

Preface



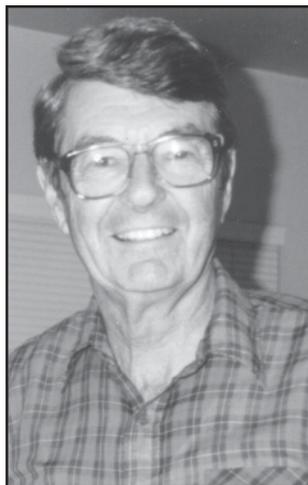
THIS HISTORY of the Far Western District has been nearly two years in the making and is the product of countless hours of research, dedication, and commitment to quality on the part of three individuals: El Wirt, who poured through reams of documents, newspaper clippings, and back issues of *Westunes Magazine* to capture a lively chronology of our heritage; Joe Salz, who was the driving force behind its publication, and gathered nearly all of the photographs appearing in the book, many on loan from private collections; and David Melville, who edited and formatted the manuscripts, scanned numerous photographs

and illustrations, and combined everything into the final product.

Many of the photographs appearing in this book were taken from back issues of *Westunes Magazine* and were of marginal clarity in their original state. While every attempt was made to enhance their clarity using state of the art tools, some pictures may appear blurred. That is the nature of historical records and old reproduction technologies. We hope we have captured the essence of those days gone by, despite these technical difficulties, and encourage all of our members to provide our historians with quality photographs and accurate records as we endeavor to preserve our history for the future.

About the Author

Eliot "El" Wirt was born in Berkeley, CA February 13, 1925. He lived in Eugene Oregon for several years up until WWII when he joined the Navy, and ended up in the San Francisco Bay area after the war. El joined the Society in 1950 in the Berkeley Chapter. Almost immediately he became Secretary of the Chapter and found himself singing baritone in a quartet called the "Mellow Bellow Four". The bass was "Tiny" Hillman, who was 6 feet 7 inches and weighed 300 pounds. They went to the District Contest in Bakersfield in 1951 and came in last in Stage Presence and tied for first in Harmony Accuracy and placed 5th!

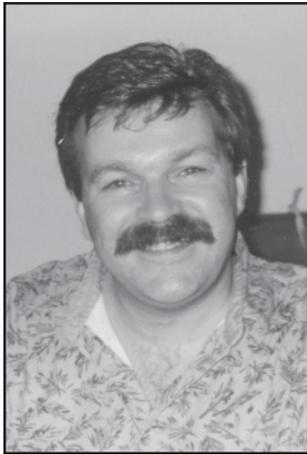


When the Korean Conflict arose, El went back into the Navy and was stationed on the eastern coast when he joined the Alexandria Virginia Chapter. He was a competitor in the first Society Chorus Contest, which was then by invitation -- after that you had to qualify. The contest was held in Detroit in 1953, and they put 25 men on stage with the great Bud Arberg directing. While in Virginia he sang in a quartet called "The Confederate Notes"; when he returned to California, current Society Historian Wilbur Sparks replaced him as baritone in the quartet.

After his discharge El returned to the Berkeley Chapter and sang with a quartet called the "Uncalled Four". They placed 3rd in the District Contest in 1954 and 5th the following year. He sang in the 1956 Society contest in Minneapolis with the Berkeley Chorus, and was privileged to sing a song with Society Founder O. C. Cash in the hotel lobby. After the convention he moved to San Jose and took a job teaching mathematics at what was then San Jose Junior College and is now San Jose City College. He transferred back to the Berkeley Chapter in 1957, just long enough to win a gold medal with their chorus in Los Angeles with Dave Stevens directing.

El has been San Jose Chapter Historian since 1963. He served on the Chapter Board in 1967 and 1971 and was Chapter President in 1975 and Chapter Delegate to the District Board in 1976. He sang with the "Old Time Harmony Four" quartet from 1964-1974 and with the "Fancy Dans" from 1981-1984, spending a month in New Zealand with the "Dans" in 1981. More recently he sang for several years with the "Kitchen Table Four" quartet and currently sings in a quartet called the "Fault Finders".

El edited the San Jose Chapter bulletin from June 1987 through September 1989 and was named District Bulletin Editor of the Year in 1988. He was San Jose Chapter Barbershopper of the Year in 1989 and was named to the San Jose Chapter Hall of Fame in 1993. He has been the Far Western District Historian since January 1990 and received the FWD President's Award in 1997.



