

Chapter 1

November 1946 - October 1951



THE FAR WESTERN DISTRICT of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America (SPEBSQSA), was chartered October 22, 1946. According to the Society magazine, *The Harmonizer*, the following

chapters in this area were in existence before the District was formed: Long Beach, Santa Monica, Phoenix Saguaro, Hollywood, San Francisco, San Gabriel, San Diego, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Reno, Guam Marines, Pacific Marines, Pasadena and Salt Lake City. Several of them received charters from the Society prior to the formation of the District. There is also evidence that chapters existed in Seattle in 1940 and Honolulu in 1941. Most of these early chapters became inactive for a period due to World War II.

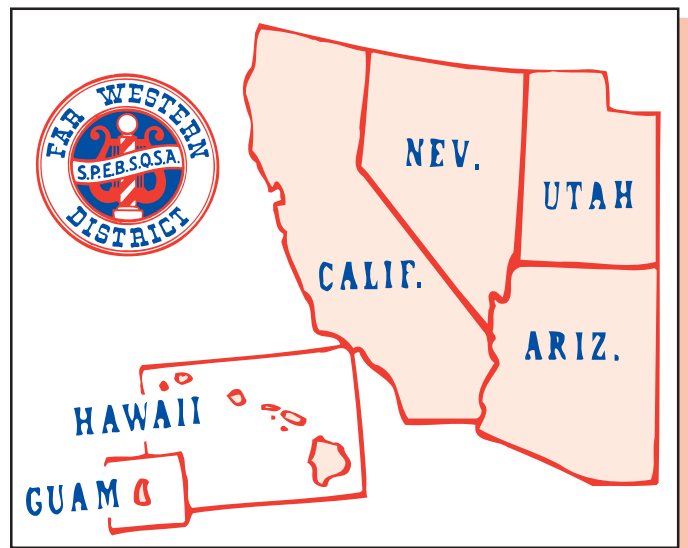
Long Beach appears to have been the first chapter formed in what was later to become the Far Western District. No charters were printed until March 1941 and theirs was #79, but the chapter was formed in June 1939. Santa Monica received its first charter in February 1942, Phoenix in March 1943, Hollywood in March 1945, San Francisco (which had existed for a time in 1941) in July 1945, San Gabriel in September 1945, San Diego and Sacramento in June 1946. Some other chapters that existed



*Russ Stanton
First President of the Far Western District*

in 1946 were Salinas, Tri-City and Glendale. The Pasadena Chapter was chartered in December 1946.

Originally the Far Western District included California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona and Nevada. In June 1947, Oregon and Washington were removed to the Evergreen District. In March 1949, Utah was added to the Far Western District, and in May 1951, the far northern part of California north of the 40th parallel was shifted to the Evergreen District and Hawaii and Guam were added to the FWD. The first District President was Russ Stanton



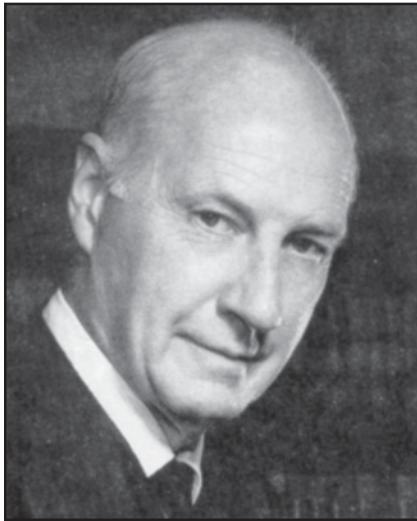
of the San Gabriel Chapter. Howard Cooper was the first District Historian and much of this history, prior to the founding of *Westunes Magazine* in 1951, comes from material collected by Howard. Some District official apparently made out some reference cards, and Howard sent one to Society founder O. C. Cash. A note from O. C. to Howard dated February 5, 1951 reads:

Bro Cooper:

Thanks for the Reference Cards. This is a new idea on me and a good one. Sure wish I could make a tour of the Calif. Chapters so I could meet all the Brethern and Sistern. Maybe I can do this some time. Until then best wishes to all.

