

WITH A VOICE OF SINGING

The story of St. John's Boy Choir

(Transcribed from an unknown author, written in ~1954; updated by Ray Anspach, July 1992)

It is doubtful that any experience in the entire realm of education could be more genuinely satisfying than that of working with a group of boys in a situation conducive to healthy growth of body, mind, and spirit. This is particularly true if the teacher and the boys happen to be working with an art like music and working with it in the church.

This is the story of just such an experience as it happened in the parish of St. John's Episcopal Church in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. It is told with the hope that it may bring to the reader a little of the real thrill of satisfaction which comes to those responsible for the project and to the nearly 200 boys who have been members of St. John's Boy Choir through the years, a brief memory of happy hours spent in the organization.

In the late 1930's, the public schools of Mount Pleasant acquired, as director of vocal music, Mr. Bernard B. Stone, a young and very talented teacher. who was very sure that the fair city was thrice blessed because of his presence. The new music teacher and I soon became very close friends, and that friendship has grown through the years as I have watched with interest his participation in the life of the community.

Among the many and varied things which made the teacher's first year in Mount Pleasant an interesting one was a telephone call from a member of the vestry of St. John's Episcopal Church. This gentleman wanted to know if the young man would be interested in organizing a boy choir in the parish. The young teacher immediately said "Yes, if I may bring my friend, John Vincer (another new teacher), along with me to help". The gentleman agreed and the two young men met with the rector of the Church, the Rev. Harold B. Adams, to outline a plan for organization.

In every parish there is one person who serves as a sort of mother to everyone. To her the people go with their problems. St. John's parish has Mrs. Claude Whitcomb, lovingly called "Maggie" by all who know her. It is to her that the two young men and the Rector turned for help in recruiting choir boys. At that time St. John's parish had just four boys among its members, and it takes more than four to make a choir. Mrs. Whitcomb knew many boys in the Kinney school district and she brought to the first rehearsal in the Parish Hall the following boys: Raymond Anspach, Billy Miller, Alva (Porky) Cochran, Tommy Dingman, and Jimmy Harless. These boys with the four boys of the parish, Tommy Northway, Billy Atha, Billy Thomas, and Tommy Williamson, made up the choir which appeared first on December 15th 1939. Wonderful assistance and organization was also given by Mr. H. B. Lindstone, treasurer of the parish, who saw that refreshments were served to the boys at each rehearsal. It was not long before it was discovered that some of the boys were coming only for the "eats", so the serving of food at choir rehearsals was discontinued. However, the practice of directed recreation for the boys after rehearsals was started and has continued in the pattern of activities. This part of the program was planned and directed by Mr. Vincer.

The first boys were all sopranos, and none could read music. Growth was, of course, very slow, but from the beginning emphasis was placed upon well produced musical tone, accurate singing, clear diction, and honest interpretation of the music, all of this using an old foot pedal pump organ. During the first year the boys sang once each month in the Church. On the other three Sundays the

adult choir sang. At the end of the first year the boy choir became the principal choir of the church and sang all the services.

Between the organization date and May 26, 1940 the following boys grew interested and became members of the choir: Dick Hammond, Winston Thiers, Jack Ramsey, Gene Ramsey, Dick Park, Bruce Theunissen, Bob Strange, Jimmy Huggins, Clifford Swan, and John Grice.

May 26, 1940 marked the first public performance other than a regular church service. It was a Choral Vespers at 4:30 in the afternoon. The Saginaw News of May 27 stated, "Beauty and dignity were molded into one on Sunday as the Boy Choir of St. John's Episcopal Church presented its first program in an afternoon Vesper service. Attired in black robes and white surplices with black ties the choir members entered the church in solemn procession led by the crucifer and flag bearers". All newspaper items refer to the new choir as only all boys choir in the Central Michigan area - a fact which is true even today, fourteen years later.

The program on this first occasion consisted of "Evening Hymn" - a Welsh folk tune, "Prayer" by Humperdinck, "But the Lord is Mindful of His own" by Mendelssohn, "Blessed Jesus" by Christiansen, and "Lead Me, Lord" by Wesley. In the presentation of the program the choir was assisted by Miss Marian Haller and Miss Eleanor Stein (teachers in the city schools) who sang alto, Mr. Vincer who sang tenor, and the choirmaster who sang bass.

The printed programs for the occasion were designed by Mr. Vincer and the covers were hand painted by Mrs. Richard Harris. Following the Vespers a reception was held in the Parish Hall for parents and friends of the boys.

From the very first a summer camping trip was included in the program of the choir. In this beautiful land of forests and lakes summer camping is almost as natural as breathing. In addition, the experience of living together helps boys and their teachers understand one another better. This annual summer camp has proven one of the most potent forces in building the strong fiber of St. John's Boy Choir.

The first camp was held at Camp Kepakshowink (now Camp Rotary) north of Clare, Michigan from Friday August 31 to Sunday, September 2. The two young teachers spent many weeks in planning the big weekend and it proved to be a tremendous success. Seventeen choir boys were in attendance. The choir had the use of one building for sleeping and eating. Mrs. Huggins went along to do the cooking. She worked and slept in the other room of the building. It is no doubt fortunate that the camp lasted but three days as it was found that one small building is not adequate for 17 boys and three adults, especially when it rains frequently as it did that weekend. The choir spent about two hours each day in rehearsal. Rehearsals were held out of doors and usually had to be moved because of rain. Swimming, hiking, and softball proved to be very popular recreational features. A tradition of an annual softball game was started with the choir being divided into two teams called the "Frank Sinatras" and the "Bing Crosbys". Stories were read by the choir master at bedtime. This custom had also continued through the years. Such stories as "Tom Sawyer", "Huckleberry Finn", "The Hound of the Baskervilles", "The Indian Drum", and "Paul Bunyan" have been read. The three days of camping cost each boy two dollars.

