB

Now entering its 113th season, Mendelssohn Club has provided numerous opportunities for choristers. A Woman's Chorus and the Rockford Mensingers predated today's Chorale and Children's Chorus.

A chorus for women existed in the 1930s under the direction of Harrison Wilde. In September 1937 it was reorganized under William Boyer of Portland, Oregon. Eighty-one singers, chosen by audition, gave their first concert in December that year. A year later, when Boyer became ill and returned to Oregon, the club engaged William Notley Hughes, Minister of Music at Chicago's Central Church. Traveling by bus, he made weekly trips (1935 - 1965) to Rockford to direct both the Woman's Chorus and the Mensingers. Mrs. Sigfred (Marion) Sandeen accompanied both groups.

Organization of the Mensingers grew out of a desire of male singers--who had appeared in a Mendelssohn Club performance of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*--to continue singing together. Joseph Copeland served as director prior to the Hughes' years. Members paid 25 cents weekly dues.

On many occasions, the two choruses collaborated in concert. One especially sensational event--a 16-piece piano concert--occurred March 28, 1940. As part of the program, the choruses sang "Tales from the Vienna Woods" accompanied by pianists at the 16

pianos. In 1946, the Mensingers presented their first annual Lenten performance of Handel's *Messiah* with the Woman's Chorus and four Chicago soloists. They continued those presentations for several years, sometimes scheduling five performances per season. Christmas carol concerts by the Mensingers often numbered ten.

Eventually, Paul Waters took over directorship. When the two choruses disbanded he became the first director (1975) of the Mendelssohn Chorale. Other directors: Ralph Nielsen, Jonathan Chell, and currently Marti Bein. Membership is open to persons who love to sing.

The chorale presented their 1975 concert at Court Street Methodist Church. Now, an annual Cathedral Concert, presented in local churches (at Trinity Lutheran since the 1980s) highlights each season. Guest artists such as trumpet soloists, brass ensembles, string quartets, cello soloists and the Salvation Army Band have appeared with the chorale in concert.

In 1979, Mendelssohn Club staged Benjamin Britten's "Noye's Fludde" directed by Lynne Hansel. Production called for a chorus of children to portray animal pairs. Enthusiasm for children singing led Hansel to spearhead the formation of the club's Children's Chorus. She served as its first director (1980 -87), followed by Cynthia Bacon (1987-91), and currently by Cathy Herdeman.

The chorus presents May and December concerts as part of the club's Youth Series concerts, performs at First Night, and entertains at nursing homes. Highlight appearances include a performance with the Rockford Symphony Orchestra in celebration of their 100th anniversary, 1984; appearances with RAYSO, 1990; Sveas Soner and A Classic Chorale, 1991; the Music Academy String Orchestra, 1992; and a 1994 performance of cowboy songs at Wild West Days, Midway Village.

*Sources: Kay Mondul, historian. Josephine Feldman, founding member of Chorale. Cathy Herdeman, Children's Choir current director, and Rockfordiana files, Rockford Public Library.*

### TESTOR CHORUS

In yet another venture to promote singing in Rockford, industrialist Nils T. Testor sponsored an ensemble of local singers (1954-59). He financed a series of concerts directed by Chicagoan Dr. Harry Carlson. Proceeds of tickets--sold at minimal cost to the public--benefited the Erlander Home Museum.

A debut concert in 1954 feature 52 voices with tenor Ralph Nielsen as assisting artist. The following year, the then 70-voice chorus not only presented a local concert, but repeated the same program with the Swedish Choral Club of Chicago in Orchestra Hall. Dr.

Carlson directed both groups. Repertoire included works by Handel, Schubert and Mascagni.

In an April 1959 farewell concert, the chorus performed works by Puccini and Ralph Vaughn Williams accompanied by 30 members of the Chicago Symphony orchestra.

*Source: Rockfordiana Files*

### KANTOREI--THE SINGING BOYS OF ROCKFORD

Since 1964, Kantorei (pronounced Kahn-toe-rye) boys have had exceptional opportunities. A disciplined instructional program has provided musical expertise for concert appearances. Participation for travel here and abroad has widened perspectives. Lifelong friendships have developed.

