

HISTORY OF THE HOUSTON CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION

The Houston Chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society and its performing chorus, the Tidelanders, has a rich and proud history which began in 1946. We trace our ancestry to 1938, when many people were truly nostalgic for the time when four-part harmony was recognized as a natural part of contemporary popular music. In response to that nostalgia, the **S**ociety for the **P**reservation and **E**ncouragement of **B**arber **S**hop **Q**uartet **S**inging in **A**merica, SPEBSQSA, was founded in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The acronym, SPEBSQSA, was selected because the founders chose not to be outdone by the lengthy acronyms of the many governmental programs started in the 1930's. The Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, SPEBSQSA, remains the legal name of the Society although we now do business as the Barbershop Harmony Society, BHS.

Eight years after SPEBSQSA's founding, a man who had belonged to Tulsa's original chapter, W. H. Anderson, was transferred to Houston. He decided to start a chapter here. Over 150 men attended the first SPEBSQSA familiarization meeting in the Sam Houston Room of Houston's Rice Hotel, in October, 1946. By October 21, 1946, 127 men had joined what was immediately chartered as the Houston Chapter of SPEBSQSA, and that proud group has flourished ever since.

W. H. ANDERSON'S ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST NIGHT

"To have some part in the creation of music, as well as to listen to it, is a stimulating experience. The rare pleasure that comes with the completion of a beautiful four-part harmony chord is a sensation comparable to no other experience. One must be a participant to understand this peculiar type of ecstasy. Singing in a good barbershop quartet, or chorus, will produce this spine-tingling thrill."

O. C. Cash, a genial gentleman of Tulsa, Oklahoma, recognized the need for a society 'where men from all walks of life could meet in peaceable assembly for the enjoyment of the last remaining vestige of human liberty' and organized the Society in 1938. 'Having been a member of that organization from the early days of its inception, I became thoroughly interested in the movement.'

"In March of 1946, the company for which I work chose to transfer me from Tulsa to Houston. It, naturally, was a big disappointment not to find a chapter of SPEBSQSA here. Anxious to bring to a new group of men the benefits of good fellowship and broader acquaintance, a movement was started to organize a chapter in Houston. During the exchange of correspondence with Carroll P. Adams, the International Secretary of SPEBSQSA, I learned that Walter R. Jenkins, official song leader for Rotary International at their conventions and Director of music for the First Methodist Church of Houston, might be influential in helping to start a chapter. It took three conferences with Mr. Jenkins to sell him on the idea and when he said: 'I believe we can do it!'

Things started to happen fast. A preliminary meeting was held in his office the latter part of September, 1946. There were about 25 in attendance, and the idea went over so well that it was decided to call an organizational meeting on October 7, 1946. It was at this preliminary meeting that the RANGERS quartet (Kline, Deaton, Boggs, and yours truly) met for the first time and became the chapter's first quartet.

Arrangements were made to hold the meeting in the Sam Houston Room of the Rice Hotel. Newspapers and radio stations helped publicize the idea with the result that some 150 to 200 men came to see what it was all about. The place was swarming with reporters and cameramen and, out of those assembled there, 92 men paid the \$5.00 membership fee, that night. The enthusiasm was so great that it was decided to hold the charter membership open until October 21st, the time set for the next meeting. When the meeting of October 21st closed, we had 127 paid-up charter members. From there, we went on to more than 220 members by the end of our first year.

Thus it was, that the idea which has brought to so many, much genuine amusement, amazement, and enjoyment - as was fellowship with the grandest gang of guys in the world, reached maturity in an organized chapter for that wonderful, metropolitan city of the South, Houston, Texas."