The choir boys returned home to open their second season in September with the following new boys added to the ranks: Leonard Potocny, Louis Doughty, Liston Blizzard, Joe Cruz, Alva Cochran,

Alva Cruz, and Le Roy Crane. During this second season the voices of several of the boys began to change, so two-part singing was introduced. By spring tenors and basses were added and the choir became a full-fledged all male choir singing four-part music for mixed voices.

On Trinity Sunday, June 8, 1941 the Rt. Rev. Louis Bliss Whittemore, Bishop of the Diocese of Western Michigan, visited the parish for confirmation. It was on this day that the two young directors of the choir were confirmed. The choir presented four festival anthems: "The Radiant Morn" by Woodward, "Cherubim Song No. 7" by Bortniansky, "Lead Me Lord" by Wesley, and "Praise" by Rowley. Raymond Anspach sang at the offertory a soprano solo "My Heart Ever Faithful" by Bach. A Saturday morning class for training solo boys had been started.

New names which appear on the choir roster at this time were: Harold Border, Edward Potocny, Richard Sexton, George Whitney, David Fall, and Jack Harris. Tenors were Richard Adams (son of the rector), Norman Ellefson, Edward Johnston (Central Michigan College students) and Alva Cochran. Alex Merwin another CMCE student sang bass.

The second annual choir camp was held for one week at the Appleblossom camp on the Tittabawassee River near Edenville, Michigan. The facilities of this camp were very kindly donated to the choir by the Central Michigan College of Education.

During the 1941 season a practice was started by the new Rector, Dr. Harold B. Adams, of awarding at the end of each month a cross to the choir boy having the most outstanding attendance and behavior record. This little cross has been passed from boy to boy each month since that time. It is a proud moment for a choir boy when he is called to the altar rail by the Rector to have the little cross on the red ribbon hung about his neck as he receives the blessing of the priest.

The first Christmas Evensong was presented on Sunday, December 21, 1941, at 4:00 in the afternoon. New names which appeared on the program were: Junior Grandy, Arthur Stinchcombe, sopranos; Ray Grambau, bass; and Kenneth Bateman, tenor. Mr. Bateman was a teacher at the Ganiard School. On this occasion the choir sang "We Praise Thee" by Tenyakoff, "Hear Thou Our Prayer" by Tkach, "Jesus, Jesus Rest Your Head" an Appalachian Carol "Lullay, Thou Little Tiny Child", "Angels O'er the Field", and "Silent Night, Holy Night" with Jimmy Huggins singing the soprano solo and Jim with Raymond Anspach singing the duet.

A Whitsunday Evensong service was sung on Sunday, May 24, 1942, at 7:30 p.m. Billy Brown's is the only new name to appear at this time. It was during the winter of 1942 that the apprentice class was organized. So many boys were applying for membership that the directors could at last afford to be selective. It was wonderful to see how proud the young directors were of their little family. And so, the apprentice class became a training group for preparing prospective choirboys for future membership. The class has always given the boys thorough training in music reading and in the liturgy of the church. The first apprentice class included Buddy Miller, Bobby Miller, Jack Cox, Bobby Cole, Don Kinsey, Eddie Lauer, Edgar Decess, Jim Corbett, Dick Jackson, and Eugene Barnhart.

On Wednesday evening June 3, 1942, the choir passed a milestone. The first choir operetta was presented as part of a concert given in the Parish Hall. During one of the winter recreational periods, it was decided by the boys that they would like to give a show to raise money to help

finance their summer camp. The choir master was appointed a committee of one to find a show. The committee report given the next week revealed the fact that all available shows seemed to include parts for girls. There were two alternatives: 1) import some girls to play the parts or 2) have boys play the girls' parts. There was no argument on the matter. It would certainly be fatal to bring girls into an all-boy choir! Especially the only all boy choir in Central Michigan. A note in the program for "O Susanna", a short operetta dealing with the life of Stephen Foster, states "Inasmuch as St. John's Choir is a real boy's organization and we have found it necessary to have some of the boys plays girls' parts, we hope that you will excuse the incongruities." The cast of characters was as follows: Miranda - Bill Miller, Mrs. Foster - Jack Harris, Jeannie - Arthur Stinchcombe, Susanna - Richard Sexton, Rastus - Bill Atha, Stephen - Ray Anspach, Steve's brother - Liston Blizzard, Townspeople - Junior Blizzard and George Whitney, Black boys and girls - Buddy Miller, Bobby Miller, Don Kinsey, Bob Cole, Ronnie Girvin, and Eugene Barnhart. The first operetta was a great success and the 1942 camp was an especially meaningful one because for the first time the boys, as a group, had helped to earn the money.

Another notice appearing on the same program reads "The St. John's Boy Choir Camp is an organization set up by its directors to train and recondition the boys' voices in preparation for the coming year. The boys' time in camp is spent in rehearsals, sports, and various activities which train them to assume their responsibilities in the choir. Each boy contributes a small share toward camp expenses and the balance is taken from the camp fund. Contributions that friends of the choir may care to give will be gladly received. The choirboys will gladly work at any odd jobs during the summer. If you have work you wish to have them do, call Mrs. Claude Whitcombe".

Even in these early days money played an important part in building a strong organization. The parish of St. John's and the boys of the choir owe a deep debt of gratitude to Mr. C. L. Maguire, then president of the Roosevelt Oil Company, who very early became interested in the work of the choir and gave unselfishly of his means for many years to keep the organization solvent. Mr. Maguire, who now makes his home in Arizona, has always been the champion of youth and the wise and complete education of youth. We would take this opportunity to thank him for giving a helping hand to a struggling group of boys who are striving for something better and finer from life.