Founding director Linden Lundstrom (1913 - 1996) studied boy choirs for his master's thesis during a 1962 tour to Denmark and Germany. Back in Rockford his friend Burnell Carlson encouraged him to organize a local boy choir. Through auditions Lundstrom selected 57 singers, ages 11 - 18, for the inaugural choir. They gave their first concert January 3, 1965.

Lundstrom, would remain director for 14 years, conducting his final concert in 1978 on tour in Wales.

This non-sectarian, non-profit organization is currently composed of three tiers. Prior to membership in the performing choir of fifth - twelfth

grade boys, younger ones study musicianship in the Training and Cadet choirs. Unlike European boy choirs composed of unchanged voices, Kantorei includes tenors and basses. This gives the choir a wider repertoire. Their sacred and secular music ranges from Renaissance to contemporary including madrigals, spirituals, folk music, patriotic pieces, show tunes, pop and jazz. Joel Ross has served as director since his 1988 appointment. Others have included David Burmeister, Gordon Olson, Jeffrey Smith and Lois Sivert.

Undoubtedly Rockford's most widely-traveled singing group, Kantorei has made United States appearances from coast to coast in its 32-year history. They've sung at destinations such as The White House, Opryland, the Air Force and Naval academies, and Disney World. On two occasions, they toured Japan. European itineraries have included Scandinavia, Great Britain (including a concert in Canterbury cathedral), France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic. In addition, they've participated in concerts and festivals with other internationally-acclaimed choirs. Most recently, they appeared in the 1996 AmericaFest at Minnesota's St. John's University with "choirs in residence" from Estonia, The Netherlands, Latvia and Norway.

These singing boys have performed locally at On the Waterfront, First Night, and Young at Heart Festivals as well as in concerts with Sveas Soner,

the Rockford Symphony Orchestra and others. During annual spring and Christmas concerts, the choir sings at St. Peter's Cathedral. In 1996, Dec. 22, 4 p.m.

Choristers pay tuition: \$225, Training and Cadet choirs; \$325, Performing Choir. Other funding derives from ticket sales, grants, gifts and fundraisers. A Board of Directors manages business affairs. For membership information, 226-1016.

*Source: Joel Ross, Director.*

### **TEBALA SHRINE CHANTERS**

In the summer of 1942, Past Potentate Dr. Clarence Werner asked that a Chanter Unit be formed in Tebala Shrine Temple. Noble Paul Conrads, organizer of the unit, received assistance from Noble George Rees of Chicago, Past Director of Medinah Shrine Chanters and Director of Ridge Community Chorus.

The first unit consisted of an octet of men who also sang with the Lyran Singing Society and Sveas Soner. Noble Earl Anderson directed; Noble Ralph Brigham accompanied. By 1943, when the unit had grown to 44 (including director and accompanist), they made their inaugural appearance at the Spring Ceremonial.

Originally, the Chanters confined appearances to Shrine and Masonic functions. Gaining fame within Shrinedom, the Tebala Chanters became known as the "Singing Swedes

from Rockford." As such, they often sang Swedish songs at Imperial Sessions and Great Lakes Meetings.

Later, in expanded performances they appeared elsewhere. One of their most cherished performances was with Lauritz Melchior at the Coronado Theater. During the 1960s through the early 1980s, they entertained with the Tebala Shrinanigans, a 24-piece dance band composed of professional and semi-professional instrumentalists. Their itinerary took them beyond Rockford to New York City, Miami and Chicago. Here they performed Shrine shows such as "Leanin' on the Ol' Top Rail," and "Funza Poppin'." A 1960s professional record, "Music for Listenin'" featured the Big Band sound of the Shrinanigans and the 42 voices of the "Singing Swedes." For comic effect, a four-man group performed with the otherwise dignified chanters. Dressed in period swimsuits, The Pinheads played the "Mop and Washtub," "Latrinaphone," cymbals, harmonica and banjo.