W. H. Anderson
1946-1947 Houston Chapter President

FROM THE FIRST MEETING UNTIL THE PRESENT TIME

From the time it was chartered until about 1952, Houston's chapter participated in some activities which were perhaps a little bit different from those of the rest of the Society - Minstrel Shows. Early photos of the chorus during this time show a front row made up in black face, a common ingredient in Minstrel Shows. Two or three men on the front row, commonly known as "End Men", would occasionally tell jokes, sing solos, and act as Emcees. This activity brought about some interesting conflicts. There was a large segment of the chorus devoted to the Minstrel shows, especially some of the older members. There was another segment of the chorus who were more devoted to pure Barbershop quartet singing. By the early 1950's, the Houston chapter had only about 20 - 25 "full-time" Barbershoppers, i.e. men who attended chapter meetings all year. Then, during the two or three months before the Minstrel Show, membership would soar to 60 - 80 men. These men were welcome, of course, but after the Minstrel Show was over, many chose not to attend.

A quick glance through some of the Houston Chapter's archival material will show the immense popularity of these Minstrel Shows. It was not uncommon for the Minstrel Shows to sell out two consecutive nights at the Music Hall in Houston which seated approximately 2,500 people. There would also be occasional special requests to do these shows out of town. Once, a man offered to pay expenses for the whole chorus to perform a Minstrel Show in Dallas. This popularity translated into money for the Chapter, making the habit even harder for the Barbershop purists to break. Finally, thanks to continued efforts by the Barbershoppers and a little encouragement from the growing Civil Rights movement, the Barbershoppers won out. By 1952, the last chapter Minstrel Show was performed in Houston. This change, though welcomed by the Barbershoppers, drastically reduced the number of members in the chapter. Only twenty or twenty-five members were left and the slow journey to better-quality Barbershop singing began.

At first, directing was assigned to and shared by a committee of four; namely Bliss Mapes, Theodore (T. C.) Blackstone, Walter Jenkins, and Edward Acton. These men, collectively, were the first four Directors. Although several others directed the chorus in one fashion or another, these men seem to be the four most commonly referred to from 1952 through 1955. Afterward, Phil Winston began doing a large part of the directing and continued to do so until 1957.

In 1957, V. L. Hooper, a man well-known to most Southwestern District Barbershoppers, moved to Houston and joined the Tidelanders. He soon began directing the chorus for their first contest performances in the late 1950's. Though Houston did not place very high in these first contests, the Chapter was beginning to steadily improve through Hooper's talents and the hard work of others such as Dick Crockett, Bill Park, Jim Carter, George Stillman and John Neighbors. The Houston chapter frequently performed "Neighborhood Community Park" shows and also began doing Annual shows, which for many years were called the "*CAVALCADE OF HARMONY*" shows.

By the early 1960's, the Tidelanders began to score well in contests and was soon winning Southwestern District competitions. In 1965, Houston competed in its first-ever International Contest. Though many members were certain the "Gold" would belong to the Tidelanders, they had the rather humbling experience of only placing 12th.

In 1967, Connie Keil became the Director, replacing V. L. Hooper, who left for business reasons. In 1968, the Tidelanders again won District competition and then shocked themselves by scoring 2nd at the International contest in St. Louis. After Connie Keil's company transferred him, John Devine replaced Connie as Director and in 1969, led the chorus to a 4th place finish at the International competition in Atlantic City. Mike McCord became Director and under his leadership, the Tidelanders placed 3rd at Portland in 1973 and then 4th at San Francisco in 1976.

The International competition in San Francisco will be remembered as a "victory" because it was there that the INNSIDERS earned Houston's first International Quartet Gold Medal. The INNSIDERS who won the Gold medal barely resembled the original quartet who were formed in 1968. Tidelanders "Old-timers" joke that almost half the chorus was an INNSIDER at one time or another. Finally, in 1971, the winning group, with John Devine singing Lead, Dr. Tom Pearson the Bass, Guy McShan the Baritone and Mike Cox the Tenor, was assembled. The INNSIDERS placed 3rd in that 1971 Southwestern District competition. Then, in 1972, they placed 2nd in District and 15th in their first International bid. They again won District competition in 1973 but were unable to compete at International.

