HISTORY OF BARBERSHOP

compiled by David Wright

Lesson 1:
IN THE BEGINNING

Definition of barbershop harmony. From the Barbershop Harmony Society's Contest and Judging Handbook:

> "Barbershop harmony is a style of unaccompanied vocal music characterized by four-part chords for every melody note in a predominantly homophonic texture. The melody is consistently sung by the lead, with the tenor harmonizing above the melody, the bass singing the lowest harmonizing notes, and the baritone completing the chord . . . Barbershop music features songs with understandable lyrics and easily singable melodies, whose tones clearly define a tonal center and imply major and minor chords and barbershop (dominant and secondary dominant) seventh chords that resolve primarily around the circle of fifths, while making frequent use of other resolutions . . . Barbershop singers adjust pitches to achieve perfectly tuned chords in just intonation while remaining true to the established tonal center . . . The presentation of barbershop music uses appropriate musical and visual methods to convey the theme of the song and provide the audience with an emotionally satisfying and entertaining experience."

Chance meeting, 1938. Sometime in the early part of 1938 two men from Tulsa chanced to meet in the lobby of the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City. Today a plaque is mounted in the lobby where they met. The two men, Owen C. Cash and Rupert Hall, knew each other, but were not close friends. Cash was a lawyer; Hall a businessman. Cash was returning to Tulsa from a business trip to Denver; Hall was flying to Pittsburgh. Both their flights were delayed because of bad weather. So there they were. Cash, who loved to woodshed, asked Hall if he could sing tenor. Hall replied he was the best in the United States. Cash suggested they go to the lounge and do a little harmonizing. They did, and Cash found that Hall was quite good, after testing him out on "You Tell Me Your Dream." After a while they returned to the lobby and found two more men who could sing, then went up to Hall's room to continue in four parts.

While Cash and Hall were talking, they had lamented the fact that woodshedding seemed to be a dying art, and discussed the possibility of getting together some men to sing when they returned to Tulsa. This meeting did indeed take place. We will trace the course of events forward from this incident and examine in detail what transpired, and how this chance meeting triggered a local organization that blossomed into the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America. But before we do that, it behooves us to cast our gaze not forward from that time, but backward. We want to ask just what was this waning tradition that Owen C. Cash and Rupert Hall were missing so much. We must attempt to discover how this indigenous music that they called "barbershop harmony" came to be, why it nearly died, and why so many missed it enough to join a national bandwagon to preserve it.

Purpose of this course. We will attempt to trace the roots and the evolution of barbershop harmony from well before its actual beginnings up to the present. We will consider these questions: What were the tides of history that spawned the birth of the barbershop quartet, and what cultural environments allowed this style of music to flourish? What were its musical forerunners? What are its defining characteristics? What other types of music were fostered contemporaneously, and how did they influence the growth of quartet singing? Which styles are similar, and how are they similar? How did the term "barbershop" arise? How long did the historical era of the barbershop quartet last? What other kinds of music sprang forth from it? Why did the style eventually need preservation? How was SPEBSQSA (now Barbershop Harmony Society) formed, and how did it become a national movement? What other organizations have joined the cause? How have they coped with the tasks of preservation and propagation? Are current day efforts still on course in preserving and promoting the style? How did the style change after the Society was formed, and how has it changed since then? We will spend the next few days contemplating and attempting to answer these questions.

Overtones. As barbershoppers, we are very conscious of the "ringing" effect that complements our singing. We consider it our reward for singing in tune with matched word sounds. The fact that a tone produced by a voice or an instrument is accompanied by a whole series of pitches in addition to the fundamental one that our ear most easily detects has been known for centuries. It is the relative strength of these pitches, called overtones (also harmonics, also partials), which determines to

our ear the characteristic sound of the voice or instrument producing the tone. These overtones allow us to distinguish between a trumpet and a violin, between your voice and mine, between the vowel "ee" and the vowel "oh". Generally we don't hear these overtones as actual pitches. They are mixed into the total sound in a very subtle fashion. But sometimes, when we ring a chord, their presence is detected by a buzz in the air, or even (the ultimate joy) as an actual audible high pitch.