On Sunday, November 1, 1942, the choir sang a service of coral evensong with special prayers for boys in the armed service. The service was repeated at St. John's Church, Alma, on November 15. On Sunday morning November 8, 1942, the following boys were inducted as regular choir boys: Dick Damon, Dick Jackson, Don Kinsey, Tom Misamore, and Lewis Willhite. The apprentice class included Eugene Barnhart, David Brown, Jack Cox, Jimmy Hotelling, Bob Miller, Bud Miller, John Rulison, Chuck Sanback, and Dayton Selby.

On Sunday, December 20 at 4:30 p.m. the second annual Christmas Carol Service was sung. Jack Harris played the chimes and solo parts were sung by Bill Atha, Dick Damon, Jimmy Huggins, and Dayton Selby. For the Christmas Eve Mass, which has always been the high spot of the year for the boys, the plainsong setting of the Mass was used. The choir sang carols throughout the city on a truck on the evenings of December 21 and December 23.

A signal honor was bestowed upon the boys and their directors when they were invited by President and Mrs. Charles Anspach of Central Michigan College to furnish the program for their

annual party for the faculty of the college. The choir sang carols on the steps leading to the second floor of Keeler Union and the smaller boys danced around the Christmas tree as the flaming plum pudding was carried in to the accompaniment of "We Wish you a Merry Christmas". This honor was repeated on three succeeding occasions. Christmas is a wonderful time for boys, but it holds in a special wonder for all choir boys. Nothing can compare with the magic of the Christmas midnight mass.

May 21, 1943, was a great day for all of the boys because it was the date of the second choir operetta Gilbert and Sullivan's "H.M.S. Pinafore". "Pinafore" proved to be a real hit and a perfect vehicle for these enthusiastic and talented boys. The cast was as follows:

Little Buttercup Dick Damon
Captain Corcoran Ray Anspach
Ralph Rackstraw Bill Brown
Dick Deadeye Jack Harris
Bill Bobstay Tom Misamore
Josephine John Williams and Jimmy Huggins
Sir Joseph Porter Bill Atha
Hebe Donny Kinsey
The sailors Junior Blizzard, Liston Blizzard, Dick Crandall, Bill Miller, Arthur Stinchcombe, George Whitney, and Lewis Wilhite
Sisters and cousins Eugene Barnhartt. Billy Knapp, Chucky Misamore, Johnny Rulison, Chucky Sanback, and Dayton Selby.

The production boasted an orchestra and an effective, though simple, set on the stage of the high school auditorium.

The 1942 camp was a great success! Because of gasoline rationing all campers rode to camp on a bus. Each boy was required to have a physical examination by his family physician. Camp lasted from Sunday, August 29 to Saturday, September 4. The cost borne by each boy for the week was \$3.25. A regulation camp uniform consisting of white T-shirt with the choir insignia in red and khaki shorts was worn at dinner each evening and for visitors' day on Friday. On that evening the annual camp evensong was sung.

Choral Evensong was sung on the first Sunday of Advent, November 28, 1943. New names appearing at this time are Richard Crandall, Jack Hayward, James Bish, John Williams, Bryan Balfour, and Charles Turner, (an apprentice seaman from Central Michigan college).

By popular request "Pinafore" was repeated on June 9, 1944, in the high school auditorium. An item from the Isabella County Times News dated June 1, 1944, said, "The thirty boys of the choir will play all the parts, including the feminine roles. This difficulty is overcome by the fact that the voices of the younger boys are unchanged and still have their treble quality. These boys enjoy playing the parts of Sir Joseph's cousins and aunts, but they all look forward to the day when they can be real sailors." On the day of the dress rehearsal, it was learned that the costume company which was furnishing costumes for the show would be unable to furnish wigs and bonnets for the "girls". It is not difficult to imagine that little boys playing girls' parts are quite unconvincing with neither wigs nor bonnets. When the choir mothers saw the utter dejection of the directors, they

immediately set about making bonnets for the 17 “little ladies”. This is an example of the great loyalty of a fine group of people, the choir mothers’ group.

For this production of “Pinafore” Dick Damon and Gordon Sharpe shared the role of Buttercup. Dick had moved to Grand Rapids and returned only for a rehearsal and the evening performance while Gordon played the children's matinee. Don Hayward played Ralph, Kendall Klumpp played Dick Deadeye, Bill Bobstay was played by Dick Cree. Otherwise, characters were the same as in the first production. New names in the chorus are: Bruce Binkley, Herbert Prior, Lewis Beach, Lawrence Miller, John Wagner, Sammy Freed, David Brown, John Rulison, and Cub Brown. Don Berger, a high school teacher, directed the dramatics for the performance as Mr. Vincer had left during the year to spend three years at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary to prepare for the priesthood. On Sunday, November 1, 1944, the choir sang a service of Choral Evensong with special prayer for boys in the armed service. The service was repeated at St. John’s Church, Alma, On November 15.

These were war years. Communities the size of Mt. Pleasant rapidly became towns of older or very young men, most others were called into the military service. The boys of St. John's Choir were too young for early war service. One boy, Richard Hammond, joined the Navy and made the supreme sacrifice. In his memory his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Glen Hammond, presented to the church a new altar light for the Chancel. However, toward the end of the war and during the post war years, many of the boys left their homes and families for military adventure in the far corners of the earth.

The end of August, 1945 was a supremely happy time for all Americans. The war had come to an end. On November 4, 1945, the choir sang a special service of Choral Evensong thanking God for peace and victory. Vaughn Williams’ setting for the “Magnificat” and “Nunc Dimittis” and Clokey’s “Te Deum Laudamus” were sung. The Rev. Everett A. Moore was serving as temporary rector of the Parish until time for Mr. Vincer to complete his work at the seminary and return as a regular pastor.

