

Six Decades Making Music and Memories

Minnesota Boychoir

BARBARA W. SOMMER, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

Who doesn't love topping fluffy pancakes with melted butter and pure maple syrup? In Minnesota, it's a spring tradition to tap maple trees and gather all that delicious sweetness. So it's not surprising that one popular brand got its start here. See "The Man and The Can: Patrick J. Towle and the St. Paul Origins of Log Cabin Syrup" by Matthew M. Thomas on page 14. The history is fascinating, but as far as pure maple syrup goes, well. . . .

Percentage of pure maple syrup in the Log Cabin Syrup recipe in its first fifty years:

25^a

Percentage of pure maple syrup in the Log Cabin Syrup recipe today:

0^b

Amount Log Cabin Syrup collectors pay for early paper-label, cabin-shaped tins in very good to fine condition:

\$200-\$2,000^c

Year the iconic cabin-shaped syrup tin was invented:

1897^d

The last year the cabin-shaped tin was used to package Log Cabin Syrup:

1956^e

The average price for a quart of Log Cabin Syrup in 1910:

50 cents^f

SOURCES: For a complete source list, see endnotes on page 26.

ON THE COVER



Top photo: Young singers under the direction of Paul H. Pfeiffer in 1978. Front row (L-R): Sanford Jones, Tom Whitney, Brian Balcom, and Rollin Ransom. Photograph by Paul Shanboom, courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society; Bottom photo: Select members of the Minnesota Boychoir's Allegro choir in 2017-2018 (L-R): Noah Yager, Jacob Engdahl, Alejandro Ricart, Christopher Williams, Per Swenson, Gabe Hug, and Finn Jackson. Photograph by Diana Ricart. Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.

Contents

- 1 *Six Decades Making Music and Memories*
Minnesota Boychoir
BARBARA W. SOMMER
- 14 *"The Man and The Can"*
Patrick J. Towle and the St. Paul Origins of Log Cabin Syrup
MATTHEW M. THOMAS
- 27 *Grasshoppers in My Bed*
New RCHS Children's Book Coming in May
- 30 **Book Reviews**

Message from the Editorial Board

This year, the Minnesota Boychoir celebrates its sixtieth anniversary. Founded in 1962, the organization has, over the years, added to our state's international reputation for choral music excellence. What began with thirty members today features four choirs, headquarters in St. Paul, a small artistic and administrative staff, countless volunteers, and a wide repertoire of music. Thanks to historian Barbara W. Sommer, we learn what it's like to be part of this beloved tradition.

Nearly a century before the choir's founding, a young Lillie Belle Gibbs was tending to her chores at the family farm north of St. Paul. It was 1877. At the same time, Patrick J. Towle was working to make a name for himself in the grocery business in Chicago.

Gibbs was the daughter of market farmers. It was not an easy life, but it was a full one, as we witness in the historical fiction children's book *Grasshoppers in My Bed*, soon-to-be-published by Ramsey County Historical Society. Gibbs lived in an agrarian community. She was made by the land and farm.

Towle, on the other hand, was made by the city. He weathered financial ups and downs before moving to St. Paul in 1888 in search of a fresh start. With his Log Cabin Syrup, Towle helped usher in the era of marketing, branding, industrialization, and expansion into distant markets.

These three stories are deeply rooted in our history. Early residents found that Ramsey County was—and still is—a place of prosperity and opportunity—a place where people can make a full life, a prosperous living, and, of course, beautiful music.

Anne Field
Chair, Editorial Board


Correction: Regrets to Judge Tanya Bransford. She was incorrectly identified on page 5 in our Winter 2022 issue. She is a St. Paul native rather than a native of North St. Paul.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks former Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr., and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon. Sincere thanks to Minnesota Boychoir for their financial support.

Minnesota Boychoir

BARBARA W. SOMMER

The Minnesota Boychoir, based in a small, busy, music-filled office on the fourth floor of St. Paul's historic Landmark Center, is a central part of the state's ongoing choral tradition. The oldest boychoir in Minnesota was founded sixty years ago as a treble choir, featuring the high voices of young, male sopranos. Since then, it has grown to include: four choirs for boys with treble and changing voices; an alumni choir; a choir for parents, friends, and supporters; a summer camp; a small army of volunteers; and a repertoire that includes sacred, classical, folk, world, and contemporary choral music. In addition, the choir premieres compositions by major composers, as well as by its own accompanist and music arranger. Over six decades, its members have performed in St. Paul, throughout the state and nation, and around the world. A commitment to excellence in music education and performance, along with focused attention on the development of confidence and character, guide the choir's members as they enthusiastically contribute to Minnesota's long tradition of raising voices in song.

Song is the central concept here, but the true auditory phenomenon of a Minnesota Boychoir performance is difficult to capture and describe using mere words. To offer our readers a more interactive and clearer audio and visual experience, look for this musical icon  and follow it to a link on the Minnesota Boychoir website (<https://boychoir.org/listen/sights-and-sounds.html>) to hear and see the choir practicing and performing some of its well-loved classics both at home and on tour.

Founding a Boys' Choir

In 1962, Morris N. Nilsen and his son, Morris A. Nilsen, decided to create a boys' choir for young singers in the Twin Cities. If that seems an odd endeavor for a father and son who owned and operated a funeral chapel in Richfield, Minnesota, it really wasn't. In fact, it was a natural fit for a family that loved music and supported the arts.¹

When Morris A. and his wife, E. Lorraine, attended a funeral directors' convention and heard the Columbus (OH) Boychoir sing, they returned home fired up. It was the "golden era for musical organizations starting in the metropolitan area,"² and they realized a similar organization could serve their community and provide an outlet for boys in the arts.

According to daughter Janis Nilsen, who was eight years old at the time, "[T]here was music in our family, in our house . . . and our father and grandfather really put something into play for the boys."³ The family named the vocal group the Morris Nilsen Boys Choir.