When the INNSIDERS returned to the International stage in 1974, they skyrocketed to a 4th place finish. Convinced they could win, they sought the coaching skills of Don Clause, rehearsed at least twice a week, and managed to move up to 2nd place in 1975. The INNSIDERS worked incredibly hard in 1976, often rehearsing as many as five to six times a week during the month before International. In fact, they had rehearsed so much, that tenor Mike Cox claimed that he didn't remember singing the first set at International. That performance must have been good enough to win because 1976 was the year the INNSIDERS brought Houston its only Gold medal.

The INNSIDERS performed on Tidelanders' shows and traveled throughout the United States and internationally for many years, despite losing Mike Cox to a job transfer in 1978. The group stayed together until 1986, singing with replacement tenors Ken Litman, Jim Sikorski, and then, for many years, with Lloyd Erickson. John Devine and Dr. Tom Pearson currently live in Houston, Guy McShan lives in Bryan, and Mike Cox lives in Oregon.

The Tidelanders returned to International competition five times in the next eight years. In 1977, under the direction of George Howe, they placed 6th in Philadelphia. In 1980, under Jim Sikorski, they placed 5th in Salt Lake City. In 1981, 1983, and 1984, with John Devine directing, Houston placed 4th, 4th, and 5th, in Detroit, Seattle and St. Louis, respectively.

Unfortunately, 1984 marked the beginning of a long dry spell for the Houston Tidelanders. Houston placed second in District competition, to either the Dallas VOCAL MAJORITY or Oklahoma City's OK CHORALE, for nine of the next ten years, once placing 3rd. John Devine decided to step down as Director in 1988. Rick Serpico became Director and led the Tidelanders from 1988 through 1991. In 1992, Tracy Shirk agreed to serve as Interim Director until a new Director could be found.

In early 1993, the Director search effort located an obvious choice. There was a candidate in Houston who (1) Was a recognized A-level chorus coach, (2) Had won a Quartet Gold medal, (3) Had directed a chorus to a Gold medal, (4) Was currently directing a 4th place International-level chorus, and (5) Had served as President of a Barbershop singing organization of approximately 30,000 members. There was a problem, however. The Barbershop singing organization was Sweet Adeline's International, the quartet and choruses were part of the SAI organization, and that obvious choice was a woman! The Houston Chapter, recognizing her incredible talent, decided to hire Betty Tracy as the Tidelanders' Director, even though the Society rules in effect at that time did not permit women serving in that role. Tracy Shirk, Assistant Director, led the Tidelanders to another 2nd place finish, behind the Vocal Majority, at SWD competition in 1993.

Through the tireless efforts of several Tidelanders, including International Board Members John Schneider and Joe Liles, and others interested in improving the Society, the rules pertaining to Non-member, Female Musical Directors were changed in 1994. The Society retained its identity as an all-male singing society, yet it allowed individual choruses to take advantage of all available leadership talent, regardless of gender. Betty Tracy subsequently led the Tides to 1994 District competition in Tulsa, with 75 men on stage. She brought home Tidelanders' first SWD Chorus Championship since 1984.

In 1995, the Tidelanders went to Miami Beach for their first International Contest in eleven years. With 88 men on stage, they finished 11th. In October 1995, the Tides repeated as SWD Chorus Champions and returned to the International Contest in Salt Lake City, placing 11th for the second year in a row. Just prior to the Salt Lake City contest, Betty Tracy submitted her resignation to the Tidelanders' Board. That event prompted a new era in the history of the Houston Chapter.

An "open" Chapter meeting was held on July 15, 1996, just after the International Contest. Members voiced their concerns and ideas for the future. The Chapter Board appointed a committee to evaluate options and to make recommendations about how the Chapter should function in the future. A New Director Search Committee was also organized. The Tidelanders decided not to compete in the 1996 contest cycle because it was obvious that there were so many diverse opinions in the chapter that reaching consensus and pleasing everyone would be impossible.