Early traces of polyphonic music; the Gregorian chant. This ringing effect was most certainly known and observed in the resonant monasteries of the 11th and 12th centuries, where the monks chanted Latin praises to God in unison. In modern recordings of this music one can often note the clear presence of the octave overtone. In some examples it is hard to tell whether or not the octave is being sung.

Consonance. Barbershop harmony (and all other kinds of harmony) is based upon the principle of consonance — the fact that some tones sound pleasing to the ear when sounded together. The reason for this was known by the Greek mathematician Pythagoras 2500 years ago, namely that tones sound pleasing when the ratio of their frequencies can be expressed with small integers — the smaller the intervals the more consonant the sound. The most consonant interval is the octave, with ratio 2:1. This is also the first overtone, and the first harmony (polyphony) the Gregorians began to sing. They probably decided to sing it because they heard the overtone. The next most natural intervals are the perfect fifth, which is the ratio 3:2, and the perfect fourth, with ratio 4:3. These were the next intervals they sang, appearing in the 12th century. The monks who sang this music were in some sense early barbershoppers — they depended on their ear to tune and they appreciated the consonance arising from the intervals they sang. Since their singing was *a cappella* and they were all singing the same word sounds, there was no obstruction to tuning the intervals as accurately as possible — to "ringing the chords." It is likely, then, that the ringing of chords (albeit simple chords), is an element of our style that must have been experienced by mankind many centuries ago. What was lacking was harmonic variety, a vocabulary of chords and progressions large enough to maintain interest.

More harmony becomes accepted. By the fourteenth century the octave and the fifth were accepted, and the third (ratio 5:4) was on its way in. At first the third was considered dissonant and even irreverent, and was banned from church music by one of the popes. By the 16th century, however, church music used a variety of triads (three note chords). In the 16th century English anthem “If Ye Love Me”, by Thomas Tallis, one detects the presence of both major and minor triads. If we denote the notes of the scale by the Roman numerals I through VIII, we heard major chords rooted on I, IV, and V, and minor chords rooted on II and VI. Major and minor triads appear frequently in our barbershop music, but they are not what give it its distinctive sound. The anthem is devoid of chords containing four notes without octave doublings, except for some quick passing tones. In particular, it is devoid of the seventh chord that characterizes our music.

The dominant seventh chord and its implied progression. The chord that is sometimes called the "barbershop seventh" actually is what most musicians refer to as the *dominant seventh chord*. Somewhere in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, European composers began to complement the major triad with a flatted seventh, a tone whose interval from the root has the frequency ratio 7:4. (It is purely a coincidence of nature that the interval uses the integer seven and it is also the seventh note in the scale, flatted.) It probably slipped in as a dissonant tone in a chord preceding a root movement that went up the interval of a fourth — a standard progression. Meanwhile, keyboard instruments had developed and the tempered scale, which had been proposed by the French Mathematician Mersenne in 1636, had become accepted beginning in the late seventeenth century, on the urging of J. S. Bach, since it allowed him to write in all keys. Equal temperament gives reasonably good approximations for the intervals of a fifth and a third, but it furnishes a dominant seventh which is noticeably sharp. In spite of this obstacle, this interval gained acceptance as a consonance, so that by the time of the great composers of the 18th and 19th centuries, the chord containing the root, third, fifth, and flatted seventh was commonplace, especially rooted on V of the scale, since all four notes of this seventh chord lie in the scale. The seventh was used primarily to cue the listener that a root movement going up a fourth was about to occur. The great composers used this expectation to toy with listeners, to hold them in suspense, or to deceive them. A melodic strain often implies or even provides the dominant seventh. (This has traditionally been viewed as one of the characteristics that make a melody suitable for barbershop harmonization, since this chord and its implied progression are two of the cornerstones of barbershop harmony.) By the nineteenth all the chords and progressions which we now use in barbershop, with just a few exceptions, were common, so that the harmonic basis on which our style rests was already essentially intact.