The choir began with thirty members, ages eight to fourteen. From the beginning, the Nilsens incorporated standards that remain with the choir today. They hoped to support the community, encourage an interest in music from a young age, and help the children learn discipline, teamwork, and "cooperation with boys of all races and religions."⁴ The Morris Nilsen Boys Choir sang at PTA meetings, conventions, banquets, churches, hospitals, and senior citizen centers. The first public concert took place on November 24, 1963, two days after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The choir dedicated its inaugural performance to the president's memory.⁵

The Nilsens managed the details of the early choir from the front office of the funeral home at 6527 Portland Avenue, scheduling and paying for rehearsal and concert locations and interviewing

Morris N. Nilsen and Morris A. Nilsen founded the Morris Nilsen Boys Choir in 1962. Kirsten Nilsen Rabbe jokes that her father (Morris A.) could play a little piano but was best at playing the tape recorder. Still, he viewed himself as enough of an “appreciator of music” to cofound and support a choir designed to highlight young, male voices. Son Morris (Morrie) N. Nilsen II was one of the first choristers. *Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.*



potential directors. Morris A. handled calls about the choir and added boys’ names to a waitlist until space opened up. Choir robes and jackets hung on a portable metal rack, and even the music was



This early newspaper advertisement for the Morris Nilsen Funeral Chapel made note of its choir sponsorship. The phone number in the ad was used for funeral *and* choir business in the early years. In *The Minneapolis Star*, October 17, 1968, 51.

initially stored at the office. According to Kirsten Nilsen Rabbe, her father also “took a very active role in setting the program for the boys’ choir, with a lot of coaching from [our] mother and . . . grandmother,” who were musically trained. In fact, their grandmother, Ellen Nilsen, sang for a time as a professional soprano.⁶

Picking Up the Baton

The choir has had five directors in its sixty years. The first three—John Carl Ylvisaker, David S. Van Fleet, and Beatrice Speed—led young singers during the Nilsen era. Each helped the choir develop its distinctive repertoire and sound.

Under the direction of David S. Van Fleet, the Morris Nilsen Boys Choir and harpist Anne Ransom performed *A Ceremony of Carols* by composer Benjamin Britten around 1966. This composition was included in a recorded album titled, *A Sacred Concert with the Morris Nilsen Boys Choir*. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*



Thereafter, director Paul H. Pfeiffer and current director Mark S. Johnson have continued to develop this premier musical organization.

Under Ylvisaker, who was just twenty-five when first hired, the boys sang classical and sacred music. But, as Morris (Morrie) N. Nilsen II, current owner of the funeral chapel, son and grandson of the founders, and former choir member, recalls, Ylvisaker also loved folk music and included it in the repertoire. It was the sixties, after all. In addition, he created his own three- and four-part cappella arrangements of Christmas carols and other songs for the choir to sing.⁷

After Ylvisaker, the Nilsens brought in Van Fleet, who worked in Minneapolis as a sales and promotion manager for a music publishing company. He held a master's degree from the University of Michigan and was a professional trombonist.⁸ Now, it was his turn to lead the boys in song. According to Nilsen family members, "Van Fleet set a very high musical bar for the choir. [For example,] the *A Ceremony of Carols* piece is . . . an incredibly difficult suite that the choir performed with both artistic nuance and musical excellence."⁹

From the beginning, choir members appreciated the experience of singing. Morrie shares how performing under the direction of his conductors made him feel:

Singing is the most pure way of making music . . . the actual standing next to, between, behind or in front of people doing the same thing . . . making music. There's really not much else like it in life. . . . The thrill of it, the feeling of . . . teamwork . . . that seems like a very small and inadequate word . . . but the performing, expressing of music . . . [I]t is kind of unlike anything else . . .¹⁰

Director Speed, who loved "helping dispel the fallacy that boys don't like to sing,"¹¹ briefly led the choir after Van Fleet moved to California.

A "New Composition"

In 1970, the Nilsens asked friend and church choir director Paul Pfeiffer to lead the choir. The personnel director at the Soo Line Railroad, took over and, with his wife—music educator

Virginia Pfeiffer—as an unofficial codirector, led the young singers for twenty-three years.¹²

While Paul enjoyed his day job, music was his lifelong love. He was a music scholar and performer during his school years, developing skills that he brought to the choir. Echoing the values of the Nilsen family, he described his goals, "Music training, respect for others, and a reverence for tradition leave boys with a legacy that will be with them for the rest of their lives."¹³

One of the earliest choristers who benefitted from that philosophy and legacy was Robert "Bob" Meyerson, who describes himself as having been a squirrely kid who couldn't sit still and probably drove the new director crazy with his behavior. Now retired from the Minnesota State Patrol and currently serving as Chief Sergeant of Arms for the Minnesota House of Representatives, Meyerson fondly remembers singing "silly songs about chickens and, yes, being kind to your parents, and we sang show songs and then classical music, church music."¹⁴ 🎵(1) During his years with law enforcement, Meyerson has had the opportunity to put his musical training to work, singing in front of crowds at government and sporting event functions, including at the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome and Target Field.



Paul and Virginia Pfeiffer nurtured four children of their own in addition to hundreds of boys through the Minnesota Boychoir. Life was hectic. According to Virginia, her husband " . . . was active at church, and there wasn't too much that he didn't do. . . . he was active around the house. He mowed the lawn. . . . He also was in charge of dusting. . . . I don't think he thought I was a very good duster, so he would sometimes on Saturday morning come to rehearsal, and he still had the duster in his back pocket." *Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.*

The transition to new leadership led to a few significant changes. After initially bringing the Pfeiffers onboard, the Nilsens helped “[them] spin the choir off into a 501(c)(3) organization. This move was designed to help the choir . . . grow and be free to fundraise.”¹⁵ Parent volunteers William “Bill” and Margery “Marge” Bailey also assisted in the move toward nonprofit status. In addition, Bill served as accompanist and, because of his experience as a certified public accountant, oversaw the choir’s finances. Marge, as choir mother, took charge of management details.¹⁶

Eventually, the organization became the Minnesota Boychoir in 1973, a name that called attention to the state it represented. Two years later on August 6, 1975, the organization incorporated as a nonprofit in the State of Minnesota “for the purposes of music education and educational enrichment.”¹⁷

Drawing on Virginia’s background as a music educator, the couple taught choir members scales, how to recognize melody, harmony, and rhythm, and how to sight-read music. Virginia also introduced musical skits to the performances.

