



Adelines Sing of Convention (Miami News article, October 1957)

'Sweet Adelines' rebel at ruling barring Negroes

By Starr Cole
Citizen staff writer

When Ottawa's "Sweet Adelines"—female barbershop singers—meet tonight, they're not going to sound very sweet. At least half the 40 members are in revolt over a ruling from the International Sweet Adelines Inc., that a Negro housewife can no longer sing with them.

For the past year, the "Sweet Adelines" have made plea after plea to their Oklahoma-based advisory board to keep Mrs. Lana Clowes, a tenor, in the club. Over the weekend, however, they were given final notice. The bylaws are clear, they were instructed—"Sweet Adelines" all must be white.

Several resignations will be turned in tonight when the group meets for practice at the Ottawa Technical High School.

"I personally cannot go along with this," said Mrs. Beverley Perkins, of 32 Cantor Blvd. "There is no reason why we should be forced to abide by that regulation up here."

"Lana has a beautiful voice and she is an asset to the chorus. This is heart-breaking for all of us. It's hard to say how many of the girls are actually going to disassociate themselves tonight, but a good half of the girls are on Lana's side."

Ottawa Citizen, March 12, 1963

By-Law Amendment

It was moved by [redacted] that the Corporate By-Laws be amended by adding the word "white" before the word "women" in Article III, Section 1, and the word "white" before the word "woman" in Article IV, Section 1. The motion was seconded by [redacted] and carried. [redacted] and [redacted] cast dissenting votes.

It was moved by [redacted] that the word "white", as stated in the Corporate By-Laws, be defined as including women of the Caucasian, Oriental and Indian races. The motion was seconded by [redacted] and carried.

1957 Bylaw Amendment from May 1958 International Board of Directors Meeting Minutes



Tenor, Lana Clowes, third row, third from left, was welcomed by Ottawa, Canada, Sweet Adelines.



The Velvetones, a Harmony Inc. quartet; photo c. 1965. Left to right are former Sweet Adelines Ottawa Chapter members Olive Service, Lana Clowes, Carol Maize, and Jean Tanner.



Harmony Inc.'s Capital Chordettes (Ottawa, Ontario, Canada) with their first director, Lana Clowes in 1964.



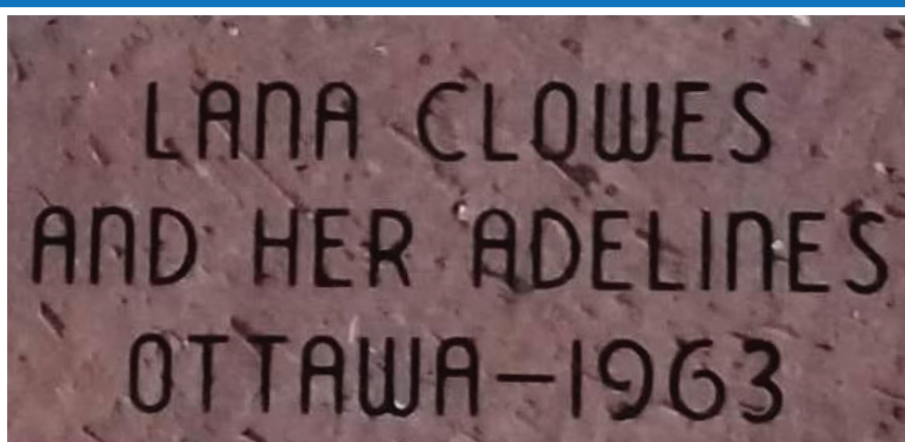
Lana Clowes playing the guitar.



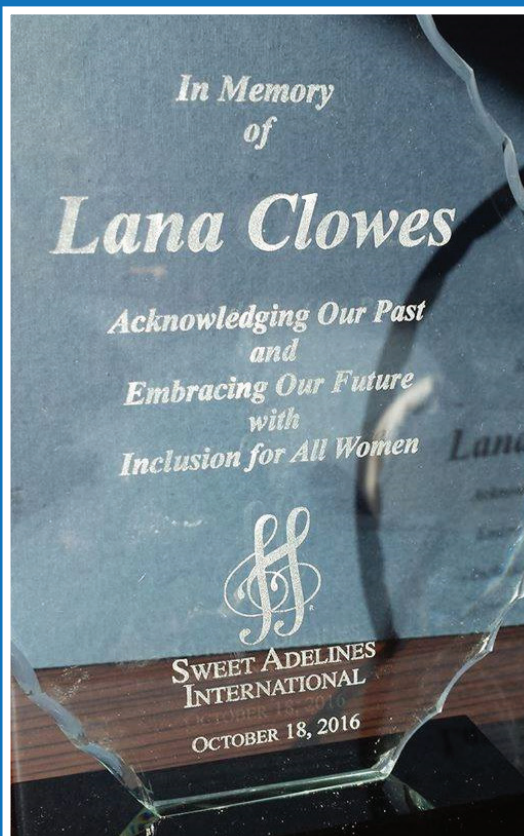
City of Gardens Chorus, Charter Photo, May 1967. Gloria Stone, second row, far left



City of Gardens Chorus, Region #13 Competition, April 1977. Gloria Stone, second row, far left



Commemorative brick for Lana Clowes at the Sweet Adelines International Headquarters office.



At the 2016 International Convention and Competition, Lana Clowes was posthumously awarded a Lifetime Membership to Sweet Adelines International. Her daughter, Valerie Clowes, accepted the membership award.

Sweet Adelines International Guiding Principles*

Culture of Belonging:

We create harmony where every voice matters. We foster a culture that provides a joyful place to share our uniqueness within a global community united in song.