"Barbers music" in Elizabethan England. Now we shift our attention to another front: the early development of spontaneous singing and the term "barbershop." There are scattered references in English literature which associate music with the barber and his shop in 16th, 17th and early 18th century England. According to Samuel Pepys (pronounced ”Peeps“)

(1633-1703), a noted diarist, the English poet John Milton (1608-1674; author of the epic poem "Paradise Lost") wrote that a lute or cittern (forerunner of the guitar), hung on the wall for use by waiting customers, and that the barber himself was adept with it, entertaining himself and others during his free moments. In fact, some barbers became quite reputable as musicians. It seems as if a certain type of music came to be associated with the barber, although we can't be sure quite what it was, for Pepys also writes:

> "My Lord called for the Lieutenant's cittern and with our candle sticks with money for cymbals we made barber's music with which my Lord was well pleased."

Transfer to America. It seems that this tradition, as well as the term, ceased in England, as the barbers' profession became more sophisticated, concerning itself with tooth-pulling, blood-letting, and surgery. But before it died, it was transplanted, like many "Old World" customs, to American shores, where barbers took up the tradition of improvised singing. The early American barber's music was probably sung or strummed in the South, where life was less "proper" than in Puritanical, psalm-singing New England, where barber's music would surely have seemed profane. In historical Williamsburg, Virginia, their are the Raleigh Tavern pictures of colonial gentlemen gathering about the bar, leisurely discussing the affairs of the day — a custom inherited from Mother England.

Early beginnings of four-part harmony. The American tradition of four voices harmonizing, and making at least some attempt to avoid unnecessary doubling in the parts, has its beginnings in the murky depths of the past. As with any folk art, it is impossible to pinpoint an exact year, or even an exact decade, when the practice began. We will point out some of the first known appearances musical practices and ensembles that represent forerunners and/or early forms of barbershop harmony.

The Hutchinson Family, Dearborn Quartet, and the Continental Vocalists. We can say for a fact that such quartet singing was in existence before the mid 1800's. As an example, we know of the existence of a family quartet called the Hutchinson Family consisting of three brothers: Judson, John, and Asa; and their sister, Abby, who sang an alto above the melody, equivalent to a tenor part, if it were sung by a male. In 1843 this popular New England quartet was singing to crowded antislavery and temperance enthusiasts in New York and Philadelphia. A generation later, the sons of one of the Hutchinson sons sang in another concert quartet — this on all male — called the Dearborn Quartet. In the mid-1800's their was another popular quartet — all male — called the Continental Vocalists which did variety shows, and published a song book in 1855 called "The Continental Vocalists Glee Book." All the indications are that there was substantial interest in quartet singing as early as the 1850's.

Influence of Popular Music.

The history of our nation is reflected in its popular songs, going all the way back to the first popular song, "Yankee Doodle," 1792. Songs reflected war and peace, good times, bad times, carefree times, hard times, exciting times, confusing times. As our discussion leads us through history, we will discuss some of the songs and the songwriters of each generation. We will see that a particular turn in the evolution of popular music created an environment that allowed barbershop harmony to flourish as a national pastime, and another turn led to its demise.

Some songs that were popular in the mid-1800s: Annie Laurie (1838) and Long, Long Ago (1843. These early melodies are straightforward and harmonizable. We will observe how through the 1800's the style of melodies changed to allow for more varied harmonization.

Early contribution by African Americans. Over the years, black Americans have an immense influence on American music, especially those aspects that relate to the development of barbershop harmony. They gave us the spiritual, and later ragtime and jazz. Blacks were among the early improvisers of harmony. They inspired the writing popular songs that are the direct forerunners of barbershop. In the Old South the enchanting music of slaves came floating in the window on a warm evening; their innate ability for harmonizing and improvising was noticed and mimicked. In the early 1800s it was the singing and dancing of these involuntary immigrants that inspired an art form called the minstrel show, which helped give birth to, among other things, vaudeville, Broadway, and the barbershop quartet. In fact, what may have been the very first actual quartet of singing barbers likely consisted of four black men. Black male quartets are known to have existed as early as 1873. And in Jacksonville Florida, there was a black quartet of singing barbers in the 1880s. These are the very first non-

professional quartets of whose existence we are certain. Other earlier ones surely existed. By the latter part of the 19th century the tradition of quartet singing was strongly entrenched in the fabric of black culture, its roots closely intertwined with blues and jazz. There is strong evidence that many defining characteristics of the style resulted from this confluence.