Paul was a perfectionist with high standards who didn’t want “just good enough.” He

wanted *everything* to be done well.¹⁸ James B. Mulrooney, a parent of two Pfeiffer-era choir members, recalls how the director described the choir and its sound, “There aren’t twenty-six voices singing. There’s one, and it’s called the Minnesota Boychoir.”¹⁹ 🎵(2)

While concerts showcased the expected high standards, it was and still is impossible for directors to manage the entire musical operation on their own. That’s where parent volunteers come in. Meyerson remembers his father’s role—helping with the risers—the heavy, cumbersome stair-like structures that choristers often stand on during concerts.

[My dad] had a station wagon, so he was the designated . . . riser man. [W]e would pick the risers up from [one location] and . . . set them up, and, then after the concert or performances, we would tear them down . . . and bring them [back]. . . . [Dad] really made a choice that impacted him when he said, ‘Yes, you’re going to be in the [Boychoir.]’²⁰

On the day of a concert, no matter how high-spirited the singers were backstage, volunteers led by Mrs. Bailey were there to comb hair,

Adding Skits to the Repertoire

Shortly after Paul H. Pfeiffer began directing the choir, his wife, Virginia, introduced original skits as part of the holiday and end-of-season performances. She wrote each skit with a theme in mind. Winter performances included “Christmas on the Seacoast of Holland,” “Once Upon a Christmas in Scandinavia,” and “An Old English Christmas.” The year-end acts celebrated summertime with “The County Fair,” “In the Good Ol’ Summertime,” and “Front Porch America.” Complete with costumes, sets, dialogue, and songs, and lasting about twenty minutes, these mini-performances gave choir members an opportunity to act, as well as sing.^a

In several skits, the boys danced. In her work as a public school music educator, Virginia received a grant to collaborate with Jane Peck, a Renaissance dancer. She included what she had learned from Peck in the skits and taught the dances to the choristers.^b

When he became director, Mark S. Johnson continued the skits for several years with Susan Novak, a local educator, theater director, Boychoir mom, and friend.^c The



In one of the Minnesota Boychoir skits, the young performers wore multi-colored, striped shirts. According to Virginia Pfeiffer, the choreography was complicated, “Some would lean right while some would lean left, and . . . we sang a song called ‘Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor,’” a traditional Newfoundland and Labrador folk song. Boys in front row (L-R): Unidentified singer, David Barli, and Rollin Ransom. The Pfeiffers’ son, Kurt, is behind Barli. *Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.*

last skit was performed on the 1999 tour to Chicago—a dazzling tale of the “Great Chicago Fire of 1871,” with original music by Todd E. Price and Mikey Heinrich. It included Holstein neckties to boot.^d



Parent volunteers made sure the boys were “ship shape” before assembling on stage for a performance. Here, Marge Bailey straightens a singer’s collar in the Green Room at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (today’s MIA).

straighten shirts, tie shoes, and offer snacks (and napkins to keep faces and clothes clean). When it came time to sing, the boys lined up with pants at the proper length, belts buckled, shoes shined, and Vienna Boys Choir-style middies ironed and in place.²¹ Once on stage, former choirboy Patrick Mulrooney, who today is thirty-eight, remembers they sang, eyes on the director “with our hands behind our back . . . pretty much like . . . parade rest.”²²

In 1977, the choir expanded its repertoire and performance schedule. With the Minnesota Opera, it sang in a performance of J. S. Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, under the baton of renowned conductor Philip Brunelle. Soon, there were regular engagements with the Minnesota Opera, the Dale Warland Singers, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, VocalEssence, and the Minnesota Orchestra. Added to that were special gigs such as singing the national anthem before a Minnesota Twins game and formal concerts at MIA and Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis and Landmark Center and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul.

The performances brought wider attention to the choir, as did choir tours in the United States and abroad. In 1982, the Minnesota Boychoir



was the only North American group invited to participate in the Eleventh International Youth and Music Festival in Vienna, Austria, where they received a Trophy of Honor as the youngest group in attendance. And in 1987, during its twenty-fifth anniversary year, the choir was named an official representative of the City of Minneapolis for its tour to Sister City Ibaraki in the Osaka Prefecture of Japan.²³

Mrs. Pfeiffer describes some of the preparation details for the trip:

. . . the boys had to learn how to bow instead of shake hands, and they had to learn to speak a little bit of Japanese and . . . listen to tapes . . . about the different voice production that the children there had versus what we had. . . [W]e sang with the children, Paul directing the Japanese children [and our choir].²⁴

Near the end of the Pfeiffer era, twenty-six choristers toured Czechoslovakia, the year before the country separated into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Decades later, Jim Mulrooney, Patrick’s brother, vividly recalls his first visit to a world outside his own with its narrow streets, old sooty buildings, strange TV antennas, new language, and different food—which the boys were expected to try.²⁵

Boys perform in the Fountain Court at Minneapolis Institute of Art in 1978. Both photographs by Paul Shanboom, courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.



This 1987 flyer featuring chorister Brandon Latterell announced a performance of the Minnesota Boychoir in Japan. According to Virginia Pfeiffer, their hosts were delightfully gracious. “The boys stayed in the homes; they slept on futons. . . . They were taught . . . to eat with chopsticks.” To this day, she remembers the generosity families showed the boys. *Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.*

Not only was I not going to . . . Disneyworld or . . . England, where they speak my language. I was in . . . the Eastern Bloc, right? And to stretch yourself. . . I cherish the day that at a young age, I was forced to get uncomfortable at times . . . But if you have a safe community; if you have that support system, and you [have] great leaders and coaches [who] want to help you get there, they're going to push you and get you to the best of your ability.²⁶

From Solo to Con Tutti

In 1993, the Pfeiffers retired. Over the course of a year and a half, they'd gotten to know a young accompanist named Mark Johnson, who hired on in January 1992 as their piano accompanist in preparation for the Czechoslovakia tour. The 1991 St. Olaf College graduate, who was also a music teacher at a junior high in Forest Lake and served as an interim church choir director, continued to work with the Minnesota Boychoir as an accompanist and instructor during the 1992-1993 season. Before long, the Pfeiffers and their board of directors felt the musician/educator was ready to *lead* a choir of boys. The singers Johnson had gotten to know through his short time with the choir were happy with the decision.²⁷

