

## The Greater Little Rock Chapter - 1955-1996

(Written in 1996 by George Tribble for the Southwestern District Historian,  
Grady Kerr)

The Greater Little Rock Chapter is a grandchild of the Memphis, Tennessee, Chapter. In the fall of 1952, says a newspaper article in 1954, seven barbershoppers from Memphis came over to Stuttgart Arkansas to “evangelize the “Duck Capital of the World”. It is there that the world Duck Calling Championships are held each year, but in 1952, a far different sound was heard; that of four part singing called barbershop harmony. They soon attracted the attention of a foursome from the Little Rock area who had been singing barbershop music since 1950 under the name “The Four Specs”. They joined the new Grand Prairie Chorus and sang with the Stuttgart group for a couple of years, but they grew weary of the 120 mile round trip each week and decided to start their own chapter in Little Rock.

On **March 5, 1955** these four, **Fred Holder, Jr., Dr. Joe Norton, W. H. (Bill) Bard, and Richard H. Hawn**, called an organization meeting at the School for the Blind and attracted two dozen others to found a local chapter. **Roland Hawn** was the first Chapter President, **Fred Garner** was elected Vice President, **Ray Lowry** became the Secretary, and **Bill Bard** was the initial treasurer, while **Fred Holder, Jr.** became the first Dixie District Board Representative. The music director was **Tandy V. Allen**.

Chartered by SPEBSQSA on **May 17, 1955**. The Chapter was a part of the Dixie District, and the performing chorus was then called “*The Capitol City Chorus*”. Barely six months later, in December 1955, they produced their first show, calling it the “First Annual Parade of Harmony”, a common name for barbershop shows at the time. They were assisted by the Grand Prairie Chorus and a quartet, “The **ARKORDS**”, from Stuttgart; and “**The Confederates**” from Memphis, Dixie District Champions and International Silver Medallists in both 1954 and 1955. Two Quartets from the Greater Little Rock Chapter appeared on the show; “**The Four Specs**” (because they all wore glasses?) and a newly formed foursome called “**The Capitolaire**s”.

By early 1956 there was a chapter newsletter, “The HARM-O-NOTES’ , and the Chapter president was writing notes to members and their families. The Chapter produced several quartets, competed in contests, and had a string of “Parade of Harmony” shows and other events that were for the benefit of deserving groups around the city. One such beneficiary was the Exceptional Children’s School in Little Rock. **A special show was produced in March of 1961 that earned \$2,400 for a new van for the school.** The MC for the second show was **Chester H. Lauck**, better known as Lum as in “Lum and Abner”.

The Greater Little Rock Chapter became “*The Diamond State Chorus*” in the early 70’s in honor of one of the mottos of Arkansas and in recognition of the only state in the union with real diamond mines. They perhaps borrowed the name from a 1959 quartet in the chapter by the same name.

Life was good in the Dixie District, but some of the distances were enormous; Little Rock was at the extreme western edge, and being totally involved would have meant traveling to Miami on occasion. So in 1978 they saw the greener pastures in east Texas and moved to the District of Champions, the great Southwestern! This paved the way for a reverse move by the Arkansas Razorbacks a couple of decades later. They were an immediate splash in the SWD, winning the Small Chorus Championship in 1979.

### **Quartets:**

Being a quartet society means that quartets have always been a very important part of the Greater Little Rock Chapter, beginning with **The Four Specs** who have already been mentioned. Over the years the chapter must have had over 100 registered quartets, and many more informal ones. There have been several “Novice” quartet championships that created a great deal of interest in the Chapter which now has four registered foursomes.

One of the first great quartets was “**The Accidentals**”, with **Dr. Tom Burrow** at lead, Captain **Bob Wachter** singing Bass, **Mack Dublin** at Bari, and **Glen Chambers** at Tenor. The Accidentals quickly became a local favorite and existed for several years (at least through 1969) with a few changes of singers. They were among the finalists in the Dixie District Contest in 1959 at Mobile.

Another was “The Sound Confederation” with **Terry Mercing, Lamar Setliff, Glen Chambers and Frank Huggins**. (originally had a different bass) They won contests and had their picture in the papers many times. Perhaps their biggest achievement was making a commercial for the “Train Station” that ran for a long time and was frequently mentioned in show ads and other newspaper articles.

**Par four** was another great one that has evolved into **Special Delivery** and eventually “**Flashback**”. They have also won division contests and placed high in District, and could be the first LR quartet to qualify for international.