An article from the Bishop’s Newsletter dated September 16, 1945 gives an excellent picture of the now famous summer camp, (now in its sixth season). *“St. John's Boy Choir has returned from its sixth annual camp. The camp is located along the shores of the beautiful Tittabawassee river in Gladwin County. The camp site is used through the courtesy of the Rural Education Department of Central Michigan College of Education. For two weeks the choir boys and their directors enjoyed an experience of work, play, and song. The directors are more than ever convinced that a camp of this sort can be managed effectively on a small budget and with a limited staff, if there is the desire to help boys develop in leadership and Christian principles of living. St. John's Choir is more than an organization that sings on Sunday morning; it is an organization dedicated to the service of the Church and to the spread of Christian love among the youth of the community.*

The camp activities are divided among music, work, and play. Each day brings the boys choir to a common understanding of each other's problems. Seven o'clock in the morning finds the camp of thirty-two boys on the recreation field ready for their morning exercise and daily run to the road and back. After a morning cleanup period and prayers around the flagpole the boys gather in the dining hall for breakfast. The morning program follows with a period of work during which each boy joins in a cooperative experience of doing his share of the camp chores. Each boy has a set

amount of work to do; some boys work in the kitchen while others clean the lodge and bunkrooms or work at projects designed to add beauty to the camp.

The music program during the morning is combined with sessions of handicraft and swimming instruction. Every boy spends at least three hours in rehearsal each day. The sectional rehearsals take up the morning schedule and a rehearsal of the full choir scheduled in the evening. There are individual vocal lessons throughout the days for solo boys. The strenuous rehearsal schedule, in addition to each boy's desire to sing good music, brings forth amazing results.

Two choral services climaxed the first week. On Sunday morning the boy's journeyed to St. Paul's Church, Gladwin to sing Morning Prayer; that evening they sang a festival evensong amid the beautiful surroundings of the camp. Many parents and friends of the choir boys attended the service. A potluck picnic supper was served to 120 hungry people.

A strenuous recreation program takes up the afternoon each day at camp. Baseball, archery, hiking boxing, swimming, boating, and fishing are among the many activities in which every boy participates.

Camp life centers around music and church services. The Eucharist is celebrated several times and each camp day is closed with the service of Compline. The chapel is a center where the boys feel free to come and go, worshipping God and learning about His Church.

At the close of the day of the camp become silent and strains of music break the silence as the boys listen to their favorite classical recordings. This slumber music, as the boys call it, gives each boy an opportunity to develop an appreciation for the best in music.

"Much of the success of this year's camp is due to the parents of the boys. The mother's group has planned and managed the meals and kitchen. One mother, Mrs. Selby, joined the camp staff to instruct the junior campers in nature study and handicraft".

This description of the camp program gives some indication of the tremendous growth of an idea in a few years' time. It also points up the great possibilities of accomplishment by people who are willing to work unselfishly for a common cause. No members of the camp staff received any remuneration. Among the choir parents who through the years have given of their time and talents are: Mrs. Huggins, Mrs. Binkley, Mrs. Sanback, Mrs. Selby, Mrs. Eldred, Mr. and Mrs. DePuy, Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe, Mr. Evett, Mrs. Misamore, Mrs. Donaldson, Mr. and Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Knapp, and Mrs. Freeman as well as the mothers of Rev. Vincer and Bernard Stone. Other persons who have worked at the camp are: Peter Bush, Jack Leonard, Jim Leonard, James Chapman, Ralph Lirones, Max Krell, Paul Strang, Fred Gallert, Beverly Kinsman, and Jean Anspach.

The camp was held at Appleblossom from 1941 through 1946 inclusive, at the National Music Camp Interlochen in 1947 and 1949, (Stone and Vincer also were on the summer staff at Interlochen for a few years) at camp Rotary in 1948, at Hamlin Lake (Michigan Conservation Camp near Ludington) in 1951 and at Camp Al-Gon-Quian on Burt Lake in 1952 and 1953. Due to the fact that the choir master was in Europe during the summer of 1950, no camp was held that year. He will never forget the wonderful warm feeling of love and friendship which rose within him when the choir organization presented to him a check for \$100 to use on his trip. He often said that it should be the other way around after all the hard work he had put those boys through.

The year 1946 was an important year for St. John's Choir for it marked the return of Rev. Vincer as rector of the church. It seemed like old times having "Father V" home again with the family. On May 5, 1946, the choir boys journeyed to East Lansing where they did a half hour radio program over station WKAR. Many letters of congratulations were received from many parts of the state.

One of the most successful operetta productions of the choir was the 1947 production of "Pirates of Penzance" with two performances on May 23 and 24 in the high school auditorium. Mrs. Sanback served as general chairman, Rev. Vincer directed the dramatics, Mrs. Orson coached the dances, Mrs. DePuy, assisted by all the choir mothers, was in charge of wardrobe, Mrs. Prior and Mrs. Beach secured properties, Mr. and Mrs. Stockman had charge of ticket sales, Mr. and Mrs. Knapp planned publicity, Mr. and Mrs. Roe printed programs and posters, and Mr. Thorpe was the photographer.

The next year's show was presented in the fall. The Dutch operetta "Tulip Time" was given on November 13 and 14, 1947. To quote from the Times News we learn that "The success of the play is attested by the number of first-nighters who returned for the second performance". Bill Beidler, a Central Michigan College student and a member of the choir, did a clever original comedy ballet number in the show. Even the choirmaster conducted the performances in Dutch costume and wooden shoes.

Schultz, an innkeeper was played by Jim Huggins, Lewis Beach played Hans, Aunt Anna was portrayed most convincingly by Dayton Selby, Bill Knapp was pretty Katinka, the burgomaster Hendrick van Coster was played by Eugene DePuy, Bill De Puy was Christina, Dick Crandall played Professor Theophilus McSpindle, Don Hayward played Ned Baxter, Kendall Klumpp played Dick Warren, and Bill Beidler was Johann. Girls chorus members were Ronnie Archer, Paul Cohen, Loren Eldred, Bill Finch, Warren Foltz, Bob Glover, Bob Hall, Ned Harris, Tom Horton, Bob Mabie, Jack Osborn, Jack Rodenbeck, Peter Rodenbeck, Ronnie Schultz, Calvin Stockman, David Stockman, Butch Thorpe, and Skip Thorpe. Dutch villagers were Louis Blizzard, Duane Eldred, Marshall Matlock, Robert Roe, Charles Sanback, and George Stebbins. American students were Jack Hayward, Dick Ryan, Gordon Sharp, and Bill Widener. Mrs. Harris and a group of her friends made many beautiful pots of paper tulips which brightened up and added much to the stage set.