On October 14, 1996, the "Futures Committee" Chairman and 1998 President-elect, Wayne Hardin, mailed a new Tidelanders' Mission Statement, a Statement of Values and a Chapter Code of Regulations to supplement the By-Laws to all the members. The **"New, Improved Houston Tidelanders"** were modeled from a "best practices survey" of the most successful chapters in the Society. The Alexandria Harmonizers provided some of the "best" ideas. Key changes included a new entity called the "Performing Chorus" for which all members must audition and then maintain chorus repertoire competency. On-going audio-taping and demonstration of visual plan mastery was required for everyone. Chapter members wishing to be a part of the Performing Chorus were requested to execute a Membership Expectation Contract which listed the commitments everyone was expected to meet. Auditions began in January 1997, under the leadership of Tracy Shirk, the new Director.

The Tidelanders experienced a very difficult year in 1997. Even though relatively few members who elected to audition for the Performing Chorus actually failed their auditions, many opted to become inactive or drop their membership altogether. From a level of 82 men on the 1996 International stage in Salt Lake City, only 35 were in the new Performing Chorus for the Division contest in August, 1997. The Spring Show lost money for the first time in history. These were difficult times but those who believed in the new Tidelanders, the "CORE", as they became known, worked hard to make the Chapter survive and return to its previous level of achievement.

In July 1997, THE ARRANGEMENT quartet, Tracy Shirk, Lloyd Erickson, Rob Smith and Jason Pinkall, our 1996 SWD Champions, made their second consecutive trip to the International Contest, proudly representing the Houston Chapter. The rejuvenated Tidelanders won the Division Chorus Contest, scoring just a few points ahead of the newly-formed HEART OF TEXAS Chorus. Forty-two Tides went to Little Rock for the SWD competition in October and came in 2nd, by only one point, to HEART OF TEXAS. We ended 1997 in an upbeat fashion with our 14th Christmas Show, *"MAGIC OF CHRISTMAS"*, at the Wortham Center. We released our first CD recording at this show.

With few exceptions, the 1997 Board of Directors, headed by President Wayne Hardin, agreed to continue their respective jobs for 1998. Membership growth continued, with 19 new members added to the Performing Chorus during the first six months. Emphasis on quality singing, described in the Tidelanders' VISION STATEMENT, continued. The 1998 Spring Show, our 48th, entitled *"PHANTOM OF THE MUSIC HALL"*, was held at the Music Hall. Past International Quartet Champions, GAS HOUSE GANG, were the headliner quartet. Sadly, this was the last time the Tidelanders performed in the great old Music Hall. It was demolished in June, 1998, to make way for a new Theatre for the Performing Arts.

THE ARRANGEMENT quartet again qualified for International competition and in July, they placed 34th among the 50 best quartets in the world who competed. In mid-year, Wayne Hardin resigned as President to take a new job in Dallas. Keith Kauffman replaced him. In August 1998, the Tidelanders again won the Division Chorus Contest in San Marcos and headed for the SWD contest in New Orleans. Unfortunately, the Tidelanders only placed 3rd, by a few points, behind the HEART OF TEXAS and CENTRAL CITIES (OK), who tied for 1st place.

In 1999, Keith Kauffman continued as Chapter President. The Annual Spring Show at the Wortham was entitled *"GRANDPA'S ATTIC"* with MICHIGAN JAKE as the special guest quartet. The Tidelanders placed 3rd in Tulsa at the annual SWD Contest after winning the Division Contest. The year concluded with another Christmas Show, our 16th, at the Wortham.

In 2000, Keith Kauffman repeated as Chapter President, and under his leadership, the chapter continued to grow. The Annual Spring Show, *"ALEX IN WONDERLAND"*, was again held at the Wortham. The headliner quartet was PLATINUM, the 1999 International Silver Medalist quartet. In August 2000, the Tidelanders made their first visit to the Buckeye Invitational in Columbus, Ohio and finished 1st in the Men's Division of the chorus contest. At the 2000 SWD Contest in Little Rock, the Tidelanders once again placed 3rd after winning the Division Contest.

