

Beacon Choir History by Donna Hamilton

(shared in Beacon's service celebrating the choir, May 26, 2024)

Even though we didn't have an official choir for several years (not sure of date), we have done singing in groups, often with a director, almost since the beginning of Beacon. At first, we rehearsed in people's homes - David (Hamilton) was always at the piano, and possibly sometimes the director, too. The first director I remember was Terry Pitt-Brooke. And for a couple of years, Cliff Ridley was our director. I believe Cliff was director from 1994-96.

In those very early days, we sang in church occasionally, but I suspect we rehearsed more for enjoyment and to sing at special occasions, such as Congregational Dinners. Some people will tell you that choir only started at a later date, when it became a more formal arrangement and sang in church more regularly, but I can assure you that those who sang together thought we'd been doing choir all along.

Some church folks talk about integrating into church life, and finding "affinity groups". Well, for many of us, choir was definitely one of our "affinity groups".

In early 90's, we started having rehearsals at Miller Park School, where we still have been meeting once a week, during the church year. In early days, we even took a kettle and goodies, and had tea and refreshments after the rehearsals! And a favourite part of the rehearsal included, as part of the warmup, getting in a circle where we each massaged the neck and shoulders of the person in front - then the circle turned around and returned the favour.

After Cliff, we had a succession of directors, such as Kay Norton and Derek Darling - still all on a volunteer basis. Each one brought their own ideas of what we should sing, so we've had lots of variety. From Sept 05, our daughter Nicola was director for a year. She was happy to do it, but at the end of that time she told us that we really should be paying somebody to do the job - not expecting anyone to do it on a volunteer basis. At that point, we would have an annual choir party at the end of the church year, where we sang all our favourites, and had gifts such as flowers, or hanging baskets, for our directors and accompanist. (Sometimes an honorarium, I think.)

Since then we have had a succession of paid directors, such as Marnie Jennings, Charlene DuBrule, Angela Chan, Sylvia McDonald, and of course currently Faith Veikle. Again, each one has brought different strengths, and their own choice of music. We often put on a concert - which was a huge undertaking. (Who can forget the one about the rains coming down in the rain-forest! In fact, I just googled it, and found it! The Rainforest Song by Jim Scott - brings back pleasant memories!!)

Tyler, could you please bring up the photo from 1995: This photo is from Place Maillardville where we held services from our beginning in 1983, for about 26 years. We then met in the Gathering Place in Port Coquitlam, for a few years, until we moved here to Sapperton in approximately 2010(!)

In the photo, the choir is standing in front of a hanging that was at our church only once, before I took it to GA in Spokane to be presented there in 1995. Many of you might not know the history of that hanging – although you may have seen it currently hanging at the “church” at 49th and Oak.

GA is General Assembly, the annual meeting of Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists from all over the US, and many from Canada, too. It is a huge conference which moves around the US to some different host city each year.

The hanging was commissioned (for me to make) by the GA Planning Committee in 1995, to be displayed at all the plenary sessions. It was then transferred to each GA for several years. I think they must’ve got tired of moving and hanging it each year, as it was at some point “permanently” displayed at the UUA headquarters in Boston for several years. When the headquarters moved (within Boston) 10 years ago, they no longer had space for it, and they asked if I’d like it back. I said yes, of course, and it now resides at VanU (Vancouver Unitarians). I am about to get in touch with Shawn, their new minister, and make sure folks there know the story behind it and figure out what is its future!!

But to get back to the photo, the “occasion” may well have been just a celebration of the hanging, before I took it to Spokane to hand it over - not sure. I see lots of old-timers in that photo, including my own children at ages around 20. I believe Cliff Ridley was the director at that point, as I see his wife in the photo.

Thanks, Tyler, you may take the photo down now.

I was so sorry to hear that Beacon may not be able to continue with having a full time choir – what for many of us has been such a big part of Beacon. But I was extremely privileged last week to attend a meeting of Beacon leaders and music folks who brainstormed ideas to keep music, specifically singing together, a vital part of Beacon life. I was very pleased to see how hard folks are working on finding a solution.

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Carol Woodworth’s Background for 2014 Choir Photo

This was in 2014. Pretty sure We are downstairs at Sapperton Hall probably in February when we used to have annual congregational dinners to celebrate Beacon’s birthday. Someone said we’ll make it a fancy dress party for fun and so the choir was all decked out when we stood up to sing.

You can see lovely **Heather Brown**. And I think the arms on her left are those of **Nancy Rupert**. Nancy and Heather were part of the worship service team that got us through the Pandemic. Then you see **Katie** who wanted to be here today then there's me and **Donna Hamilton** who was here visiting last week. Donna's husband **David** would have been there but not in the picture because he would have been at the piano! He voluntarily played for every Sunday service and choir practice for Beacon for over 30 years. Then there's **Marylke** and **Peggy Lunderville**, who I think have been in the choir from its inception, also **Joan Morris** and **Rev Ev Morris**. Our lovely **Anne McLeod**, who's still singing! Our director at that time **Charlene DuBrule**. And that set of shoulders behind Charlene, I am sure are those of **John Hagen**. Then there is marvelous **Sue Sparlin** who could sing every section in the choir. Whoever needed help, Sue would sing with that section. Then there is beautiful **Tom Lunderville** who used to randomly bring his homemade cookies to our rehearsals. And lovely **Sally Frith**. We used to commute together because she lived in PoCo. I know Sally made jewel coloured scarfs for everyone in choir to wear for special occasions.

We hope these pictures will bring forward other memories some of you may have to share with each other at coffee time.