During the 1947 Christmas season the boy sang for the Child Study Club, presented a group of carols for a program called "A Merry Christmas Fantasy" for the Hospital Auxiliary, sang carols in the window of the Mt. Pleasant Hardware on two evenings, and sang the traditional Christmas Eve Midnight Mass. For this they sang Healey Willan's "Missa Brevis No.4" and Don Hayward sang "O Holy Night" at the offertory.

At the banquet celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Parish on December 9, 1947 glowing words of praise for the choir were said by Bishop Whittemore, always a warm friend and loyal supporter of the boys and their directors.

During February 1948 the following new boys were inducted: David Evett, Jack Rodenbeck, Marshall Matlock, and Robert Hall. On Tuesday evening of Holy Week, March 18, 1948, the choir boys were joined by a group of girls of the church to form the St. John's Festival Chorus for the presentation of Steiner's "Crucifixion". There were 45 singers in the chorus. Soloists were Bill Beidler, tenor and Don Hayward, baritone.

December of 1948 marked the beginning of the choir's 10th year. To recognize the event a special service was held on December 5. The service for admission of choristers was read with the following boys being inducted into the choir: Douglas Evett, Stuart Evett, Thomas Horton, Ronald Markel, Richard Myers, Peter Rodenbeck, and Dick Wood. At the offertory, Gounod's cantata "Gallia" was sung with Beatrice Hunt Iams singing the soprano solo and accompaniment played by a string quartet made of Louise Wear and Victor Iams, violins, Olaf Steg, viola and Verna Gilbert, cello. Lucille Davis, a real friend of the choir, was piano accompanist. The formation of the St. Nicholas Guild was announced at the service. The Guild is for tenors and basses who, because of outstanding records, are elected by the choir each month to be honored. The Guild is named for St. Nicholas, the patron saint of choir boys, and the members are presented with a medal which is issued by the School of English Church Music and worn on a purple ribbon around the neck and over the vestment.

During the Christmas season of 1948 the choir sang for the Child Study Club, the Fancher School PTA, and for the people of Mt. Pleasant in the display window of the Consolidated Gas Company.

The beginning of 1949 marked the organization of a sister choir for girls. This group was directed by Beatrice Iams. The new choir sang for the nine o'clock mass each Sunday, making its first appearance on Easter Sunday. Two years later Mrs. Iams moved from the city and Nan Webster assumed the direction of the girls' choir. The boy choir members have always greatly enjoyed the occasions on which they have sung with the girls' choir and the social events planned for the combined group. At this time the Choir Parents Guild was enlarged to include the parents of the girls' choir members. The Choir Parents Guild has proven a very important aid in carrying out the increasingly complex program of the choir organizations. A great many parents have given freely of their time to plan and carry out parties, conduct rummage sales, help with refreshment stands at the fair, plan the summer camp, plan transportation for choir trips, keep choir vestments in condition, work on operettas, and many other jobs. It is this interest of choir parents in the activities of their children which makes the varied program possible.

The major project for the 10th anniversary year was the preparation of a full concert program. The concert was sung in West Branch, Midland, and Shepherd prior to its presentation in Mt. Pleasant. The home concert was given in Warriner Hall, the auditorium of Central Michigan College, on April 21, 1949. The program for the Tenth Anniversary Concert was indeed an ambitious one! It included Bach's "O Rejoice, Ye Christians Loudly", "Call to Remembrance" by Farrant, "Ave Verum Corpus" by Mozart, Oldroyd's "Prayer to Jesus", "Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei" from Healey Willan's "Missa Brevis and E Major", "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" by Holst, Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater" (sung by the sopranos and altos with a string quartet), "There Shall a Star from Jacob" by Mendelssohn, "Cherubim Song No.7" by Bortniansky, Francis Snow's "Sleep, Holy Babe", "I Hear Along Our Street" by Mackinnon, "Mid-Winter" by Holst and "With A Voice of Singing" by Shaw. Ray Anspach acted as the assistant conductor conducting the "Cherubim Song". The choir sang to a very large audience and even surpassed past performances and excellence.

Many times I have heard the young choirmaster, Bernard Stone, say that probably the nicest thing which ever happened to him in connection with the choir was a surprise banquet given in his honor on the evening following the concert. Special guests at this 10th anniversary banquet besides the choir boys were members of the girls' choir, members of the string quartet, Mrs. Davis, Mr. and Mrs. Iams, the choirmaster's mother and the Rector and his mother. The banquet program planned

by the boys included a very clever pageant depicting the outstanding event of each of the 10 years. The climax of the evening came with the presentation to the choirmaster of a solid gold cross set with ten jewels (eight pearls, a ruby, and a diamond). He always wears the cross with his vestments on festival occasions and at concerts. It beautifully represents the love and devotion of a group of wonderful boys for their leader.

The high point of the 1949 summer camp held at National Music Camp, Interlochen, was a concert presented in Pennington Hall on Sunday, August 28. Assisting artists were Ava Comin Case and Helen Titus, duo pianists from the music faculty of the University of Michigan. Jim Chapman, a university student, acted as music assistant and accompanist for the camp. A special all-day trip to the Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes ranked tops with all the boys. They posed on the side of the rich yellow sand mountain standing in the formation of a cross for the official camp picture. It was a great thrill for the boys to climb to the top of the dune and see mighty Lake Michigan spreading out before them to the horizon.

