

A Brief History Of The Achill Choral Society *(as of 2008)*

In 1982 due to the initiative of a German-Canadian businessman, Mr. Martin Mayer of Hockley, the Choir was founded. The name Achill Choral Society was attached later as that was the old hamlet where he lived. His wife Luitgard was a member of the alto section until a few years ago. Mr. Mayer donated a substantial amount of money to the choir to get it up and running. He even planned and started to build a Concert Hall in the Hamlet of Achill to be our home base for practice and concerts. Unfortunately this project was running aground due to building permit restrictions from the Township of Adjala. Mr. Mayer has passed away since.

From a humble beginning in the fall of 1982 with approximately 40-45 members we practiced for our first Christmas concert. Little did we know where this group would eventually be heading. Here we are today with some 75-80 members and some exceptional concerts, and a good reputation under our belt. Some of our early presentations, where the Choir outnumbered the audience, were of a traditional nature with Carols at Christmas and Folksongs in the Spring Concerts. In about the third year we had our first big production together with the Georgetown Choir in the Tottenham Community Centre. This concert moved our reputation one step up, since we enjoyed a full house and a standing ovation. For this event we had to build a large stage with approximately 100 wooden frames, which some of them still exist to this day. It also proved to be the best system for us, since we can use them like building blocks at any of our venues. We carried on with our program of three concerts each Christmas and spring. Traditionally we would always have a Christmas performance at a local old age home. Then along came "Wine and Roses" in the spring, where alcohol (wine) was served and the tables were decorated with roses. After a few of these we came up with some cabaret performances, which were a lot of fun and good sources of fundraising. We also had a number of big garage sales at the Black Horse Theatre and some bake sales to put money into the bank. The first dress code was black skirts/pants and white blouse/shirt. In about the fifth year the men were outfitted with light-grey tuxedos and the ladies got new dresses. In 1990 we received our first invitation to go overseas. Due to the Georgetown choir's large Dutch membership and their ties to Holland we were invited to come along to celebrate the 45th Anniversary of the Dutch liberation by Canadian troops in 1945. It was the "Etten Mannen Chor" a 100 voice men-only choir that were our hosts. Most members of the choir went for the two-week trip, which was very much enjoyed by everyone. Consequently the invitation went out to bring the Holland choir to Canada, and in 1993 they arrived on our shores. In a big co-production we staged a concert with the Achill, Georgetown and Etten Mannen choirs at a sold out Roy Thompson Hall, Toronto's finest concert hall. This event left a deep impression on everybody's memory, and needless to say, this was the absolute highlight in all of Achill's Choral history. While we were floating on this high cloud for a few years, two more overseas invitations came along, one from England and another from Holland. This time it was 1995, the 50th Anniversary to the end of WWII. Again the Achill and

Georgetown members packed their bags and went off to England where we met up with two different choirs. The first was in Huddersfield and the second was the "Hereford Police Choir." After that we went across the Channel to Calais and then by bus through France, Belgium and into Holland. When we arrived in Etten, the welcome to us Canadians was overwhelming. A brass band with about 25 instruments and drums played in front of the bus as we slowly went through the town to our destination. People lined the streets and waived Canadian flags to welcome us. After a week in Holland and some concerts and sightseeing tours we returned to Canada with many pleasant memories of this voyage. Two years later the Hereford Police Choir came to Canada and again with Georgetown, Achill and the Hereford Choir we performed at the "Ford Centre Of The Performing Arts, George Weston Recital Hall," a sold out concert, which was another highlight on our track record as a community choir. In 2002 at the 20th Anniversary of the Achill Choral Society a trip to Achill Island in Ireland was planned. The first settlers in the Hamlet of Achill came from this Island, hence the name Achill. In May 2002 we flew from Toronto to Belfast, where we were picked up by two Buses, which took us through Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland . We performed about 8 Concerts in 14 Days and we did a lot of sightseeing. Since then we have enjoyed a good reputation on our home turf and our aspirations are continuously reaching for higher goals and challenges.

I hope that this rough outline will give you some idea what went on before your time in the choir.

(original author unknown; lightly updated August 26, 2018)