Minstrel shows. The art form called the minstrel show arose somewhere in the 1840's. The minstrel shows further developed the art of improvisation, and male quartet singing began to appear in the format somewhere along the line well before 1900. The word "minstrel" prior to the 19th century referred to a professional entertainer of any kind: musician, juggler, acrobat, storyteller, etc. In the 1800's the indigenous American theatrical art form called the "minstrel show" evolved. The father of the minstrel show was a man named Thomas Dartmouth Rose, popularly known as "Jim Crow". He was an early impersonator of African Americans who pioneered the style. It consisted of blackface performers caricaturing the singing and dancing of African American slaves. The minstrel show had its hay day between 1850 and 1870. After that it gradually declined, although it continued to appear in professional theaters into the 20th century, and even into the 1960s and 1970s as a vehicle for amateurs. Its influence was felt later in vaudeville, radio, television, and motion pictures of the 20th century. But the chief impact was probably its influences on, and contributions to, American popular music. As such it is one of the keystones in the development of the barbershop style, though in today's world its caricature of the African American is considered insensitive.

Format of minstrel show. As the minstrel show developed in the mid 1800's, a two part, sometimes three part, format evolved. In the first part, the performers were arranged in a semi-circle, with the "interlocutor" in the center. On the ends were "Mr. Tambo", the tambourine man and "Mr. Bones", who rattled the bones. The interlocutor wore whiteface and formal attire. The rest of the (all male) cast wore blackface and colorful apparel. The program frequently opened with a big opening chorus number, following which the interlocutor gave the command, "Gentlemen, be seated." The program then went into a series of jokes and gags between the interlocutor and the end men, interspersed with performances of ballads, comic songs, and instrumental numbers, chiefly on the banjo or violin. Here it was customary for a male quartet to step forward during the course of the show and serenade the audience with a popular ballad. It consisted of cast members who loved to sing, and who could hold their part, not being drawn off by the next man's harmonizing. Their arrangements were improvised, and probably never written down. The second part, the olio, consisted of a series of individual acts, concluding with a "hoedown" or "walk-around" in which every member did a specialty number while the others sang or clapped. The song "Dixie" was written by Dan Emmett (see next paragraph) in 1859 as a "walk-around". Sometimes there was a third part consisting of a play, abridged and sometimes parodied (farce, or comic opera).

Daniel Emmett. Perhaps the first minstrel company was the Virginia Minstrels, organized in 1843, and headed by Daniel Decatur Emmett. That year the popular minstrel song "Old Dan Tucker" was written, probably by Emmett. An interesting aspect of this troupe was that it was a quartet. We might wonder if these four performers included, as part of their routine, four part renditions of the popular minstrel songs like "Old Dan Tucker", which was presumably written for and performed by the Virginia Minstrels. From a book on minstrelsy, some insight is provided by this passage:

> 'The Virginians often sang and played at the same time. A soloist took part of the song while others joined him in the second, the refrain, singing in one voice, which was considerably closer to the plantation manner than the four-part glee style of other minstrel bands." (emphasis added)

Daniel Emmett had a long and colorful career as a minstrel writer and performer. He was born in 1815, and was still on the minstrel circuit as late as 1895. Emmett died in 1904.

Edwin P. Christy. In the early days of the minstrel show—the mid 1800's—the greatest of the minstrel companies was not Dan Emmett's troupe, but rather the Christy Minstrels, founded by Edwin P. Christy (1815 - 1862). It was Christy who initiated the standard format described above. In about 1846, Christy's troupe appeared in New York City, and played on Broadway for nearly ten years. The success of this company must have been due in large part to the popularity of the songs it performed—songs like "Old Folks At Home" and "My Old Kentucky Home". These were written by a very talented young man employed by Christy. His name was Stephen Foster.