The real 10th anniversary of the choir was celebrated on December 9, 1949 at which time the boys journeyed to Owosso to present a concert under the sponsorship of Christ Episcopal Church of that city. The concert was given a few days previously in St. Louis, Michigan. Serious concert numbers filled the first half of the program. "Cowboy Memories", an original show based on American folk tunes of the great West was presented during the last half of the evening. The script for the show was written by Jess Thorpe. Characters were Uncle Bill - Kendall Klumpp, Little Shaver - Peter Rodenbeck, Granny and Grandpa - Robert Glover and Dayton Selby, Grandchildren - Stuart Evett and Jack Thorne, the Old Gray Mare - Dick Myers (front) and Skip Thorpe (back). Solo numbers were as follows: "Frog Went a Courtin'" - Bob Glover; "The Last Roundup" - Kendall Klumpp; "Ghost Riders" - Bill Knapp; "Red River Gal" - Jack Hayward with Calvin Stockman and David Stockman playing dulcimer and accordion; "Old Smokey" and "Tumblin Tumbleweed" - Don Hayward; "Old Cowhand" - Dave Evett and Jack Osbourn. The entire company sang "Oklahoma" for the finale. Western Gals were Phil Chapman, Tom Donaldson, Doug Evett, Bill Finch, Bob Hall, Tom Horton, Franklin Marcel, Ronnie Markel, David Martin, Chuck Preimsberg, Jack Rodenbeck, Ned Harris, Tom Smith, Calvin Stockman, and Jack Thorne. Cow Pokes were Ray Anspach, Dick Crandall, Dave Evett, Don Hayward, Jack Hayward, Jim Huggins, Jack Huggins, Jack Osbourne, Bob Roe, Chuck Sanback, David Stockman, Butch Thorpe, Bill Widener, and Dick Wood.

Members of the girls' choir served as ushers. Lucille Davis was accompanist for the concert. A very attractive concert program was printed by the Enterprise Print Shop where Mr. Preimsberg works. It included several pictures of choir activities and words of praise from prominent citizens who have heard the choir. The concert was presented to a capacity audience in Warriner Auditorium, Mt. Pleasant on January 26, 1950.

On the day following the Owosso concert, the Owosso Argus Press carried an article concerning the choir which said in part, "The work of the 30 boys and their leader was excellent and in the best Anglican tradition. Their tonal quality was fresh, well controlled and unaffected and at no time was there any evidence of forcing. They put themselves wholeheartedly into the varying moods of the music they sang and there was an infectious enthusiasm. Mozart's "Adoramus Te" was sung with an organ-like quality. For the last half of the evening the boys doffed their starched collars, flowing ties, cottas and cassocks and appeared in costumes for an original cowboy musical. There was an excellent tap dance number and a square dance scene."

In April 1950, the singing of the choir was captured on wax by a commercial recording company representing R.C.A. Victor Laboratories. The two numbers selected for recording were "Sleep Holy Babe" and "The Lord's Prayer", two of the choir's most popular numbers. "The Lord's Prayer" had to be re-recorded eight times before it was discovered that a squeak which was heard in each take was caused by one of the benches on which the boys stood during the recording session. The gang was really tired when it was finally finished. This recording has proven very popular, and many copies have been sold to friends of the choir wherever they have appeared.

A distinct honor was conferred upon the boys when in November 1950 they were invited to present a demonstration concert for the Lansing chapter of the American Guild of Organists at the Plymouth Congregational Church in that city. On November 12, 1950, the third Diocesan Choir Festival was held at St. Paul's Church, Muskegon. The choirmaster, Bernard Stone, was again chosen to be the conductor of the festival and about 60 members of St. John's Boy and Girl Choirs sang in the festival.

In 1951 the choir participated in the first annual Mt. Pleasant Church Choir Festival sponsored by the Music Foundation. During Holy Week they combined with the Girl Choir to present the "Crucifixion". For this performance Dr. Leroy Juhnke was tenor soloist and Maynard King, a CMCE student, sang the baritone solos.

The director of St. John's Boy Choir had for many years a strong desire to train the boys to do "The Mikado" which is probably the funniest of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. In 1951 he decided that they were ready for the difficult project, and he was right, for "The Mikado", given on February 23, was the most successful production to date. This operetta depends very strongly upon strong character actors for its success. St. John's Choir produced a group of young actors whose work approached professional quality. The cast of characters was as follows: The Mikado - Jack Osbourn; Nanki Poo - Bill Knapp; Ko-Ko - Dayton Selby; Pooh-Bah - David Evett; Pish Tush - William Widener, Yum-Yum - Stuart Evett; Pitti Sing - Peter Rodenbeck; Pitti-Pitti-Sing-Sing - Tom Donaldson; Peep-Bo - Dick Myers, and; Katisha - Jack Rodenbeck. Ray Koos of the college music department played the piano accompaniment. Tom Northway directed the dramatics and designed and executed the stage sets. Woodward Smith was general chairman, Mrs. Edahl had charge of costumes, Mr. Preimsberg was in charge of printing, ticket sales were handled by Mr. Horton and Mr. Rodenbeck, Mr. Knapp handled publicity, and members of the Girls' Choir acted as ushers.

At this time The Rev. Robert Childs became Rector of the Parish replacing Rev. Vincer who had taken a position as Canon at the Cathedral in Grand Rapids prior to entering the Navy. Father Childs has three boys, David, Bob, and Sam. David has become a member of the choir. Bob is part of the apprentice class. Sam is 2 years old.

On June 7, 1952, the new organ in the church was dedicated with a special service at nine o'clock. Preceding the service, a half hour recital of music for organ and brass instruments was presented and at the offertory the choir sang Alec Rowley's "Praise" with the brass quartet accompanying. Father Childs showed immediately a strong interest in the music of the church and in the further development of the choir organization. On Good Friday 1952 the combined choirs sang "The Crucifixion" as part of the three-hour service with Ramon Coyne and Maynard King (CMCE music students) singing the solos.