*Yours etc.
O. C. Cash*

Before the District was chartered, the famous Bing Crosby was appointed to the Society Board for the years 1939-41. Charles M. Merrill of Reno was appointed to the Society



Charles Merrill
First FWD International Board Member
1946-47
International President 1947-48
Member of First FWD Champions, the
"Bonanza Four"

Board, and served from 1944 through 1949. Charles was Society 1st Vice President in 1946-47 and Society President in 1947-48. He also sang baritone in the "Bonanza Four," the first quartet to represent the FWD at the Society Summer Contests of 1946 and 1947. Russ Stanton credited Merrill with getting the District chartered earlier than it otherwise would have been. Russ served on the Society Board from 1947-49.

Charter members of the Long Beach

Chapter included E. J. Del Porte, W. L. Farrow, E. L. Final, George W. Isaacs (their first secretary), Ed. M. Jones, Verl Keiser, Elliott Kirby, Carl Moss, Harry Schauer and Edison Thomas (their first president). Farrow, Kirby, Schauer and Keiser all served later as presidents of the Chapter.

Their best-known quartet was the "Four Bits of Harmony," formed in 1950; a very funny quartet that



"Four Bits of Harmony"
1951 Far Western District Champions

always appeared on stage in ancient swimming suits, and were District Champions in 1951. The Long Beach Chapter by-laws were the first ones used by the Society.

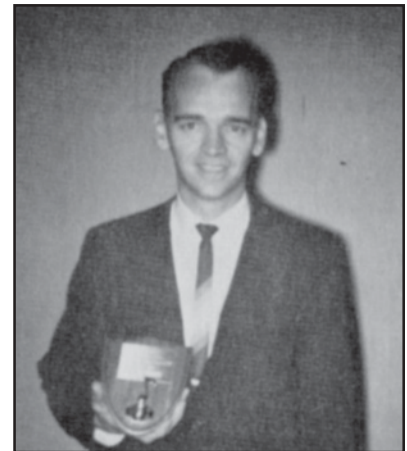
The Santa Monica Chapter was actually the first to receive a charter from the Society after the District was formed. Their first president was George Figuereda, who was Chief of Police, and their first secretary was Frank Otto, a Lieutenant in his department. They signed up over 60 members in the first year, with annual dues of \$5. The WWII draft soon cut into their membership, which dropped to 20. They were forced to move several times, but eventually got a nice hall under the City's Recreation Department, and their membership picked up. They were able to serve the City in many ways, gaining it's respect, and eventually were given an even better place to meet in the Adult Recreational Center. In the early 1950's they were fortunate to have a young lad in his early 20's by the name of Earl Moon as chorus director for a short time. This chapter eventually disbanded,

and was re-chartered in May 1976.

The first "Parade of Quartets" in the West took place in Phoenix, Arizona on May 21, 1943. The first "Parade of Quartets" in California was held at the San Gabriel Mission on October 5, 1946, just before the District was formed, and featured 22 quartets from chapters in what would soon be the District. The San Gabriel Chapter supplied the first District President, Russ Stanton. They had the first regular barbershop radio program which ran weekly for 3 years, and in 1948 they put on a show on KFI-TV, with Society Secretary Carroll P. Adams as MC. San Gabriel formed the first chapter orchestra, known as the "Haywire Orchestra," from chapter members in 1949, and they were the first District chapter to reach a membership of 100, which they did in 1955.