Active membership on the risers increased to 80 in October 2000, the highest number since the 1996 International Contest in Salt Lake City. PRESTO, with Tracy Shirk, Rob Smith, Keith Kauffman and Steve Coon, finished 2nd in the 2000 SWD Quartet Contest. NOTE-ORIETY, with Stefan Hussenoeder, Mike Wilson, Pete Hasbrook and Dave Frye, won the SWD Novice Quartet title. Another successful Christmas Show was held at the Wortham and the Tidelanders released their second CD, *"THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR"*.

Jim Graham was elected 2001 Chapter President. The Tides won the Division contest at Baton Rouge in March. The Annual show was moved to August because of venue availability. That show, entitled *"FROG KISSIN' "*, with International Quartet Champs FRED as the headliners, featured a new Matinee performance. Tracy Shirk resigned as Director at the conclusion of the Annual show and Roy Prichard agreed to serve as Interim Director while a search committee sought a new Director. With coaching assistance from Brian Beck and Cindy Hansen, Roy led the Tidelanders to the 2001 SWD Chorus Championship in Little Rock, scoring significantly higher our previous efforts. The Christmas Show, *"A GRINCHY KIND OF CHRISTMAS"*, again held at the Wortham, included both Matinee and Evening performances. A highlight of 2001 was the Chapter's receiving a significant financial grant from the Cultural Art Council of Houston Harris County, CACHH, as a result of Ron White's efforts.

Jim Graham was re-elected Chapter President for 2002 and Todd Wilson, Tenor of ACOUSTIX, the 1990 International Quartet Champions and six-time Gold medalist with the VOCAL MAJORITY Chorus, was hired as Director to replace Tracy Shirk. Roy Prichard became Associate Director, a new position for the Tides. Eighty-eight Tidelanders competed at International in Portland, Oregon. We earned some of our highest-ever contest scores, winning 9th place honors. The August Show, *"A SHOW OF CHAMPIONS"*, moved to the Wortham Brown Theatre for the first time. Both ACOUSTIX and STERLING, the 2001 SWD quartet champs, appeared. In October, the Tides finished 2nd to the VOCAL MAJORITY at the SWD Contest in Little Rock and were invited to the 2003 International contest in Montreal as a Wild Card entry. During the year, the Tidelanders performed at the Veteran's Hospital, Pasadena United Methodist Church, St. Paul's Catholic Church in Clear Lake, Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, the Wortham Christmas Tree Lighting and held a Good Time Show at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Clear Lake. The year concluded with our annual caroling in the halls of the M. D. Anderson Hospital.

Jason Pinkall was elected 2003 Chapter President. Todd Wilson continued as Musical Director. Highlights of the year included extension of the annual Clear Lake Good Time Show to three performances, including a special matinee for seniors, and hosting the Division Contest and International Quartet Prelims at the Grand Opera House in Galveston. In July, 82 Tidelanders traveled to the International competition in Montreal and again earned strong A-level scores, placing 8th. International quartet finalists, SATURDAY EVENING POST, were the headliners for our August Show. The Tidelanders again won the SWD Chorus Championship in Corpus Christi and earned the right to represent the SWD in Louisville at the 2004 world championships. The chorus and quartets were again active throughout the year with area performances in churches, hospitals. The annual Christmas Show at the Wortham was extended from two to three separate performances for the first time, due to patron demand. Todd Wilson resigned as Musical Director at year-end and was replaced by Roy Prichard.

Will Collier became the 2004 Chapter President with Roy Prichard serving as Musical Director. John Devine, a former Tidelanders' Director, returned to the chapter as Associate Director. We continued our successful Singing Valentines program. The Clear Lake Good Time Show was moved to St. Bernadette's Catholic Church. Nearly 80 Tides traveled to Louisville for the International competition where we finished 11th overall. The August Show, *"TIDELANDER REALITY"*, was once again held at the Wortham, with an added Sunday Matinee for the first time in many years. FOUR VOICES, the 2002 International Quartet Champions, were our headliner quartet. At District competition in Dallas, the Tidelanders finished a close 2nd to the HEART OF TEXAS chorus and accepted a Wild Card bid to compete at the 2005 International Contest in Salt Lake City. The chorus and our quartets were very active during the year, again doing a Good Time Show in Clear Lake and performing at Pasadena Memorial High School and Holy Spirit Episcopal Church. For the third year in a row, we sponsored several youth scholarships to Harmony Explosion Camp and held a successful Young Men in Harmony (YMIH) Workshop at Spring ISD's Westfield High School. Approximately 50 students participated in the afternoon-evening event. The year ended with another Wortham Christmas Show, *"CHRISTMAS IN LIMERICK"*, and caroling at M. D. Anderson Hospital.