In August 1952 the summer camp was moved to camp Al-Gon-Quian on beautiful Burt Lake in northern Michigan. This is undoubtedly the finest setting for the choir camp program yet. The owner of the camp, Mr. Herbert Twining, runs a very high-quality camp for boys during eight weeks of the summer season. The choir boys used the camp during the last week of August. A portion of the excellent Al-Gon-Quian staff is on hand to take care of feeding of the boys and their swimming. For the banquet and evening program of the 1952 camp Mr. and Mrs. Maguire who have a summer home on Burt Lake were invited as special guests. Mr. Maguire spoke a few words of thanks and appreciation for the boys for their fine work. Father Childs has fitted into the camp program very well. He directs the recreational activities which were formally handled by Father Vincer. The boys will never forget Father Childs' enthusiasm for sailing, volleyball, and his wonderful games of capture the flag.

The Christmas Eve mass of 1952 was an especially impressive service. Trumpeters were used to play the prelude and the processional with the organ. The choir sang a half-hour concert of carols preceding the service. Soloists during the mass were Robert Glover, Stuart Evett, and Bill Knapp. Bill sang the Bach-Gnoud "Ave Maria" at the offertory. LaVern Mayhew and Milan Miller were trumpeters and Peter Rodenbeck played the chimes.

"The Crucifixion" was sung again as part of the three-hour service on Good Friday, 1953. Soloists for the first time were both choirboys, Bill Knapp, tenor and Richard Crandall, baritone. The Sunrise Mass on Easter morning was sung by the newly organized plainsong choir for tenors and basses called the St. Nicholas Choir. Trumpets were used. For the eleven o'clock mass the full choir was accompanied by a string quartet composed of Dr. Soren Chamichian, Mary Louise Evett, Lorentz Hansen, and Portia Theds. Peter Rodenbeck was the chimer.

Spring of 1953 was again time for a choir concert. The concert was presented at Warriner Hall on May 1. The program had been previously sung in Cadillac and was subsequently presented at the People's Church in East Lansing on May 13. On June 13, 1953, a program was presented for the Michigan County Abstractors Convention held at the Otsego Ski Club in Gaylord, Michigan. The singing of the boys on this occasion was, according to the choirmaster, one of the most satisfying and thrilling performances he had ever conducted. The setting in the large picture window of the lounge overlooking the beautiful rolling hills of northern Michigan was a perfect setting for the singing. The concert program was divided into four parts. Part I - unaccompanied sacred compositions; Part II - Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater" sung by the sopranos and altos with string quartet; Part III - Mendelssohn's "Hear My Prayer" sung by Bill Knapp, the choir, and the string quartet; and part IV - folk songs, fun songs, a barbershop quartet (Ray Anspach, Bill Knapp, Dick Crandall, and Dave Evett), and concluding with a group of selections from "The Mikado".

Paul Evett wrote in the Isabella County Times News dated May 1, 1953, "There are excellent reasons for asserting that this unique religious- musical organization is outstanding inside and outside the state of Michigan. For a city the size of Mt. Pleasant to possess an organization like St. John's Boy Choir is almost unheard of. The importance and influence of the choir extends beyond the confines of the church that supports it and becomes the precious possessions of the entire community."

Enough profit was realized from the several concert performances and rummage sales held by the choir mothers during the year to make it possible to take every boy to camp in August at no cost

to the boy himself. This is the first time this has been possible. It is the realization of a long-time dream of those in charge of the choir. The 1953 camp, held again at camp Al-Gon-Quian was the best ever. Mrs. Freeman acted as camp nurse and directed handicraft activities and Mrs. Knapp was camp treasurer and official cabin inspector. Harold Freeman, Bill Knapp, Jack Osbourn, and Dave Evett were cabin counselors. On Sunday morning of camp week, the choir sang at the eleven o'clock mass at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Petoskey. The boys sang to a packed church. Father Childs was the celebrant, and the rector of the church preached the sermon. A word of praise and thanks should be said for Mr. Frank Rand, the president of the Choir Parents Guild. He has worked untiringly in directing the camp and other activities of the current year.

On Trinity Sunday, May 31, 1953, it was announced that the choirmaster, Bernard B. Stone, had been given a year's leave of absence to pursue advanced studies in music in New York and that his work would be carried during his absence by Ray Anspach, charter member, acting as choir director, Harold Freeman, CMCE sophomore music student and member of the choir acting as director of the soprano-alto rehearsals on Tuesday afternoons, and Bill Knapp, CMCE freshman music student and ten year member of the choir acting as director of the apprentice class.

The second Sunday after Trinity marked the choirmaster's last formal service with the boys before his departure for New York. At this time the choir sang Gnod's "Gallia" with Miss Nan Webster as soprano soloist. The Isabella County Times News of June 12, 1953, said in part, "During the special service Sunday there will be a deeper meaning in the music to the boys, the parishioners, and possibly the entire community of Mt. Pleasant, because the interval between this service and the next one in which the choirmaster will direct will be by far the longest he has been absent from the choir."

Members of the choir at this time are: Sopranos- Stuart Evett, Edward Edahl, Robert Glover, Stephen Hall, Peter Knapp, Douglas Browning, John Hartman, James Markel, Hugh McNicol, and Sidney Smith; Altos - Tom Donaldson, Tom Horton, Dick Myers, Charles Preimsberg, Peter Rodenbeck, Thomas Rand, Skip Thorpe; Tenors - Ray Anspach, assistant director, Richard Crandall, Douglas Evett, Robert Hall, and William Knapp; Basses - Harold Freeman, assistant organist, David Childs, David Evett, William Finch, Ronald Markel, Kendall Klumpp, Jack Osbourn, Jack Rodenbeck, Charles Sanback, and Butch Thorpe. Choir boys in the armed forces are Jim Huggins, Don Hayward, Jack Hayward, and Bill Walton. The apprentice class includes William Adams, Ricky Browning, Robin Harrison, Robert Howard, and L. G. Duncan.

