

**GREATER JEFFERSONTOWN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

August 2014, Vol. 12 Number 4

August 2014 Meeting - Special Meeting Date

The August meeting will be Wednesday August 27, 2014.

This month we will be touring the private museum of Brooks and Marilyn Bower in their home, Soldier's Retreat. Their museum has both Revolutionary War and Civil War artifacts, and tells the story of the property's 200-year-old plus history of Soldier's Retreat originally built by Col. Richard Clough Anderson (1750-1826).

There will be two tours on Wednesday, August 27, the first will be at 2:00 P.M. and the second will be at 7:00 P.M. We will meet at Soldier's Retreat, 9300 Seaton Springs Parkway off Hurstbourne Parkway. If you plan on making one of the tours, please call me, 491-6463, or email me to my account, plasticjtu@aol.com, or the GJHS account, jtowhistsociety@aol.com, and tell me which tour you wish to attend. GJHS members get preference, family members are welcome. Please leave a telephone number for me to confirm. I understand to get to the museum we will be walking through part of the Bower's home.

October Meeting

Steve Wiser will tell us about the haunted houses of Louisville.

Kentucky Historical Marker for the Conrad-Seaton House Ann Bader has received approval from the state for what will be printed on the historical marker for the Conrad-Seaton House and she has submitted the order for the marker to be cast. Jeffersontown provided the funds for the marker. Anne is going to request the marker be dedicated during the Gaslight Festival this September.

Gaslight Festival

Dates for the Jeffersontown Festival in the square are Friday – Sunday, September 19 – 21.

June Meeting

We were entertained by about forty members of the award winning Thoroughbred Chorus singing four great songs, then singing happy birthday to Charltorria Young's mother, Georgia, in celebration of her 90th birthday. The chorus then performed a patriotic piece and closed their program with a great rendition of Stephen Foster's My Old Kentucky Home and Dan Fogelberg's Run for The Roses combination. Needless to say the chorus received a standing ovation from the thirty-three people in attendance.

In the middle of the musical presentation the Thoroughbred Chorus' musical director, Drew Wheaton, stopped to explain the barbershop style of singing. It is a four-part voice harmony with the lead part, kind of a second tenor part that carries the melody, a bass part, a baritone part, and a tenor part. Drew then led the chorus, demonstrating each part in the introduction to the song, Always. He likened the four part harmony to a flower, with the lead part, the melody as the stem of the flower, then the bass as the earth that holds everything together. The tenor part is the flower that floats on top that adds shimmer and makes the sound shine. Then comes the baritone part, it could be left out but you wouldn't have barbershop harmony. The baritone is the fertilizer that gives four-part harmony strength and life to the flower. Then the Chorus sang Irving Berlin's Always.

After the chorus left the building to go to their usual Monday practice at the Old Christ Lutheran Church, Troy gave us the history and of the Thoroughbred Chorus and barbershop.

Barbershop got its start in the late 1800s from mostly African American men socializing in barbershops where they would harmonize while waiting their turn, singing spirituals, folk songs and popular songs. They would sing a cappella, without musical accompaniment. The new style of singing grew, reaching its peak in the early 1900s, but by 1920, it had pretty much faded into obscurity. But before it did, barbershop helped music writers make a living by selling sheet music of their songs, especially when the phonograph came along. The record labels of the day would employ the quartets to sing the songs their writers were putting out, and if a song became popular, this would sell more sheet music. The first time the word barbershop appeared in a song was 1910. This was evidence that barbershop had become imbedded in the culture.

What happened in the 1920s is that the Jazz Age came along and music became more danceable and barbershop singing faded into the background. In 1938 when a tax lawyer named O. C. Cash met Rupert I. Hall in a Kansas City hotel and they got to talking about barbershop singing. Both came from Tulsa, Oklahoma and both loved barbershop. Cash was a true partisan of quartet singing who advertised the fact that he did not want a cappella to fall by the wayside.