Conductors have included Nobles Earl Anderson, Walter Larson, John Mumma, Duane Barker, Carl Carlson, Tom Storm, Dick Johnson and Bert Johnson. Accompanists have been Nobles Ralph Brigham, Marvin Alden, Hilding Newstedt, Arthur Anderson, Theodore Hager and Richard Bates.

Members must be 32nd degree Masons and Shriners who enjoy singing and fellowship. In addition, they possess the good feeling of participating in the

"world's greatest philanthropy": 22 Shriners Hospitals and Burn Centers for Children.

*Sources: Art Johnson, Jim Anderson, Dick Johnson and Mike Parker.*

## **GREATER ROCKFORD BARBERSHOP CHORUS**

Familiarly known as the Rockford Barbershoppers, this group is the local chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America (SPEBSQSA).

Principal movers toward organization and charter membership, in 1948, included Eugene Abegg, Harry Harris and Paul Conrads. Forty names currently appear on the chapter roster. All men who enjoy singing are welcome.

Bill Doll serves as the current director; Jack Armstrong, assistant director. Past directors included Dick Gallagher, Jack Hoffman, Jim Pettinger, Angelo LaLoggia and "Skid" Davies.

At "home" in the Midway Theater for the past 12 years, the barbershoppers present an annual fall concert there. It features the Rockford chorus and quartets, guest quartets and a Dixieland band fronted by Doll. Christmas caroling also ranks as a highlight event.

*Source: Bill Doll, director.*





**Tebala Shrine Chanters, circa 1975.**  
**Walter Larson, Director**  
*Courtesy Richard Johnson*



**Greater Rockford Barbershop Chorus, 1994**  
**Bill Doll, director**  
*Courtesy Bill Doll*

## SWEET ADELINES

The women's counterpart to the men's barbershop choruses--Sweet Adelines--received their first local charter in 1950. Fifty women sang under direction of Muriel Nordell. In a later development, the current Rock Valley Chapter Sweet Adelines International received its charter in 1980 with 20 members. During the ensuing years, the chapter has grown in numbers and in quality, regularly placing in the top ten in regional competitions. Membership requirements do not call for an ability to read music--only a willingness to learn basic skills of singing.

*Source: Rockfordiana Files.Telecom USA*

## SECOND CITY CHORUS

Affiliated with the Rockford Metro Chapter of the SPEBSQSA, the all male Second City Chorus ranks as Rockford's newest choral group. Organized in June 1996, the chorus offers opportunities for men to perform a wide variety of musical styles with emphasis on professional presentations.

Joseph Caukins, currently director of music at Second Congregational Church, formerly directed the West Towns Chorus, a widely-acclaimed suburban Chicago group. In a *Rockford Register Star* interview, he said, "I see how many great singers and lovers of music there are in Rockford." He expects the Second City Chorus (named

to recognize Rockford as second in size to Chicago) to fill a void here for male singers who desire excellence. Peter Hansen serves as Associate Director.

Scheduled local events include a December 15, 1996, inaugural concert at Second Congregational Church with organist Robert Bates, plus a First Night appearance.

*Source: Greg Martin, chorus president.*

## KOUNCIL KORALIERS

Sponsored by the Rockford Area Arts Council, this All-City Youth Chorus consists mainly of fifth and sixth grade students who like to sing. A few seventh and eighth graders also belong. Flyers distributed to schools--not only in Rockford, but also to surrounding communities--invite students to join. No auditions necessary; no fees collected.

Founding director Dorothy Paige-Turner conducts weekly rehearsals at Second Congregational Church. Now in its seventh season, the chorus performs at events such as Harlem School District's Red Ribbon observance, First Night, and the Pecatonica Christmas Walk. Recently they appeared as the opening group for a Charlotte's Web presentation of Miriam Perrone's "A Note of Hope" in Memorial Hall.

*Source: Dorothy Paige-Turner, Director.*

*For information: 963-6765*



**Representative Kantorei boys, 1996**  
**Joel Ross, director**

*Courtesy Joel Ross*



**Representative Council Koraliers, 1992**  
**Dorothy Paige-Turner, Director**

*Courtesy Rockford Area Arts Council*

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