Diversity & Inclusion:

We celebrate our differences as essential to the rich harmony that unites us. As we recognize barbershop's African American origins and learn from our exclusionary past toward women of color, we reject discrimination and unwaveringly strive toward greater awareness, openness, and understanding of each other.

*Complete Guiding Principles include Musical Excellence, Culture of Belonging, Diversity & Inclusion, Personal Empowerment & Leadership, and Outreach.

From Exclusion to Inclusion and Equity

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

1957

At the 11th Annual Sweet Adelines Convention, the outgoing board president announced the bylaws would be amended to restrict membership to only white women. Sweet Adelines defined this as "Caucasian, Oriental, or Indian." At the convention, members responded with "cries of approval" and "shouts of protest and of pain."¹ This action ran counter to changes in public laws to eliminate racial segregation. In the ensuing months, some members continued to challenge SA's formalized policy, others dropped out, and chapters split.² Noting that the amendment only formalized an already existing policy, Sweet Adelines proceeded with the racial exclusion amendment and required strict adherence by all chapters for the next eight years. In 1959, former Sweet Adelines' members founded Harmony Inc. as an organization with "Outstretched hands to every race and creed."

1963

Lana Clowes was a musician all her life. She played the violin, guitar, hand percussion instruments, ukulele, banjo, piano (self), recorders, and performed with her choir at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. Lana was a wonderful teacher to thousands of students in the Carleton Board 1968 to 1994. Around 1961, Lana was invited to sing with Sweet Adelines' Ottawa Chapter. Lana sang with the chorus for about a year. By March 1963, Sweet Adelines' headquarters learned of Lana singing with the chapter. The Ottawa Chapter made plea after plea to their Oklahoma-based advisory board to "keep Mrs. Lana Clowes, a tenor, in the club."³ Presented with the opportunity to reconsider the policy, to again consider the human impact of this decision and live up to its motto, Sweet Adelines' headquarters refused to approve membership for Lana on any level. One Ottawa Chapter member told a journalist: "Lana has a beautiful voice and she is an asset to the chorus. This is heart-breaking for all of us."⁴ Many members of the Ottawa Chapter resigned and other Canadian Sweet Adelines voiced their objection to the policy. Lana and several of the Ottawa Chapter members joined Harmony Inc. and Lana became director of Harmony Inc.'s Capital Chordettes.

1966

In the year that Sweet Adelines removed the racial restriction from its bylaws (1966), Gloria Stone was invited to become part of a newly forming Sweet Adeline chorus in Victoria, Canada. Gloria joined City of Gardens Chorus (now known as Pacific Edge Chorus) and had a "joyful, wonderful, glorious" Sweet Adelines experience that lasted for 13 years with the chorus and continued on for years with members of an "alumni" chorus. Here are some words from Gloria about her experience with Sweet Adelines:

"I was working in 1966 and at work one day I saw a lady writing on a blackboard about joining a singing group and she said 'whoever wants to join just write your name down and someone will pick you up.' The group formed in 1967 and we chartered with 27 members."

"I sang lead and sometimes bari if they didn't have enough parts because I had taken voice training so I understood the part. Most of the time we made our own costumes. I could sew so I could make my own. Everybody would get together and we'd help each other make the costumes together."

"Competition was one of the nicest parts because you got to meet women you never knew before. It was just lovely and joyous. I can never forget that."

"We performed a lot. We performed in nursing homes and sang in theaters and did lots of shows and we always had a full crowd."

"I was a member from '67 until around 1980 and then I joined the alumni chorus. We always had a good time. We had a happy time, a joyous time. I was sad when I had to stop singing because I enjoyed it so much. I always keep Sweet Adelines in my prayers."

2016

In 2016 a diverse group of women banded together to purchase a commemorative brick that rests on the patio at Sweet Adelines' headquarters. The words on this commemorative brick are "Lana Clowes and Her Adelines - Ottawa 1963." Following placement of this brick, and after strong encouragement from Sweet Adelines members from different regions, Lana Clowes was awarded posthumous lifetime membership at the Sweet Adelines International 70th Annual Convention and Competition in Las Vegas 2016. Fifty-three years after Sweet Adelines refused any level of membership for Lana, her daughter, Valerie Clowes, accepted the membership award.

Following this public acknowledgement of this period of racial restriction, a Diversity and Inclusivity Task Force was formed with the mandate to "provide input for the SA long-term strategic planning process and develop short-term tools to support diverse and inclusive membership in Sweet Adelines International." To inform the organizational strategic planning process, at a 2018 Visioning Retreat attended by the International Board of Directors and a representative group of members, a series of Guiding Principles were created that included Diversity and Inclusion and a Culture of Belonging. Born out of these Guiding Principles, in 2020 the International Board of Directors announced changes to competition rules prohibiting the performance of songs with racial lyrics, messages, or history. A team of skilled members was brought together and with the use of a Song Assessment Tool developed by the Diversity and Inclusivity Task Force, they began providing assistance to members in determining whether or not a song is admissible for performance by Sweet Adelines based on racist characteristics. To further support the organization in creating an inclusive environment and recruiting a diverse membership, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council will provide permanent stewardship of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and ensure these topics remain priorities for Sweet Adelines International.

While much work remains to be done, Sweet Adelines International is committed to creating an organization where all members feel welcome and we can truly "Harmonize the World."

1 Prelude to Harmony: Chapter 1, "Our Rich History", Harmony, Inc.
2 Id.
3 Ottawa Citizen - March 12, 1963, "Sweet Adelines rebel a ruling barring Negroes"
4 Id.