

ACDA Archives at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign: Not-So-Hidden Treasures

by Hilary Apfelstadt

In January 2022, the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, housed at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), acquired archival material from the American Choral Directors Association's (ACDA) national office in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Prior to that time, I served as ACDA's interim executive director from September 2020 to September 2021, and one of my responsibilities was to help direct the disposition of materials housed in the national headquarters. Not only were they taking up valuable space, but they were somewhat inaccessible to researchers. It occurred to the Executive Committee at the time that at least some of the holdings should be in a university library where they would be safely stored yet accessible to people interested in the materials.

In addition to records of national conferences and correspondence with regions, as well as multiple copies of past *Choral Journals*, ACDA had received items from the estates of outstanding choral leaders such as Elaine Brown, Walter Collins, Harold Decker, Colleen Kirk, Robert Shaw, and Fred Waring, among others. Among the documents were examples of teaching materials such as syllabi for conducting and choral literature courses, marked scores used for personal analysis and teaching purposes, copies of concert programs, and performing editions. Looking at the materials in person provides fascinating insights into the minds of some of the American choral profession's leaders from

many decades ago, and holds research potential for contemporary scholars interested in the history of our field and, in particular, the musical approaches of these luminaries.

When I started working at ACDA in September 2020, the archives were housed on the second floor of the national office building in Oklahoma City. At one point we had a full-time archivist, Dr. Christina Prucha, now head of collection services at the University of Portland Library, who did a wonderful job cataloging and organizing the materials. It was she who provided the index we shared with the University of Illinois archivist, Scott Schwartz, when we proposed sending them to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and that index proved very helpful. After Christina left ACDA, there was no full-time archivist hired, and the work was absorbed tangentially into the jobs of other employees. We continued to acquire materials from conferences, issues of the *Choral Journal*, and occasional donations, but without one person overseeing things, the archives were in limbo of sorts.

As a former member of the Research and Publications Committee, I was determined that we not lose valuable archival materials, and in October 2020, sought the advice of Dr. Marvin Latimer, the author of *Excellence in Choral Music: A History of the American Choral Directors Association* (Hinshaw Music Pub.), and Dr. John Silantien, then chair of the Research & Publica-

tions Standing Committee. Dr. Latimer suggested some materials could be digitized, some disposed of (i.e., duplicates), and others donated to a university library. We also consulted with Dr. Christina Prucha. Dr. Latimer recommended we invite Dr. Silantien to Oklahoma City to examine the archives and help us decide how to manage the holdings. That visit took place in April 2021, resulting in recommendations for what could be shredded (e.g., outdated financial records), what should be saved in the national office (e.g., materials related to ACDA conference history), and what should be saved in historical archives (e.g., materials donated by well-known choral musicians such as Walter Collins and Elaine Brown).

We decided to keep the Division (now “Region”) Collection and the National Conference Collection in Oklahoma City, and to move materials pertaining to specific choral conductors and conducting pedagogy to the University of Illinois. Dr. Harold Decker, national president of ACDA from 1966 to 1968, founded the country’s first doctoral program in choral conducting there in 1958.¹

It seemed the most appropriate site to house the ACDA archives; so, with the help of Dr. Andrea Solya, now director of choral activities at UIUC, I began discussions with Scott Schwartz, director and archivist for music and fine arts. Because of the level of organization already existent in the archives (thanks to Dr. Prucha), the proposal received a positive review, and by January 2022, the materials were on their way. I am grateful to the work that Dr. Brent Ballweg, then associate director of ACDA, did to facilitate the move.

The Collection

Once the materials arrived in Illinois, Scott Schwartz and his assistants had considerable work to do to integrate the materials into the collection there. Space constraints mean that not everything is on site; when someone wants to see something in the collection, one must make a formal request online so the materials can be retrieved and brought to the Sousa Archives space on campus. That fact is clearly indicated on the website. There are two ways to access a description of the materials, either through the ACDA website (www.acda.org) or by going directly to the UIUC site. On the ACDA website, look for “archives collections” under the “Re-

sources” tab for a complete description of the holdings and a link to the University of Illinois archives website.² Scan the QR code to visit the digital archives.