Leon Klingensmith was elected 2005 Chapter President and Roy Prichard continued as Musical Director. In an effort to compensate for declining Show ticket sales revenue, increased emphasis was placed on public relations, community outreach and grant solicitation activities. We broadened the scope of our YMIH Workshop effort, inviting schools from the Greater Houston area to each event, rather than limiting participation to individual schools or school districts. Workshops were held in West Houston, Pearland and Katy. Approximately 200 students from nearly 20 schools participated in these three programs. The Board hired a consulting firm with well-documented, 30-year non-profit organization fund-raising expertise to spearhead our grant solicitation efforts. Unfortunately, two Category 4 hurricanes, Katrina and Rita, hit the Gulf coast at the same time this program was initiated. Local grant funding was diverted from performing arts groups to hurricane relief. Our results didn't meet expectations although we did receive our first-ever grant from Houston Endowment Inc. Both our August and Christmas Shows, "*FORE PART HARMONY*" and "*A GIFT FOR CHRISTMAS*", were held at the Wortham. METROPOLIS was the August headliner quartet and the Houston BoyChoir joined the Tides for the Christmas performances. We also performed at the Clear Lake GTS, Pasadena Memorial High School, the Bayou City Arts Festival, Holy Spirit Episcopal Church, St. Timothy Church and M. D. Anderson Hospital.

It is noteworthy that the Society adopted a new International Chorus Competition format for the 2005 event in Salt Lake City. More Wild-card chorus entries than usual were invited and those groups competed in a preliminary round for the opportunity to compete in the final contest. The Tides failed to qualify for the finals even though our contest score, had the traditional format been followed, would have given us an 18th place ranking. Afterward, the Music Team and Board jointly decided that because our members had competed at four consecutive International events, a significant financial and emotional drain on everyone, we would drop out of the competition cycle in 2005. The Tides did not participate in October's District competition, as a result.

In 2006, Klingensmith was re-elected President. Roy Prichard remained as Musical Director. We successfully repeated our Singing Valentines program and Clear Lake GTS in February. In March, together with the Lake Jackson chapter, we hosted the Division Convention. The Tides won that chorus competition with a very-solid A-level score, the highest we have achieved in several years. At the District chorus competition in Corpus Christi, the Tides placed 3rd behind the HEART OF TEXAS and MILLIONAIRES choruses. Because we sang well, only 6 points out of 2nd place and 35 points behind HOT, the Tides were offered and accepted a Wild Card invitation to compete at the 2007 International Convention in Denver. Both our August and Christmas Shows, "*BEST OF BARBERSHOP*" and "*A SANTA CLARA CHRISTMAS*", were held at the Wortham Center. DALLAS KNIGHTS were the August headliner quartet. Having the Houston BoyChoir join us for the 2005 Christmas Show was so well received that we invited them to join us again in 2006.

We actively continued our support for scholastic choral music programs in Greater Houston. Once again, Pearland High School hosted our annual area-wide Barbershop Harmony Workshop. It was attended by 110 students from 15 schools. This was the best attendance we've ever had for any single Workshop. Chapter quartets also supported "Men's Night Out" choral programs at Angleton and Spring High Schools and provided quartet coverage at the Houston Ballet's "Nutcracker Marketplace" fund-raiser at Reliant Center, too. The Tides performed frequently throughout the year, including events at Holy Spirit Episcopal Church, Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church, the Wortham Center Christmas Tree Lighting and year-end caroling at M. D. Anderson Hospital.

Klingensmith was elected to a third term as President for 2007 with Roy Prichard continuing as Musical Director.