To begin, it was mostly a solo act, with a little help from his friends. Johnson, coordinating with choir volunteers and supporters and with some early assistance from part-time junior choir directors Eunice Hoolihan-Benson and Cynthia Prosek, business manager Shelly McAlpin, and accompanist Denise Prosek, began positioning the choir for continued

growth. The board recognized this leadership and took steps to support Johnson, whose work was bringing him national attention. It took a few years but, by 1997, the organizational and management structure was in place. Johnson was named executive and artistic director of the Minnesota Boychoir—its first full-time, paid employee. Office space in the Landmark Center gave the choir a new home, and little by little, Johnson was able to focus on the music and hire more staff, including accompanists, administrative and development positions, and additional directors and educators.²⁸

Under Johnson's leadership, the Minnesota Boychoir has grown to 150 members, with a high of 185 during its fiftieth year (2012). In his nearly thirty years at the helm, Johnson reenvisioned the original Concert Choir and Junior Chorus as training choirs, created a main performing ensemble that included changing voices—modeled after the Anglican choral tradition of men's and boy's choirs—and provided opportunities for members to continue through high school. 🎵(3, 4) The four choirs include: Cantar, for treble voices (ages six to nine); Cantando, for treble and changing voices (nine to fourteen); Cantabile, the most visible and active of the choirs, for treble and changing voices with a high level of musicianship (ages nine to fourteen); and Allegro, for Cantabile graduates (fourteen to eighteen). There also is a choir for alumni called AlumSing and Adult Choir for parents, friends, and supporters. Both groups are invited to sing at select concerts.²⁹

The choirs maintain a busy performance schedule, which means rehearsals are a must. The boys meet once or twice a week, depending on the performance level, at Concordia University in St. Paul. There, they practice the music and learn music theory—the basis for understanding what the choirs are singing. For Johnson, education is a central part of the Minnesota Boychoir experience. It supports the vision, as the Boychoir motto states, of “helping boys find their voice.”³⁰

Director Johnson's no-nonsense approach to the choir is best described as strict, supporting self-discipline and personal growth, mixed with fun. Choir members arrive at the end of busy days at school, sports practice, and music lessons. During rehearsals, they may hear personal

Minnesota Boychoir Executive and Artistic Director Mark S. Johnson rehearses before a concert with a select group of singers including (L-R): Luke Stone, Carl Loble, Daniel Zarling, Dillon Jensen, and Nico Ortega. The two boys in the foreground are unidentified. Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.



stories about Johnson's introduction to music as a child or the gift from his childhood teacher—a piano that he now uses when rehearsing with the choirs. The singers play warm-up vocal games such as Toss the Koosh, Rollercoaster, and Picky-Choosy, asking silly questions to get to know one another better.³¹ 🎵(5)

Each year, with the help of Johnson's mother, Sue, members select a nickname for their leader. A few favorites include Peaches, Buttercup, and Twinkle Toes, but mostly, he's known as Mr. J., the conductor who sometimes shows up to rehearsal wearing silly coats or hats just for fun. Still, everything Johnson does points toward the music—fun with a purpose.³²

Through games and homework, the boys learn music theory—harmony, melody, and rhythm. Ask choristers about standout lessons, and they will tell you about the “Dum-Dum” song, a perennial favorite and “a great way to learn rhythm.”³³ 🎵(6) Getting down to business, Johnson focuses “on teaching the three fundamentals of singing: posture, breath (breath support), and timbre (tone placement and production of sound).” These basics provide the platform to perform a variety of repertoire and give boys the tools they need to improve their own musical skills and talent. Will Langason, today a senior, recognizes these benefits. “[F]or our music theory class [in high school], I was able to go straight to music theory two. . . . I just feel like I'm . . . ahead of the game being in the choir.”³⁴

Johnson also makes sure the choristers understand the meaning behind the music and lyrics, and as he works with what he calls the “sometimes unexplainable sound of a boy soprano”³⁵ and the mixture of the more mature voices of the older boys, Johnson emphasizes enunciation. 🎵(7) It is important that the boys sing the words clearly so they may be understood by the audience. Former choir member, Gabe Hug, who is twenty-one and finishing his studies at Loyola University in Chicago, remembers these lessons as important to his music education:

Mr. J. makes it a big point to explain what all the music is about so . . . the boys are all thinking about something while they're singing. They're not just spitting out music. They're creating music.



Members of the Minnesota Boychoir rehearse with Mark Johnson; accompanist, composer, and musical arranger Todd E. Price at the piano; and members of the Minnesota-based ensemble Cantus, seated at the front of the room, in 2019. Choristers work diligently from the first rehearsal to the final performance to learn, memorize, and perfect each piece of music.

Name _____

Cantabile

Music theory

minnesota
BOYCHOIR

The keys to life (and music!)

1 12 different notes in the chromatic scale means there are 12 major and 12 minor scales possible.

The key of C Major has no sharps or flats. What is the pattern of (W)hole steps and (H)alf steps? There should be 7 steps to complete the octave. Use the keyboard as a guide.

2 Key signatures are printed to the right of the clef and before any time signatures. Key signatures are also printed on every line and staff unlike time signatures.

Use the combination of half and whole notes you came up with above and write the letter name notes for a major scale starting on “E♭”

E♭ _____

3 Use the combination of half and whole notes you came up with above and write the letter name notes for a major scale starting on “B”

B _____

What key do cows sing in?

This example of a music theory worksheet created by Phillip Radtke, a choir alum and assistant to the artistic director and music theory teacher, illustrates a few of the lessons the boys learn in rehearsal, with a little silliness (music-related joke) thrown in. Readers, do you know the answer to the riddle on this page? Easy! It's Beef Flat! Both images courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.