They went back to Tulsa and came up with an idea to resurrect the art form. They sent out a communique to their friends saying Rupert Hall, the keeper of the minor key and O. C. Cash the third temporary assistant vice chairmen of the "Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America" was set up. Well none of that existed. What they were doing was telling their friends is if you are interested, come and join us. Remember that in 1938 the Roosevelt administration was setting up all kinds of organizations that went by an alphabet soup of initials. And they were spoofing this trend. Thus was the beginning of the S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A.

They got twenty-six of their friends to meet them on a rooftop of a Tulsa hotel. That twenty-six sent the message to their friends and so on, and what happened was by the third meeting about 150 men showed up. This caused a stir in Tulsa, which wasn't used to that sort of thing, and the police were called out. A reporter got wind of it and thought this was a story. He interviewed O. C. Cash, who being a showman, said yeah we've got a society. We have chapters all over the nation in cities like St. Louis, Kansas City. And of course they didn't have anything of the sort. Other papers picked it up and it fanned all over, it became a sensation, and people from across the nation started asking, where is barbershop in my town? People in Louisville asked, where was their barbershop society? And that is how it started here.

On July 11, 1945, local businessman Fritz Drybrough invited a number of friends to his home to listen to the once popular style of music. They worked at it for a while and on June 10, 1946, O. C. Cash came to Louisville to present it with its charter. That's how the Thoroughbred Chorus became part of the Barbershop Harmony Society as Louisville #1 Chapter. The men originally met at the home of founder Fritz Drybrough, and then for many years at the Rathskeller of the Seelbach Hotel in downtown Louisville, where they met mostly for fun. They would socialize and drink beer, sing a few songs, drink some more beer, then dismiss. What they did do during this time was to have many chapter champion quartets come in and put on some really good shows.

The chapter became one of the largest chapters in the Society and in the early years presented shows with some of the best talent available. For example, in the 1951 annual show, the chorus sang only six songs, but there was a chapter quartet, a female quartet, a local dance troupe, and seven out-of-town quartets. The chapter grew to a membership of almost 300, but there were only about 100 men who sang on a regular basis. Most of the members seemed more interested in socializing than in improving their musical skills and, as a result, membership declined. By 1956 the singing chorus had decreased to about 60 men and chapter membership had shrunk to 150.

That all changed in 1957 when a group of twenty-five more serious men, who wanted to be more competitive, gained control of the chapter and moved it toward a competitive unit and changed its name to the Thoroughbred Chorus, a name one of its members had registered for his quartet.

By 1958 the new chorus had won the Cardinal District title making them the district's representative in the international society competition in 1959 where they finished eighth. In 1960 they finished sixth, second in 1961, and in 1962 the Thoroughbred Chorus won the Society's International Chorus competition.

Well, what happens is that when you win the championship, you have to sit out for two years. When they came back in 1965 they finished second to the Miami chapter, and in 1966 the Thoroughbreds again won the international championship.

All this fast tracking made other chapters start to look at Louisville and ask what is going on there. What was going on was that early on the chorus was only interested in winning. In the mid-60s they wanted to be excellent. They connected up with a Dr. Appleman at Indiana University who was interested in the science, the harmonics of sound. He was not a musician of any sort, but he was just interested in the physics of sound. Fred Waring, director of the Pennsylvanians (Us old folks know who they were.), was starting to do the same thing.

One of the chorus members, Jim Miller, was part of a quartet, The Citations, and they wanted to be part of the study. Once a month they would go up to IU and work with Dr. Appleman, who had them trying to match pat sounds, vowel sounds. So what happened was not only singing the right words with the correct notes, they were singing the correct sound of the notes. That work ended up not only making the Thoroughbreds a champion chorus but changing the whole Barbershop Society.

Usually the championship was won by a few points. In 1969 The Thoroughbreds crushed the competition by 350 points. It was evident with that win that something revolutionary was going on with the Louisville chapter. So the chorus and The Citations became ambassadors for the Society and went out across the nation reviving the barbershop sound. Between 1962 and 1984 the Thoroughbreds competed on the International stage thirteen times, winning the chorus championship seven times, finishing second five times, and third twice. Winning the chorus championship seven times was the record until 2011 when a 135 member California chapter chorus won their eight competitions starting in 1990.