Stephen Collins Foster. We would be amiss if we didn't devote some attention to this man. Foster may have been the greatest melody writer of all time. He grew up, in Pittsburgh, listening to African Americans singing their songs in church meetings and on the job. He heard popular songs from the minstrel shows. As a young boy he had a natural bent toward song writing, and he published his first song in 1842, at age 16. In 1848 he sold rights to his famous song "Oh, Susanna" for $100;

together with his "Old Uncle Ned" it brought the publisher $10,000. Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of a career impaired by terrible entrepreneurship on Foster's part. In 1849 he entered into a contract with a New York publisher to whom he had given rights for "Nelly Was A Lady" for fifty printed copies. He was commissioned to write songs for Christy's minstrel show. Here, in 1851, he wrote the song that is most associated with his name, "Old Folks At Home". The front cover of the song as first published, ironically, names E. P. Christy, not Foster, as writer and composer. That is because Foster sold to Christy for five dollars the right to be publicized as composer. Eight months later Foster regretted this and tried in vain to nullify the agreement. His name did not appear on the music until the copyright was renewed in 1879 — fifteen years after Foster's death.

Another irony is that Foster never saw the Swanee River. When he set out to write the song for Christy, all he had in mind was to write a nostalgic song about a home near a southern stream. He originally selected the Yazoo, then the Pedee River. The latter actually appeared, crossed out, in drafts in Foster's manuscript workbook. He was apparently searching for a more lyrical name. Then his brother suggested looking at an atlas, which they did, and when Foster noticed Florida's Suwannee River, he said "That's it, that's it exactly!", and it went down on the music as "Swanee". It's hard to imagine how America's songwriters could have gotten along over the years without this lyrical corruption to conjure up images of the mythical south.

Stephen Foster left us over 200 songs — among them some of the best ever written. It was his stated objective to become "the best Ethiopian [i.e., minstrel] song writer". It's fair to say he accomplished that, with such greats as "Camptown Races" (1850), "Old Folks At Home" (1851), "Massa's In De Cold, Cold Ground" (1852), "My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night" (1853), and "Old Black Joe" (1860). He also wrote songs in the more "respectable" sentimental style then popular. These include "Jeannie With The Light Brown Hair" (1853), and "Beautiful Dreamer" (1864). The latter two exude remarkable elegance and beauty in its melody, indicating that Foster was beginning to break out of the mold in the latter part of his life. In 1857 he was in such financial trouble that he sold all the future rights to his songs for $1900. The profits from his songs went largely to performers and publishers. By 1860 he was struggling from depression and alcoholism. He moved to New York City. In 1861 his wife left him. He remained in debt until he died in 1864 at the age of 37 in the charity ward of New York City's Bellevue Hospital. We are all poorer in that his life ended at such an early age.

Religious songs. The late 1860's and 70's was an era in which many of the popular songs were hymns. Examples: "Nearer My Got To Thee" (1859), "Abide With Me" (1861), "Work For The Night Is Coming" (1864), "Whispering Hope" (1868), "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior" (1870), "I Love To Tell The Story" (1874), "What A Friend We Have In Jesus" (1876). In many of these melodies one can detect the influence of Stephen Foster. Hymns and spirituals have always been popular as quartet numbers, and most likely were in the repertoires of the quartets of this age.

Popular songs of the later 1800's. An early popular song whose implied harmony makes use of secondary dominants ("circle of fifths") was "Aura Lee," written in 1861. As with many popular songs of this era, the lyrics have a formal nature. Many of the songs written after Stephen Foster's time resembled his style. In 1866 James A. Butterfield wrote the music to "When You And I Were Young, Maggie," which very much resembles Foster's sentimental ballads, but introduces a few more chords than Foster's songs typically contained. In 1878, James A. Bland wrote "Carry Me Back To Old Virginny," a minstrel song in the style of Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home." Two years earlier, in 1876, the well known "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen" was written, featuring some interesting harmonic variety that has made it a quartet favorite over the years. Note the brief harmonic shift to the relative minor and its dominant on the line "your voice is sad when e'er you speak." This brief passage was a forerunner of the kind of harmonic variety that was to come in abundance a few years later, setting the stage of the greatest quartet era of all time.