They're . . . adding emphasis to words because those will be important words in the sentence. . . . There's music teaching within each piece.³⁶

Boychoir graduate Chelanga Langason, now twenty-eight and working as an education support specialist for Minneapolis Public Schools, remembers the attention to detail. "Sometimes we would spend fifteen minutes running four bars of music until it was perfect or . . . close to perfect."³⁷

Rehearsals, though busy and sometimes intense, often are the highlight of the day for choir members. Mr. J.'s reminder to choristers to come with three items in hand—a pencil (to make notes on the music), their music folder, and a bottle of water, lets students know they should be ready to concentrate on the choir and the music.

In addition to rehearsal time, Johnson mixes education and fun by arranging retreats and other activities. These include "respect workshops," aimed at helping the boys focus on friendships and acceptance of others, and popular traditions—the annual winter retreat and bonfire at Wapo (Lake Wapogasset Camp in Wisconsin), Allegro Night Out, social gatherings, and ceremonies and recognition for graduating seniors.³⁸

Accolades to Johnson written in 2012 on the choir's fiftieth anniversary tell of the experience in the boys' own words. Max Grier, a ten-year-old chorister at the time, expressed feelings similar for many:

It's hard to describe Mr. J. He's funny. He can change his emotions really fast. He's fair. He's a really good teacher. It puts you in a good mood when you come back from choir. He's creative. He's well-planned out. He's straight-forward. He says what's on his mind. He doesn't sugarcoat or edit anything. He taught me how to focus, and how to sit still, discipline. And how to sing, obviously.³⁹

Johnson's approach and leadership in working with boys is well-recognized. In a state full of choirs, Philip Brunelle, the founder of Vocal-Essence, summed up the impact of Johnson's methods: The boys are not only well-trained but

confident and work well with musicians of all ages and backgrounds.⁴⁰

Matthew Mayer, longtime choir volunteer, adds a parent's perspective, when he says, ". . . the boys go from starting out [as children] to becoming leaders and not only in the choir, but in their community."⁴¹ 🎵(8)

These young leaders keep busy with two full-choir performances a year—a winter concert and a spring concert. The more-experienced choirs collaborate with other musical organizations and average twenty-five to forty appearances annually. They also have performed with a number of big-name artists: Patrick Cassidy and Deborah Gibson in the touring ensemble of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*; the famed Irish folk band *The Chieftains*; Jennifer Grimm, a Minnesota-based singer/songwriter; Katie McMahon, an Irish singer who was also lead vocalist with the original *Riverdance*; and local gospel phenom Robert Robinson.⁴²

Current choristers, brothers Mark and Philip Hug, describe the results, whether singing in a Boychoir concert, in a performance with professional musicians, or in a collaboration with other musical organizations. Fifteen-year-old Mark says, "I just love concerts . . . It feels magical while you're singing next to your friends and the sound fills the room." Philip, who is eleven, adds, "[O]ne of my favorite feelings is when you got a song down, memorized in your head, and then you don't even have to think. You just sing; it flows out of your mouth, and it's amazing."⁴³ Of course, Johnson is pleased to hear that, as part of the discipline he expects is memorizing the lyrics, even if they are in another language.

Leading a boychoir of this caliber is not easy. Johnson and his staff work long hours to support the choir, carefully planning concerts and tours, raising much-needed funds to support the nonprofit organization, deciding on and arranging music from their large library, selecting new pieces, and guiding and supporting the choristers.

As with any organization, the choir faces challenges that personnel work on continually. One of the most important is creating a Minnesota Boychoir more reflective of the metro community. Efforts at increasing diversity have been part of strategic planning for years but often have not moved forward. With new board

Touring the World

Choir tours are some of the most significant experiences for the young singers. Under Mark S. Johnson's tenure, choirs have visited England, France, Monaco, Spain, Italy, Costa Rica, Norway, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The boys have also sung at some of the world's great venues, including ChristChurch Cathedral^a; the National Cathedral in Washington, DC; Sydney Opera House in Australia; Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City; and Santa Maria de Montserrat Abbey and La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. In 2022, they will perform and tour in Ireland.^b

Singing at the Sydney Opera House was especially memorable. Former singer Chelanga Langason captured the depth of feeling experienced by many members when he described performing there.

[O]ne of the most impactful moments . . . was when we went to Australia . . . [and] sang in the Sydney Opera House, and I remember when we

were done . . . I was a thirteen-year-old boy, and I was weeping because I was just so moved by the opportunity and the music.^c 🎵(9)

Michael Mayer was in Sydney, as well. He was part of the younger choir and stood to the side when the older boys took the stage and sang "Prayer of the Children" in front of other choirs from around the world. The power of the choral music stunned the audience, which jumped to its feet in a spontaneous standing ovation. "When [the Boychoir members] walked out of the backstage entrance after that concert, there was . . . a group of other choristers out there, just waiting to applaud us," Michael said. "We felt like all-stars." His father, Matthew, added, "I remember security at the Opera House came running . . . there was screaming and clapping and yelling, and security thought something was happening . . . But it was just the boys coming out of the . . . door."^d



The Minnesota Boychoir outside the Sydney Opera House in 2002. Choristers Michael Mayer and Chelanga Langason are in the second row, the second and third from right respectively. Accompanist Todd E. Price is on the far left and Director Mark S. Johnson stands at the far right. *Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.*

members experienced in diversity, equity, inclusion, and access and recent light shed on racial division, improving this aspect of the choir has again become a priority. In 2021, staff, board members, and families underwent an intensive survey of the organization's culture—looking at people, processes, and power through the lens of inclusion and access. The board developed a five-year plan with goals to increase diverse membership, invite collaboration with community-based organizations, and diversify performance venues and audiences.⁴⁴

Grand Pause

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shut the world down—silence everywhere—until the singing started again from balconies in Italy and France, to solo performances in living rooms in nearly every country, to the Minnesota Boychoir right here at home.