The Hollywood Chapter was chartered in April 1945 with a number of famous charter members including Bing Crosby. In one Society publication, Bing was listed as Hollywood Chapter President, but there are reports that he was generally too busy to attend meetings. As previously mentioned, he did serve on the Society Board from 1939 to 1941. Another charter member was Jack Barbour, a Movie Producer with Warner Brothers, and a great woodshedding baritone. Others were Los Angeles District Attorney Hatch Graham (who later died of a heart attack while attending a Society Summer Convention), General Electric Corp. Vice-President Vern Miller, a terrific bass, and General Electric Western Division Sales Manager Wayne Allen. The "Hollywoodsmen" quartet (Tom Moffat, Bob Moffat, Wayne Allen and Vern Miller) sang for some time on the Dick Sinclair Polka Party, televised Sunday nights on KTLA-TV Channel 5. Another member of the Hollywood Chapter was song writer Charlie Brown, who wrote "Somebody Else Is Taking My Place" and other songs.

The Hollywood Chapter disbanded in 1961. Probably the only members of that chapter still active in barbershopping are Joe Salz, who joined the Hollywood Chapter at age 18, and is now a member of the Phoenix Chapter and currently Chairman of the District 50-Year Celebration Committee, and Floyd "Blackie" Blackwell who joined the Hollywood Chapter while still a member of the U. S. Navy, and is now a member of the Palomar-Pacific Chapter.



Floyd "Blackie" Blackwell
50-Year Member of the FWD

Some other chapters chartered shortly after the District was formed were: Bakersfield in March 1947, Berkeley in April 1947, Honolulu in September 1947, San Jose in November 1947, Tucson in December 1947, West Los Angeles and Globe, AZ in May 1948, La Canada and Lakeside August 1948, Eureka in September 1948, Flagstaff in October 1948, Peninsula in

November 1948 and Whittier in September 1950. The “Angel City Four” (Gordie Fryer, Blackie Blackwell, Bo Gray and Ray Cullman) formed the Hollywood Chapter, and then went on to establish the Los Angeles County Chapter which was chartered in July 1950, and met on the 5th floor of the downtown YMCA. Some presidents of this chapter were Bob Moffatt, Blackie Blackwell, and Mike Senter, who would later sing bass with the Society Champion “Golden Staters.” Some chapters chartered in 1950 were Martinez, Santa Ana and Arcadia.

The Los Angeles County Chapter was strictly a woodshedding chapter with no chorus, and by the second year their membership was up to 82. Some members drove 40, 50 and 60 miles to attend the meetings. The chapter met on Friday nights. In later years they changed their meeting place to a location away from the downtown area, their membership dropped, and they eventually disbanded in 1961.

A Huntington Park Chapter was formed in the late 1940’s. Their best-known quartet was the “Roundeleers,” with Les Woodsen on bari. Les directed the chorus, and Dr. Val Hicks also directed the chorus for a short time. This chapter disbanded in the 1960’s. Another chapter chartered in the late 1940’s was the Inglewood, California Chapter which met at the Elks Club in downtown Inglewood, and was chartered in June 1947. Their chorus was directed by Jim Gowdy, and their best-known quartet was the “24 Feet of Harmony,” so named because its members were all 6’ tall. This chapter eventually moved to Manhattan Beach, and became known as the South Bay Chapter which now meets in Redondo Beach.

As early as 1941, a chapter was formed in San Francisco but it was not chartered, and WWII caused it to be abandoned in 1942. San Francisco was finally chartered in July 1945 with 18 members, and was sponsored by the Reno Chapter. Their organizer at that time and first Chapter President was Don Grenfell, who became the first Vice President of the Far Western District. By June of 1946, they were up to 53 members. Their first quartets were the “Golden Statesmen” (Jack Hare, Warren Coutts, Stan Vose and Don Grenfell), the “Claim Jumpers” (Al Boatwright, Jerry Nyhan, Bill Gavin and Jim Shumate) and the “Lease Breakers” (Al Boatwright, Jerry Nyhan, Ed Davis and Warren Hanna). Bill Gavin directed the chorus. The “Golden Statesmen” sang on that first California “Parade of Quartets” in San Gabriel. San Francisco’s Jack Hare was president of the FWD in 1947-48, and was a very active member of the chapter until his death in February 1951. Dave Stevens became their chorus director in 1950. In 1951 the San Francisco Chapter hosted the Society Mid-Winter Convention, with the “Buffalo Bills” featured on the shows.