Rise of the woodsheddable melody. We have seen that there was apparently substantial interest in quartet singing before 1890, evidenced by the existence of the Hutchinson Family singers, the Dearborn Quartet, minstrel quartets, and African American quartets. "The stage was set and the participants were awaiting one more important development - the final evolutionary step which ushered in the age of the barbershop quartet. This ultimate feature was the rise of melodies which were especially conducive to woodshedding and harmonization". One feature possessed by many of the popular songs beginning in the 1890's is the sol-to-sol nature of the melody, rather than the do-to-do structure which predominated in the mid 1800's and made these songs harder to harmonize. Sol-to-sol songs allow a top tenor to harmonize above the melody and give the bass singer room to operate. If the song's melody ends on low do of the scale, it crowds the bass off his rightful note and forces him to harmonize on less desirable chord tones. Many of the sol-to-sol songs, such as Sweet Rosie O'Grady (1896), Gypsy Love Song (1898), and My Wild Irish Rose (1899), were extremely conducive to four part ear harmonies. (It should be noted, however, that there are many do-to-do songs in the traditional barbershop repertoire, such as “Hello My Baba” (1899).)

Two very important distinguishing features of the new popular songs helped encourage ear harmonization. First, the melodies were more singable, not requiring a great deal of range. This basic simplicity of 1890's songs often entailed a characteristic "roominess" in the melody — lots of half notes and whole notes, allowing the harmony singer to echo the melody or make harmonic moves (called "swipes" and "snakes" by early barbershoppers) while the lead singer simply held his note. The second distinguishing feature was a greater variety of chords implied by their melodies. Many of the songs from the mid-1800's had chord patterns involving only three chords (I, IV, V), with occasional use of a fourth (II). But the songs after the turn-of-the-century era often involved all these plus at least one or two more (VI, III).

Change in lyrical trend. Many of the songs of the 1800's, with the notable exception of the minstrel songs, had lyrics that seem very formal and high-flown, often employing the old English pronouns "thee" and "thou". Consider, for example, the lyrics of "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes" (1762), "Lorena" (1857), Foster's "Beautiful Dreamer" (1864), "Sweet Genevieve" (1869), and "Love's Old Sweet Song" (1882). But in the gay nineties, the common vernacular came into vogue and simple straightforward became the norm. The songs concerned themselves with the same simple subjects like sweetheart, home, and mother, but the lyrics displayed their meaning right on the surface without subtle metaphors. Consider the lyrics of "Annie Rooney" (1890), "Sweet Rosie O'Grady" (1896), "Hello My Baby" (1899). This aspect was for a while taken as a hallmark of the barbershop style; more recently this attachment of lyrical character to the barbershop style has been dropped. Note that in some of the post-1890 songs we still find traces of the old highbrow verbiage, for example in the verses of "You're The Flower Of My Heart, Sweet Adeline" and "My Wild Irish Rose."

Improvisation. The minstrel singers, with their woodshedded arrangements, helped to develop a long American tradition of improvisation. This has turned out to be immensely popular in this country over the years, and perhaps is rooted in the Jeffersonian ideal of freedom and independence. For decades, before the development of such styles as jazz, ragtime, and barbershop, America's musical traditions were based on the traditional and strict European conservatory methods. The printed page, with the composer's intentions, was paramount. Occasionally a bit of freedom was allowed at the cadenza section of a concerto, but by and large, there was the old world stiffness and stuffiness of powdered wigs and court manners in much of our 19th century music. As the 1800s progressed, Americans broke away from this European rigidity. This musical emancipation, which was helped along greatly by the gradual emancipation of blacks, revealed itself in various modes of musical improvisation, such as the Negro spiritual, ragtime, barbershop, and later in jazz, country, and gospel music.