As it became clear that lockdowns and distancing would be in place for months, staff scrambled to create a plan. Four choirs temporarily became three, and rehearsals turned virtual, with Johnson, Radtke, and Todd E. Price all taking on individual teaching assignments as the pressures of keeping up choir morale and closeness among members tested everyone. 🎵 (10) Though membership dropped from 140 to 98, resilient choir members learned to sing individually with their voices blended together electronically—an unusual and unexpected lesson in music theory. The inconvenience and

hard work paid off. Instead of going dark for two years, the musicians showed off their expertise and talent, along with Johnson's flair for fun, in the Winter 2020 and Spring 2021 remote concerts, singing to music recorded by Price. 🎵 (11) In September 2021, fully masked and working in small groups, the choir resumed in-person rehearsals and lessons.⁴⁵

They got through the hurdles thanks to choir volunteers, supporters, and parents of choristers, who continued to help meet the needs of the organization. Says parent Barbara Mulrooney, it's a family commitment; choristers, parents, and siblings all are part of it.⁴⁶ The support structure is broad and deep. Volunteers serve on the board of directors and various committees, help out backstage, and chaperone tours.

Of course, the tours make all that hard work worth it. Over the years, the choir has traveled to nineteen states and Washington, DC; fourteen countries; and five continents. And, yes, there's lots of fun but also, importantly, routine and rules with a tightly and very carefully planned schedule. Rules: wear color-coded shirts, listen to the chaperones, be thoughtful of others, and thank employees at restaurants, hotels, and on buses. Remember to push in chairs when leaving a table, and, no, you are not allowed to use your cell phone. The question, "How are you going to [represent Minnesota Boychoir] when you're with the group in a public space?" guides everyone—director, accompanist, choristers, and chaperones as they proudly reflect the values of the organization.⁴⁷

Encore!

Eventually, the rehearsals, performances, and tours end upon completing eighth grade or following high school graduation. The boys grow up and go on to careers, taking with them the confidence, poise, and maturity developed during their time in the choir. Some follow Johnson into music and music education. Others work in business, nonprofit management, government, and in public and private education. Still, they share a common bond as part of the Minnesota Boychoir tradition. Current and former choir members describe the choir as a family and a team. Patrick Mulrooney speaks about its importance as an opportunity for

Executive and Artistic Director Mark S. Johnson and members of the Minnesota Boychoir's Allegro choir have a way of bringing the audience to tears with their exquisite music, as they did here during the 2017-2018 season. Photograph by Diana Ricart. Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.



participation in the arts. “We played sports [in school]. . . sports are physical, mental, but the emotional side of the choir . . . I think more kids need something like that to build both sides of your life.”⁴⁸ And Gabe Hug believes:

. . . the biggest take-away from all of Boy-choir is that they were our family; they are our family; I’m still part of that family. . . . We’re all here together. . . . We’re all part of this big collective, part of something bigger.⁴⁹

The idea of being part of something bigger has been incorporated into the Minnesota Boychoir experience from the beginning for choir members and the many involved parents, families, volunteers, and supporters. After sixty years—thirty of them under Mark S. Johnson—the choir continues as a lively, vigorous organization, offering a place for boys in the arts. It is an integral part of Minnesota’s arts and cultural scene.

The Minnesota Boychoir anniversary celebration is at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis on June 18, 2022, at 7 pm. It is free and open to the public.

Acknowledgments: In 2020, the Minnesota Boychoir hired Barbara W. Sommer to conduct oral history interviews with select directors, staff, choristers, families, volunteers, and board members associated with the choir between 1962 and 2022. The Minnesota Boychoir Oral

History Project documents are housed at the Ramsey County Historical Society for future use by historians and researchers. The project was made possible, in part, by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Thank you to the following interviewees: Philip Brunelle; Keith, Sandy, Gabe, Mark, and Philip Hug; Mark S. Johnson; Jon Kietzer; Greg, Rebecca, Chelanga, and Will Langason; Matthew, Tanya, and Michael Mayer; Robert “Bob” Meyerson; Barbara, James B., James “Jim” M., and Patrick Mulrooney; Janis Nilsen, Morris N. Nilsen II, Kirsten Nilsen Rabbe, and Dawn Nilsen Wenner; and Virginia Pfeiffer.

Barbara W. Sommer, M.A., BWS Associates, has over forty years of experience in the public history and oral history fields. She has been principal investigator and director of more than thirty community oral history projects on topics ranging from healthcare to the arts. She is a longtime member of the Oral History Association (OHA) and the author and coauthor of numerous books in the field including, The Oral History Manual (3rd ed., 2018). Her award-winning book, Hard Work and a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota (2008, 2022) was recently reissued by the Minnesota Historical Society in a softcover edition. She holds degrees from Carleton College and the University of Minnesota.

To read a supplemental sidebar—“So Much Music!”—and to see a sixty-year select timeline of the Minnesota Boychoir, go to <https://publishing.rchs.com/publishing/magazine/ramsey-county-history-magazine-volume-57-1-spring-2022/>.

NOTES

1. Morris Nilsen Family (Morris A. Nilsen’s children: Janis Nilsen, Morris N. Nilsen II, Kirsten Nilsen Rabbe, and Dawn Nilsen Wenner), interview, Minnesota Boychoir Oral History Project, Ramsey County Historical Society (Hereafter MBOHP), October 29, 2020. According to Kirsten Nilsen Rabbe, who taught voice and piano for twenty-five years in Trimont, Minnesota, “The idea of a funeral home founding and sponsoring a boys’ choir on its own was unique to our family’s funeral business. As funeral directors, our grandfather and father’s connections with churches, clergy, and church musicians . . . was a natural resource for recruiting members as well as engaging rehearsal and concert locations.”

2. Jon Kietzer, interview, MBOHP, July 23, 2020; Jon Kietzer is the former music director and current or-

ganist and brass ensemble director at House of Prayer Lutheran Church in Richfield. The choir rehearsed in this church when Paul H. and Virginia Pfeiffer began working with the organization. Kietzer has collaborated with the choir for years and served as a board member; The Columbus Boychoir later moved to Princeton, New Jersey, and was renamed The American Boychoir.

3. Morris Nilsen Family (Janis), interview. Janis Nilsen, who performed as a cellist with the Charlotte (NC) Symphony Orchestra for forty years and still teaches cello today, remembers she was not pleased that the choir was intended for boys only. “Dad took me along to auditions one night. . . . At the end of the night, he pushed my hair up into a baseball hat and said, “Why don’t you go in and sing for [the director]? So I did.” Of

course, she was disqualified, but the audition gave her an appreciation for the unique qualities of a boys' choir.