David Melville, Editor

David Melville was born in International Falls, Minnesota and survived the cold to tell about it. His first exposure to music began at age four, studying piano. In 1967 his family moved to Bemidji, Minnesota where he attended high school and participated in band, orchestra and concert choir. He also studied commercial art, and created illustrations used for school productions. He was cast in a number of productions in a professional summer-stock theatre, and also worked on the technical crew. His first exposure to barbershop was in Bemidji while working on the stage crew for the local chapter's annual show.

David attended St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota from 1976-1980 and received his Bachelor's degree in Biology. While at St. Olaf he continued studies in piano as well as voice, and sang in the choir. After college, he moved to Bayfield, Wisconsin where he managed a country inn. The owners of the inn were musicians, and drafted him into their in-house chamber singers. In 1982 he resumed the collegiate life, completed another degree in software engineering and, while in school, worked as a recording engineer and announcer for Minnesota Public Radio and later on the crew for "A Prairie Home Companion."

After moving to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, he met some fellows from the Greater St. Paul Area Chapter, and joined the Society shortly thereafter. Later that year he joined the Hilltop Chapter as a dual member, and formed a quartet named "Lake Street Bridge," so named because two members were from Minneapolis and two from St. Paul, and the Lake Street Bridge was the old landmark that had connected the cities for nearly a century. Tragically, a worker was killed during the construction of the new Lake Street Bridge just days before they were to perform on their first chapter show, so they searched frantically for a new name, and decided on "All Around Town" just moments before going on stage. That name stuck, and the quartet made many appearances until disbanding in 1993. While in the Twin Cities he served his chapters as Program VP, Music VP, Secretary, Bulletin Editor, and Show Chairman, and was Co-Chairman of the LOL District Spring Convention.

Early in 1993 he relocated to Phoenix and so far has survived the *heat* to tell about it! He arrived on a Tuesday afternoon and joined the Phoenix Saguaro Chapter that evening. Since then he has served as Bulletin Editor and Member at Large on the Phoenix Chapter Board, has designed the publicity materials and playbills for the Phoenicians for the past several years, and is currently their stage manager and webmaster. His career takes him all over the globe, and there is nothing he enjoys more while on the road than teaching barbershop tags to people of other cultures, and seeing that smile come over their faces when they ring that first chord.



Joe Salz FWD 50-Year Celebration Chairman

Joe Salz has been singing nearly all of his life, getting an early start in barbershop during high school in Dubuque, Iowa. He later joined the Society in 1948 as a member of the Hollywood Chapter, and formed a quartet, the "Harmony H-Liters," at his first meeting. He has sung with choruses and quartets in Dubuque, Altoona, PA, Phoenix, South Bay, CA and Sacramento.

Over the years, Joe has held every chapter office, some of them several times. He was President of the Phoenix Saguaro Chapter when they first became a "Century Chapter," and sang with the Phoenicians to win a gold medal at Atlanta in 1972. He served nine years on the Far Western District Board of Directors as District Treasurer, and has also served on the Ethics Committee, Long Range Planning Committee, taught the Program VP class at the Arizona Division COTS and, most recently, was Chairman of the FWD 50-Year Celebration Committee. He is the proud recipient of the FWD president's Award, that honor bestowed in 1981.

Joe has sung in numerous quartets throughout the Far Western District, including the 1957 FWD Champion "Desert Knights" who, along with the "Knight Nurses" are still performing on chapter shows; the 1972 FWD Champion "Stage Four"; and the "Coastliners," International Representatives in 1963, 1964 and 1965 who placed as high as 11th in Society competition. Quartetting has taken him to the four corners of the USA, to Canada, and on tour with the USO to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba along with Bub Thomas and the "Four Bits of Harmony." He also sang at Carnegie Hall with the "Rolling Tones" from Altoona, PA during the Mid Atlantic District Convention. Other quartets include the "J-Walkers," "Nostalgia," and the "Gold Standard."

Joe has been a prominent figure in the Far Western District, and has been involved in making its history for most of its existence. Among Joe's many awards and mementos is one which he bears with great pride: his 50-Year Member Pin awarded to him at the Society Contest in Atlanta.