**The Magichords** eventually became **The Untouchables** and are a crowd favorite. They do some great stuff and are also highly ranked in the District.

**Zirconium** is another current quartet that has been very successful.

#### **Chapter/Chorus Awards and plaques:**

The chapter has 13 awards for:

Harmony Foundation recognitions

Society plaques for helping found both the Hot Springs and Greater Fort Smith Chapters.

SPEBSQSA membership awards

State of Arkansas Proclamations

3 Silver Plates in recognition of Division Chorus Championships in 1979, 1980, and 1981

24 Plaques for

Chorus Championships

Most Improved Chorus

Plateau Championships

Large Chapter of the Year Awards

Note: 1979 Large chapter of the year and 1979 Small Chapter Chorus championship

#### **Novice Quartet championships:**

Each year for at least the last 10 years we have had an annual “Novice Quartet Championship and Family Pot Luck Social”.

### **Men in the Chapter:**

But our men are the heart of the Chapter. We are tremendously indebted to our founders for laying a foundation of singing, organization and reputation in the area that we are now trying to continue. None of the founders are still with the chapter, but at least two are still in the area. The last we know of was **Glen Chambers**, who was with the Greater Little Rock Chapter from the beginning until his failing health kept him from attending meetings a few years ago. Glen sang with “*The Accidentals*” and “*The Sound Confederation*”, two of our best ever. He was a talented musician, composer, and arranger and Society Judge. Despite poor health, he was able to attend the Chapter show in 1994. The Chorus sang one of his original songs and recognized him from the stage. It was a moving tribute and was very timely since Glen passed away in September of that year.

One of the early giants in the chapter was Captain **Bob Wachter**. Bob, an officer at Little Rock Air Force Base, served as director for a time and sang in several quartets.

**Julian White** is another notable, coming from Greater Little Rock to serve the Society and the District in many roles over the years. He was named Southwest District Barbershopper of the year for 1986. His most recent job was as District Music Educator where he was dean of Harmony Ranch for several years.

Our current champion is the Director, **Terry Mercing**. Terry joined the chapter in the 70’s and soon became a director. He has taken sabbaticals on two occasions, both times returning to lead the chapter to new levels. He has attended Director’s College the last three years and is now a highly qualified Director, Coach, and quartet singer, and teaches COT classes. Terry sang in “*The Sound Confederation*” with Glen Chambers and Lamar Setliff, and is now in one of the best quartets in the district, “*Flashback*”.

Don Snow  
Lou Anderson  
Elwin Jones  
Steve Purdy

### **Individuals prominent in the district:**

Julian White, District Officer, BOTY  
Terry Mercing, BOTY, COTS Instructor, VP of Events, etc

Lou Anderson, VP Events  
Two Chapter Counselors, Karl Krebs and George Tribble  
Multiple Award Winning Bulletin Editor, George Tribble

**Sweet Adelines support**

Peggy Barnes  
Jenny Mercing  
Milana Dennis  
Janell Barkley  
Paula Steinziek  
Betsy White

**Events**

Officers, installation banquet  
Singing Valentines  
Annual Show  
Had one most years, missed a couple a few years back  
Annual Novice Quartet Contest and Family Pot luck social  
Division and District Contests  
Fun Fest in Hot Springs  
COTS  
Chapter Quartet Show

**Recognitions:**

Golden ooh  
BSMEA  
Al Bing Membership Award  
Glen Chambers Most Improved Singer Award  
Barbershopper of the Year

**Conclusion:**

The Greater Little Rock Chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America, Inc, (now to be called the Barbershop Harmony Society), has now had almost 50 years of good times and bad, of triumphs and losses, of wins and failures, of ups and downs. Times have not always been good, but overall, it has been great!

Barbershopping is not a hobby that you do in your spare time, it is a way of life. It takes dedication and support, and like Bartles and James from the wine commercials a few years back, we thank you for your support. Barbershopping takes time away from family things, but it gives back a lot of satisfaction, the pleasure of public performances, of singing well, of doing something we perhaps thought we could never do.

Our Chapter and chorus are special. We have one of the better chapters in the society. We have an outstanding mix of fun, learning, expressing ourselves and getting better. In the Southwestern District, the only chapters better than ours are the ones who audition prospective members and turn down those who aren't well trained and highly talented.

So now we begin the next fifty years. Some will be good, some will be bad; a few might just be great. It is up to us to make it happen.