4. Morris Nilsen Family (Kirsten), interview.

5. Ibid; "50—1962-2012: Minnesota Boychoir," 50th Anniversary Season booklet (St. Paul: Minnesota Boychoir, 2012), 6.

6. Morris Nilsen Family (Kirsten and Dawn), interview. Dawn Nilsen Wenner served as a firefighter in Richfield for twenty-three years. She later moved to St. Peter, married, and swapped a firetruck for a tractor. She's the "closet" musician in the family.

7. Morris Nilsen Family (Morris II), interview; "Our Composers: John Ylvisaker," Choristers Guild, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.choristersguild.org/document//331/>. John Carl Ylvisaker later became the composer-in-residence for the American Lutheran Church and helped produce its award-winning radio show, SCAN. He wrote over two thousand hymns including the well-known, "I Was There to Hear Your Morning Cry;" Miguel Otárola, "John Carl Ylvisaker: 'Bob Dylan of Lutheranism' wrote more than 2,000 hymns," *The Minneapolis Star*, March 29, 2017, B4; Kirsten Nilsen, email correspondence with editor, April 1, 2022.

8. "Van Fleet Will Direct Boy Chorus," *The Reporter* (Fond du Lac, WI), April 2, 1968, 15.

9. Kirsten Nilsen, email correspondence.

10. Morris Nilsen Family (Morris II), interview.

11. "Sunday Q&A/ Beatrice Hasselmann," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, April 30, 1989, 34. Beatrice Speed (later, Beatrice Hasselmann), was a music teacher in the Twin Cities and also directed the Metropolitan Boys Choir of Minneapolis-St. Paul for several years. She believed "singing is not only an abiding joy, but a marvelous therapy against stress."

12. Virginia Pfeiffer, interview 2, MBOHP, July 2020. Virginia Pfeiffer taught music education at Cooper Elementary and other schools in Minneapolis and worked with the Minnesota Boychoir alongside her husband; "Paul Henry Pfeiffer," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, December 30, 2013, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://www.startribune.com/obituaries/detail/13980272/>. Paul Pfeiffer passed away in 2013.

13. "50—1962-2012: Minnesota Boychoir," 8.

14. Robert "Bob" Meyerson, interview, MBOHP, November 23, 2020. Bob Meyerson is one of the elder alums, having joined the choir in the early 1970s; Robert "Bob" Meyerson, phone conversation with editor, March 30, 2022.

15. Kirsten Nilsen, email correspondence.

16. Ibid; Morris Nilsen Family (Morris II), interview; Virginia Pfeiffer, interview 1, MBOHP, June 2016.

17. Pfeiffer, interview 1; "50—1962-2012: Minnesota Boychoir," 6. Margaret Morris, "Choirmother offers comfort for youthful, talented singers," *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 20, 1981, 12F.

18. Meyerson, interview.

19. Barbara and James B. Mulrooney (James), interview, MBOHP, August 19, 2020. The Mulrooneys are parents of two former singers and active volunteers. They support the choir to this day.

20. Meyerson, interview.

21. Morris, 12F. Pfeiffer, interview 1; The choir has undergone different "looks" in its history. As the Morris Nilsen Boys Choir, members wore choir robes or sport coats, button-down shirts, and dark pants. During the Pfeiffer era, Marge Bailey designed light-blue sailor-style middies similar to those worn by the Vienna Boys Choir. Eventually, these changed to white middies. Later, Mark S. Johnson introduced a new look with black polo shirts featuring an updated choir logo and black dress pants as standard wear for the treble choirs. The high school choir wears black dress shirts and pants with ties. Boys select a different tie color each season.

22. James "Jim" M. Mulrooney and Patrick Mulrooney (Patrick), interview, MBOHP, September 19, 2020. Jim Mulrooney, who, today, works in commercial banking, participated in choir from 1991 through 1999 and later served on the organization's board of directors. Patrick Mulrooney joined later in 1991 and sang through the 2002 season, performing in *The Magic Flute*, *Carmen*, and *La bohème*. He works in the wine industry and is based in Florida. The brothers felt the Pfeiffer duo worked well together—one a disciplinarian; the other a nurturer. According to Jim Mulrooney, "Mr. Pfeiffer . . . hair was very short, shoes were shined. It was . . . a disciplined approach to his choir, and he was very particular about [the] image that the choir was conveying. . . . They both [Paul and Virginia] had . . . high expectations for the boys . . . why not strive for excellence, right?"

23. Morris, 12F; "2019 Membership Directory—Ibaraki, Osaka, Japan," Sister Cities International, 26, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://sistercities.org/membership-directory/>; Pfeiffer, interview 2.

24. Pfeiffer, interview 1.

25. James "Jim" M. Mulrooney and Patrick Mulrooney (Jim), interview.

26. Ibid.

27. Mark S. Johnson, interview 1, MBOHP, June 25, 2020.

28. Barbara and James B. Mulrooney (James), interview; Johnson, interview 1; Mayer Family (Matthew, Michael, and Tanya), interview MBOHP, September 3, 2020; Later staff hires included: Todd E. Price, accompanist, composer, and arranger (1998); Tanya Mayer, office coordinator (2008-2014); Anna Keyes, managing director (2014); Minnesota Boychoir alum Phillip Radtke, assistant to the artistic director and music theory teacher (2016); and Amy Driscoll, development manager (2019).

29. "Choirs of the Minnesota Boychoir," Minnesota Boychoir website, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://boychoir.org/programs/>; "Minnesota Boychoir," *Star of the North*, Spring 2021, <https://starofthenorth.net/minnesota-boychoir/>.

30. Johnson, interview 1; "Vision," Minnesota Boychoir website, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://boychoir.org/about-boychoir/>.

31. Gwendolyn Freed, "Music makes the man," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 16, 2003, E1, E10; Amy Driscoll with Minnesota Boychoir, email communications with editor, January 29, 2022.