The rise of vaudeville. By 1890 the minstrel show, now on the downswing of its life span, but by no means dead, had spawned for America had another medium of popular entertainment — the vaudeville stage. It was respectable family entertainment with high standards of professionalism. There developed large chains of theaters in towns across the country. One such had as many as 400 houses. Many of America's greatest entertainment stars began their careers on the vaudeville circuits, including W. C. Fields, Will Rogers, and Al Jolson. In format, vaudeville was nothing other than a variety show consisting of 10 to 15 acts, much the same as the minstrel shows, but it dropped the blackface and the African American impersonation. In 1896 vaudeville theaters began showing motion pictures, which at the time were just a curiosity. This seemingly innocent novelty would spell the demise of vaudeville 30 years later, taking the barbershop quartet down with it. Quartet singing was a standard part of the program. Although vaudeville quartets existed in abundance, we have very few recordings of them because most of them didn't record. But some of the more famous ones did record some songs, and we'll hear some of these later. Vaudeville gave birth to the Broadway stage and the movies. It also helped along the quartet tradition, since it provided the means for people across the country to see, and not just hear, professional quartets. Reflecting the racial segregation of the day, black vaudeville operated completely separately, and featuring numerous black barbershop quartets.

George M. Cohan. The man who gave us "You're A Grand Old Flag," "Mary's A Grand Old Name," "Give My Regards To Broadway," and "I'm A Yankee Doodle Dandy" began his career at an early age singing with his sister and parents. By 1893 he was writing vaudeville skits and popular songs, and in 1901 he opened a full-length play in New York. His songs are some of the most creative early specimens embraced by barbershop harmony. A good example is "There's A Ring To The Name Of Rosie," which was a popular contest number in the 1970s and 1980s.

Lynn Abbott's article; black vaudeville & the first reference to "barber shop harmony." In the Fall, 1992, issue of *American Music,* a New Orleans writer and musician named Lynn Abbott wrote an article laying out a compelling case for the African American origins of barbershop harmony. Among other things, the article documents a rich black vaudeville tradition complete with black quartets and black music critics. One such critic was a columnist called Tom

the Tattler, who, in 1900 wrote the following unflattering remarks about barbershop harmony:

> "A noticeable advancement along the lines of the profession is the passing of the barber shop quartette with its barber shop harmony. It doesn't take much of an effort of memory to recall when all quartettes sang their own self-made harmonies, with their oft-recurring 'minors,' diminished sevenths and other embellishments. This barber shop harmony, although pleasing to the average ear, and not altogether displeasing to the cultivated ear, is nothing more or less than a musical slang. It violates—at times ruthlessly— the exacting rules and properties of music. All forms, phrases and progressions of music go down before it. What does [*sic*] the barber shop exponents of harmony care for such delicacies as the forbidden progressions of perfect fifths and octaves? What do they care about chord progression in its correct form? Their chief aim is to so twist and distort a melody that it can be expressed in so-called 'minors' and diminished chords. The melody is literally made to fit their small stock of slang chords, instead of the chords being built around the melody."

With this lambasting of the barbershop style, Tom the Tattler gave us one of the first known printed usages of the term "barber shop" to denote a style of harmony.

Two of Thomas Edison's inventions. In 1876, the same year "Kathleen" was written, Thomas Edison had perfected two inventions that would very much affect the history of barbershop singing. One would spawn the growth of quartetting by bringing the sound of professional quartets into the homes of millions across the country. The other invention probably did as much as any other single thing to spell the end of the quartet era forty years later. The first invention was the phonograph, which recorded the voice on a cylinder made of tin foil. The second was the Kinetograph, better known as Edison's motion picture camera.

Concluding remarks. By this time the barbershop quartet was a popular type of ensemble. Barbershop quartets flourished at both the amateur and professional levels. Barbershop harmony was sung by both blacks and whites in a largely segregated society.

In the next lesson we will hear some of the earliest recorded evidence of the blossoming tradition of quartet singing at the turn of the century, reflecting a style of music characterized by *a cappella,* four-part harmony, melody in the second tenor, embellishments such as swipes and echoes, and freedom to improvise. We will discuss developments in early century popular music, entertainment, and technology, and how they affected quartet singing. We will trace the quartet movement forward through its heyday.