So what was started here in Louisville was good for the entire S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A., The Barbershop Harmony Society as it is known today. Other chapters started emulating the Thoroughbreds; the Dallas, Texas chapter was one that for a few years became dominant until the Santa Fe, California chapter started their record run.

Troy opened the floor for questions and comments.

One couple asked Troy if he knew the song S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A. He didn't, so they sang it. Make yourself up a tune, repeat the letters a few times, go up above and find what all the letters stand for and end your tune with those words and you have it. Now sing! As Troy said Cash and Hall had a ball with all those letters. That part of it started out as a tongue-in-cheek scheme to attract attention to their real purpose.

Troy gave a rundown as to how and when they came to Jeffersontown. After meeting in the Rathskeller, they moved out to a place in St. Matthews, and in 1978 purchased the Old Christ Lutheran Church building. It has since been renamed "Jim Miller Hall" to honor the late, great director of the chorus. So the Thoroughbreds have been in J'Town for thirty-six years.

How does a new member get started? Not easy. Two things are going on, learning the music as you would in a church choir, and learning the craft, learning to voice the words so they are very understandable, while singing the tune. Half the guys can't read music, so they use CDs, tape recorders, records, etc., to learn the songs. It takes time.

Barbershop owns the corner on a cappella singing. They sound so good because of the cord structure and the four-part harmony and over-tone structure that is used.

They still compete, but have not done as well in the past, because the Society as a whole has caught up with them, and two other chapters have split off from the original group, depleting their ranks. The Louisville Times started in the early 1990s. The Kentucky Vocal Union based in Elizabethtown, split from the Louisville Times. The Kentucky Vocal Union is group of younger (40-50) guys who should finish in the top ten this year. Troy commented many young people, those under 35, as we know don't join anything. They don't join the Rotary, the library clubs, the historical societies, nothing. They just play with their electronic gadgets. All groups are struggling to bring in new, younger members. We have a hard time replacing ourselves. They have found those 40-55 are those willing to join. Troy says he likes to tell guys over forty that by joining the Thoroughbreds is the only thing for which you are going to get a standing ovation.

In 1981 Jim Miller had the bright idea to put in some choreography, and again the Thoroughbreds started a change in barbershop singing. Before then the chorus just stood there on the risers and sang.

Are there women barbershop groups? Yes, they are the Sweet Adelines International. The Louisville Chapter is not connected with the Thoroughbreds, but many times they take part in the other group's shows. Troy said they have a slightly different sound because they have difficulty with the overtones strictly because of the physical structure of a woman's voice.

The Thoroughbreds practice every Monday night in Jim Miller Hall, 10609 Watterson Trail, 7-10 P.M. and welcome visitors to come, listen, and enjoy. They always put out chairs just for visitors. They also sell CDs that you can purchase when you visit. You can visit their website, www.thoroughbredschorus.com. There you can find their June 2014 newsletter with pictures taken at the June GJHS meeting, with a picture of Charltorria and her mother.

Thoroughbreds Chorus annual show will be Saturday, December 6 at 2:00P.M. and 7:00P.M., at the Memorial Auditorium, 4th & Kentucky Streets downtown. Tickets are \$12 -18. I believe there is a senior discount. At one time years ago the annual shows sold out. Besides The Citations, chapter has also produced several championship quartets including The Bluegrass Student Union, Interstate Rivals, Second Edition, and The Barons.

This was a great program and presentation by a Jeffersontown based organization

Jeffersontown Film

The short film commissioned by the Jeffersontown City Council is still in process.

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church 225 Year Celebration.

Upcoming activities are Wednesday, August 6, an ice cream social; Sunday, September 21, 12:00 P.M., rededication of the Church and organ.

1888 Farmhouse at 6414 Billtown Road.

The old farmhouse was bulldozed.

Contact Us

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