32. Driscoll, email communications.
33. Mayer Family (Michael), interview. Michael Mayer is a past member (2000 to 2011). His parents, Matthew and Tanya, are active volunteers and supporters.
34. Mark S. Johnson, interview 2, MBOHP, July 2, 2020; Langason Family (Greg, Rebecca, Chelanga, and Will), interview, MBOHP, September 10, 2020. Chelanga joined the choir in 2001 and graduated in 2012. Will joined in 2013 and is currently in the Allegro choir. Parents Greg and Rebecca actively volunteer.
35. Johnson, interview 2.
36. Hug Family (Keith, Sandy, Gabe, Mark, and Philip Hug), interview, MBOHP, September 2, 2020. Parents Keith and Sandy Hug are active choir parents and volunteers. Their sons have all been members: Gabe joined in 2008 and graduated in 2018. Mark joined the choir in 2015. He is a freshman at Roseville Area High School and is still involved, and Philip, a fifth-grader at Parkview Center School, has been a singer since 2016.
37. Langason Family (Chelanga).
38. Gail Rosenblum, "Want to raise kind kids? Then model kind behavior," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 5, 2017, E7. Allie Shah, "Emotions run high during grads' goodbye time," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, June 15, 2006, E2.
39. Max Grier, in *Minnesota Boychoir Scrapbook 2*, 2012.
40. Philip Brunelle, interview, MBOHP, July 30, 2020. Philip Brunelle is a globally recognized choral conductor, organist, and musical entrepreneur based in Minneapolis. He sang in choirs as a child and became a church organist as a teenager and the youngest member of the Minnesota Orchestra at age nineteen. He has been the organist and choirmaster at Plymouth Congregational Church for fifty-two years and is the founder and artistic director of the Plymouth Music Series, now VocalEssence, one of the world's premier choral music organizations.
41. Mayer Family (Matthew), interview. For more information about the importance of singing for children, see Graham Welch, "The Benefits of Singing for Children," <http://efdm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ThebenefitsofsingingforchildrenGFW.pdf>, February 2012.
42. Brunelle, interview; Michael Anthony, "Minnesota Opera Company Performs," *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 14, 1977, 7B; Mike Steele, "What's Doing?: entertainment news," *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 25, 1979, 96; Driscoll, email communications.
43. Hug Family (Mark and Philip), interview.
44. Johnson, *Star of the North*. For further insight into questions and challenges involved in broadening diversity in the choir, see the Langason Family interview at Ramsey County Historical Society.
45. Mark S. Johnson, Amy Driscoll, and Todd E. Price, correspondence with author, Fall 2021.
46. Barbara and James B. Mulrooney (Barbara), interview.
47. Johnson, *Star of the North*; Hug Family (Sandy), interview; Mayer Family (Matthew), interview.
48. James "Jim" M. Mulrooney and Patrick Mulrooney (Patrick), interview.
49. Hug Family (Gabe), interview.

Notes to Sidebar on p. 4

- a. Virginia Pfeiffer, interview 2, Minnesota Boychoir Oral History Project, Ramsey County Historical Society, July 22, 2020.
- b. Ibid.
- c. Mark S. Johnson, email communication with author, November 16, 2021.
- d. Mark S. Johnson and Amy Driscoll, email communication with author, January 7, 2021.

Notes to Sidebar on p. 9

- a. Nick Perry, "10 years after quake, Christ Church Cathedral finally rising," AP News, February 19, 2021. The cathedral was nearly destroyed in a devastating 2011 earthquake. It is being rebuilt and should reopen within the next seven to ten years. The boys toured New Zealand in 2002.
- b. "Minnesota Boychoir," *Star of the North*, Spring 2021, <https://starofthenorth.net/minnesota-boychoir/>.
- c. Langason Family (Chelanga), interview, Minnesota Boychoir Oral History Project Ramsey County Historical Society (hereafter MBOHP), September 10, 2020; Michael Anthony, "Singing Out in Sydney," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, June 8, 2007, F4.
- d. Mayer Family (Michael and Matthew), interview, MBOHP, August 31, 2020. Composer Kurt Bestor wrote "Prayer of the Children," "out of frustration over the horrendous civil war and ethnic cleansing taking place in the former country of Yugoslavia." See Kurt Bestor, "Prayer of the Children—The Story Behind the Song," <http://www.kurtbestor.com/story-behind-prayer-of-the-children>.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

The Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) strives to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, deliver inspiring history programming, and incorporate local history in education.

The Society was established in 1949 to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, the original programs told the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Heyáta Othúnwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 and rededicated in 2016 as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. The Society serves more than 15,000 students annually on field trips or through school outreach. Programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

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RCHS is committed to ensuring it preserves and presents our county's history. As we continue our work to incorporate more culturally diverse histories, we have made a commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion that is based on this core idea: RCHS exists to serve ALL who call Ramsey County home. To learn more, please see www.rchs.com/about.

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Mnisóta Makhóche, the land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds, extends beyond the modern borders of Minnesota and is the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Dakhóta (Dakota) people. It is also home to the Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples, all who make up a vibrant community in Mnisóta Makhóche. RCHS acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands.

RCHS is committed to preserving our past, informing our present, and inspiring our future. Part of doing so is acknowledging the painful history and current challenges facing the Dakota people just as we celebrate the contributions of Dakota and other Indigenous peoples.

Find our full Land Acknowledgment Statement on our website, www.rchs.com. This includes actionable ways in which RCHS pledges to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóche.

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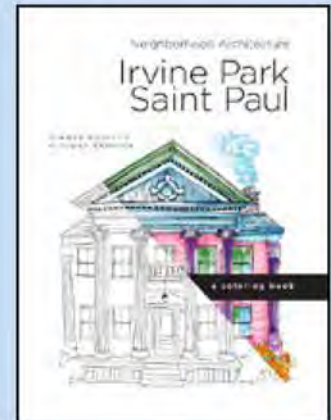


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MATTHEW M. THOMAS, PAGE 14

Color advertisements were fairly rare in the early twentieth century. This one, which appeared in the October 10, 1910 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, is aimed directly at young boys, who loved syrup on their pancakes and bread, and their mothers, who most likely made the purchasing decisions for the family. Log Cabin Syrup was produced in St. Paul. From the collection of Matthew M. Thomas.