A total of 165 boys have been members of the choir. Two charter members are still members in good standing, Ray Anspach who has been a continuous member for all but the years he spent in military service and Jim Huggins who is now in the Marines. In addition to these two, Charles Sanback, Richard Crandall and Bill Knapp have been members of the choir for ten years or more.

St. John's Boy Choir has meant, and will continue to mean, a great deal to many boys in this typical midwestern American town. Here they may learn to live together, to work together, and to play together; they may at one and the same time associate with great music and relax from work by playing a good game of ping pong or softball. But what is more important, they have an opportunity to develop their talent and interests and to offer them unselfishly to the glory of God.

WITH A VOICE OF SINGING

The story of St. John's Boy Choir

Part II

The Boy Choir that was organized at St. John's Episcopal Church, Mt. Pleasant, during 1939 continued as an active organization until 1955, when girls were admitted. During this period of time nearly 200 boys had joined the organization. At one time the choir totaled 40 members, which included an apprentice class of boys being taught the necessary musical skills and Church liturgy to meet the high standards of the group, a much different standard than the boys of 1939.

The success of the organization from the beginning rested in the very capable hands of a public school music teacher, Bernard B. Stone, and a high school teacher, John D. Vincer, who served as assistant choirmaster. These two men guided the young lives for many years.

John Vincer left Mt. Pleasant during the early 1940s to attend Seabury-Western Theological Seminary and eventually returned to become Rector of St. John's, a position he held until January 1952. He later spent many years as a U.S. Navy Chaplain, retiring the rank of Captain.

Bernard Stone held the position of choirmaster until June, 1953, when he left for New York to work toward his doctorate, after turning down an offer to head up the music department at Central Michigan College . Upon completing his studies, he accepted a position with the public schools in Jackson, Michigan.

While expecting "Stoney" to return to Mt. Pleasant and assume leadership of the boy choir, temporary choir directors were assigned. The position was held by Ray Anspach from September 1953 to June 1954; Ray Koos from September 1954 until June 1955. Ray Koos also served as his own organist, as he taught piano at Central Michigan College . Harold Freeman served as organist for a period of time in 1953 and again in 1955.

St. John's parish was under the leadership of several rectors from the beginning of the boy choir, each one adding his own particular uniqueness to parish life, and to the boys in particular. Beginning in 1939: Reverend Newell D. Linder was a parish priest, 1939 - 1940; Dr. Harold B. Adams, 1941 to 1944; Reverend Everett A. Moore, 1944 to 1946; Reverend John D. Vincer, 1946 to 1951; Reverend Robert S Childs, 1952 to 1957; Reverend Charles Stewart, 1958 to 1962; Reverend John H. Goodrow, 1962 to 1985 (following Father Goodrow's death, rector assignment was temporary from 9/85 until 12/86; Reverend Gordon F. Weller, 1987 to present.

No boy choir activity took place after 1955. Interest in a reunion kept growing among the "boys" but did not materialize until the summer of 1992 when Kendall Klumpp, an early member of the parish, and Father Weller, without whose support and efforts the reunion would not have happened, became unofficial co-chairmen of an ad hoc committee. Others joined the reunion committee: Jo Redman and Alice Louisell, parish members; Jack Harris and Ray Anspach, boy choir members from long ago. It was then that the St. John's Boy Choir Reunion began to come to life, 53 years after inception and 37 years after boy choir life ended.

Kendall Klumpp began organizing names and addresses from many sources, calling and writing to any and all he could locate. A time and date was set, invitation letters were sent to those located and the plan was implemented.

The very first St. John's Boy Choir Reunion was held at St. John's Episcopal Church in Mt. Pleasant, July 26, 1992, beginning with a Choral Eucharist at 12:00 PM with 28 former boy choir members singing in the chancel choir; no sopranos, but what a great sound. Father Gordon Weller served as celebrant and Dr. Mary Lou Nowicki served as organist. Family and friends filled the church (including Maggie Whitcomb who helped organize the choir in 1939 and who had recently celebrated her 100th birthday). Following the service a picture of the former members was taken on the front steps of the church with the "boys" arranged similar to pictures of long ago. Copies were made available.

Members who attended were: Ray Anspach, Bruce Binkley, Bill Beidler, Phil Chipman, Alva Cochran, Dick Crandall, Louis Doughty, Donald Duzenbury, David Evett, Doug Evett, Harold Freeman, Jack Harris, Don Hayward, Jim Huggins, Bill Knapp, Pete Knapp, Kendall Klumpp, Hugh McNichol, Tom Northway, Jack Osborn, Bob Roe, Dick Ryan, Chuck Sanback, Dayton Selby, Tom Smith, Bob Strange, Clifford Swan, Bruce Theunissen, John Wagner, and Dick Wood.

A luncheon was organized and prepared by church members and was served in the Parish Hall and on the lawn. There was also an opportunity for all to view the memorabilia in the Parish Hall. Pictures, old programs, and newspaper articles from long ago were displayed.

After lunch many of the group reassembled in the church for a program. We talked of how this reunion developed and took place, how the choir was organized way back in 1939, and of the many activities of the boy choir through the years. Dayton Selby told of his latest visits with Father Vincer who lives in Falls Church, Virginia, not far from Dayton.

The reunion was a very successful event. Our only regret is that those not able to attend were not able to share the joy of the occasion. Truly missed were Bernard B. Stone who died September 13, 1984 and Father John D. Vincer who was unable to travel. We were later notified that Father Vincer had died September 22, 1992. Stoney and Father V were mentioned many times, as they will always be very special people to the "boys". Several of the former members expressed the desire that the boy choir history be preserved. Hence this document. It was also suggested that a lasting memorial be considered. No definite selection has been made but contributions from former members are being received. It is expected that gatherings will take place from time to time.

Ray Anspach

July 1992