Although Reno’s “Bonanza Four” competed at the Society Contest in 1946, the first Far Western District Contest, a combination District and Regional Preliminary Quartet Contest, was held in Long Beach in 1947. The judges were the 1944 Society Champion quartet “Harmony Halls” from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the MC was radio and movie star Hal Peary, a member of the Long Beach Chapter. In 1948 it was again a combined contest held in San Francisco, and the judges were the 1945 Society Championship quartet “The Misfits” from Chicago. MC for this contest was Bill Gavin, who was mentioned in the



*The “Four Staters”
1948 Far Western District Champions*

previous paragraph, and worked at radio station KNBR. Winners were the “Four Staters”, so named because they had lived in 3 states before coming to their 4th state: California. The “Four Staters” had their own 15-minute local radio show.

Many Chapters were chartered in 1947: Bakersfield and Arcadia chapters were chartered in March, Berkeley in April, South Bay in June, Aloha (Honolulu) in September, San Jose in November and Tucson in December. Two other chapters, Orinda and the Newhall Rebel Chapter were also chartered in 1947, and limped along for a while, but eventually dissolved or merged with other chapters. The Ventura County Chapter was organized in May, 1947 but was unable to attract enough members to be chartered, and folded in 1950. It would later be chartered in September, 1953.

The La Canada and Lakeside chapters were chartered in August 1948, followed by the Eureka Chapter in September, the Flagstaff, Arizona Chapter in October and the Peninsula Chapter in November 1948. The Salt Lake City Chapter, which



*The “Westernaires”
1949 Far Western District Champions*

was then part of the Far Western District, received its charter in February 1949. Three chapters, Martinez, Eden-Hayward and Whittier were chartered in September 1950; Crescent City was chartered in February 1951, and the Oakland Chapter in late 1951.

In 1949, the District Contest and Regional Preliminary Contests were separated. The purpose of the Regional Preliminary Contest was to determine which quartets would represent the District at the Society Summer Contest. The District Contest was simply to determine quartet standings within the District. The

District Contest winner would not be eligible to compete again in the District Contest. Winners of the Regional Prelims would be eligible to compete in that contest again unless they won the Society Summer Contest. The 1949 Regional Preliminary Contest was held in Long Beach in April, and the judges were Arvid Anderson of Chicago, Benny Loftsgaard of Klamath Falls, Oregon, J. H. "Bud" Leabo of Creswell, Oregon, Hatch Graham of Los Angeles and Russ Stanton of San Gabriel. The MC was Meredith Willson. The 1949 District Convention and Contest was held in San Diego in October.

The "Westernaires" from the Phoenix Saguaro Chapter won the district title for 1949, thus being the first quartet to be retired from district competition under the new system. They went on to compete in the 1950 Society Summer Contest, and Art Merrill, Society Treasurer, had this to report: "In Omaha I almost fell off my chair when George ["Tiny"] Pranspill, lead for the 'Westernaires,' held a tuning fork to his ear for the pitch for his quartet. I asked him afterward, and he said that he'd been brought up on tuning forks, and found them easy to use. He certainly wielded his with professional ease."



*The San Diego Serenaders
1950 FWD Champions*

The 1950 Regional Preliminary Contest was again held in Long Beach, with judges Joe Stern of Kansas City, Hatch Graham, Benny Loftsgaard and Mat Wilson of La Jolla. TV star Art Baker was the MC. The 1951 Regional was in Los Angeles, with two of the judges being members of the "Bonanza Four," namely Dayton Colville and Jerry Nyhan of San Francisco.

As has been mentioned, Bing Crosby was quite involved with the Society in its early days and a member of the Hollywood Chapter. He once wrote that, while on a U.S.O. tour of the European Theater during WWII, he had luncheon with General Eisenhower and his staff, and "since he [Ike] liked to sing barbershop harmony, we got up a quartet. The General sang baritone."

