

History of Sweet Adelines International

At the dawn of the baby boom era, women who enjoyed singing close harmony formed an organization known today as Sweet Adelines International, a highly respected source of education in the barbershop style.

In the summer of 1945, the Great War was over in Europe and would soon end abruptly in the Pacific. In the United States it was a time of Harry James, the Andrews Sisters, gasoline shortages, victory gardens, the USO and Rosie the Riveter. Walter Winchell read everyone the news and a young war correspondent named Walter Cronkite was predicting victory. The United States just buried a president and dramatically raised a flag on Iwo Jima. Western Union still meant grief to a family and the Red Cross brought promise. Almost half the world was digging out from rubble, while peace was about to be shocked into us with a bomb dropped from a slow-moving weather plane called the Enola Gay.

The summer of 1945 was a time to appreciate being alive. Many longed for the older, gentler days, and one of the things held dearest was music, it crosses miles and memories and was about to make another impact on history in war-busy Tulsa, Oklahoma.



The date was Friday, July 13, 1945, when Edna Mae Anderson of Tulsa, Oklahoma, brought a few women together in her home. The women wanted to participate in – the "chord-ringing, fun-filled harmony" that their husbands, members of the men's Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America (SPEBSQSA), were singing. From that meeting grew the nucleus of what was to become Sweet Adelines International.

July 23rd was going to be the kick-off date. Invitations were sent to all barbershop wives asking them to meet at the Hotel Tulsa, where the men had met in 1939 to form SPEBSQSA.

Mrs. Anderson got more than she bargained for. By year's end, the chapter incorporated in Oklahoma. Anderson was its president. It had 85 members and a chapter name, Atomaton (We have an atom of an idea and a ton of energy) that recognized the new nuclear age.

Within four years, the organization had grown to 1,500 members singing in 35 chapters and 60 quartets in 14 different states; adopted bylaws and elected national officers; and created a system for adjudicating national annual competitions to select the best women's barbershop quartet.

These pioneer members possessed singing experience that ranged from talented amateur and semiprofessional to graduates of baccalaureate vocal music programs. They brought experience as working women and homemakers into the organization and infused it with their determination and organizational abilities.

Systems of governing and parliamentary procedure, finances and leadership development which they created more than 50 years ago have stood the test of time and remain virtually unchanged though updated in response to technological advances.



"The original purpose for which Sweet Adelines was organized in 1945 was educational, to teach and train its members in musical harmony and appreciation," Edna Mae Anderson stated. The main goal was to create and promote barbershop quartets and other musical groups; another goal was to give musicals...public and private performances for...learning and general appreciation of all the things pertaining to music."

The organization has stayed true to its original goals, entertaining and educating thousands of people every year. It may look and sound different today, but deep inside its members are the same women aspiring to perform, to achieve and to experience the joy of singing and the thrill of ringing chords that weave harmony into lives and into the world around us.



Today there are nearly 25,000 members of Sweet Adelines International in more than 600 choruses who are perpetuating the unique American art form of barbershop harmony while looking optimistically to the future in their quest to Harmonize the World!