On this website, the description of the collection reads as follows:

Consists of correspondence, programs, lectures, photographs, research files, newsletters, newspaper clippings, sound recordings, meeting minutes, awards, publications, music scores and parts, and personal papers documenting the careers of major American choral directors and leaders of the American Choral Directors Association between the 1950s and 2000.

Detailed Description

Record Group 1:
Harold A. Decker Papers and Recordings,
1902–2009

Record Group 2:
Colleen J. Kirk Papers and Sound Recordings,
1949–2003

Record Group 3:
Russell Mathis Papers,
1960–1977

Record Group 4:
L. Stanley Glarum Papers and Audio Recordings,
1930–1977

Record Group 5:
Morris D. Hayes Papers and Realia,
1956–1991

Record Group 6:
Elwood Keister Papers,
1958–1995

Record Group 7:
Ferenc Farkas Collection,
1933–2001

Record Group 8:
Charles C. Hirt Papers,
1923–2001

Record Group 9:
Walter S. Collins Papers,
1940–1996

Record Group 10:
Elaine Brown Music and Papers,
1880–2005

Record Group 11:
Fred Waring Collection,
1937–1997

Record Group 12:
F. Melius Christiansen Choral Scores,
1918–1954

Record Group 13:
Robert Shaw Collection,
1954–2005

Record Group 14:
Robert and Ellis Snyder Choral Library
and Personal Papers,
1935–1999

Record Group 15:
Small Collections,
1893–2006

Each group number on the website includes a link, which leads to a very detailed list of contents of boxes and their folders. For example, clicking on the link for “Record Group 15” yields the following information:



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Following this is a list of materials in each series.

Collectively, the ACDA archives comprise a wealth of information about leading choral conductors who developed the profession throughout the country—conductors, teachers, advocates, leaders—and a rich resource for choral researchers. When I had the opportunity to examine materials in depth, I was fascinated to examine score markings of Elaine Brown, for example. In 1948 she founded The Singing City in Philadelphia; her goal was to form an integrated community choir for avocational singers. Everyone was welcome

regardless of race, religion, or gender. Ms. Brown was a pioneer, both as a female conductor, and also as someone championing diversity and inclusion long before it became a collective goal of our profession. On her scores, she wrote the number of syllables in phrases, a strategy that clarified the phrase structure; she showed phrases with simple brackets and arcs; she included contextual information about the composers and the titles; she added some dynamic shadings and harmonic detail. She included word-by-word translations for foreign languages. Everything she wrote on the scores served the purpose of highlighting musical detail and showed her meticulous thinking process.³

Charles Hirt, who served as ACDA national president from 1970 to 1972 and taught at the University of Southern California, was known for his excellent musicianship, his scholarship, and his leadership. He kept detailed records about ACDA business as well as about his various conducting appearances, including correspondence and programs. Looking at the latter reveals a philosophy of programming that was prominent in our profession for many decades, one that highlighted the importance of the western choral canon but also championed contemporary composers of the time. And looking at the range of events, both domestic and international, at which Charles Hirt was asked to present and/or conduct gives a sense of the enormous impact he had on the profession. In addition to teaching materials, there are examples of his writing and copies of scores.

Harold Decker's materials include copies of dissertations by his advisees, as well as one from the University of Miami (Coral Gables) by James Ewing about Elaine Brown: "Elaine Brown and the Singing City: The Choral Art as a Communicative Social Force" (1976). Several of the documents reflect Decker's own interest in twentieth-century composers. As founder of the country's first DMA choral conducting program, Decker had many ideas about what constituted appropriate study and performance materials, and these alone are worthy of examination. His class notes are extensive and detailed, and there are numerous materials pertaining to his service in ACDA. Concert programs, tour materials, and scores comprise multiple boxes. In looking through a number of his scores, I noted that some of these were marked sparingly but with helpful notes.

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In Tallis's forty-voice motet, *Spem in Alium*, for example, Decker mapped the score with cues and placement of voices in the eight choirs.

Robert Shaw's materials comprise ten boxes that include scores edited by Mr. Shaw for the Atlanta Symphony Chorus as well as many marked by his copyist, Harold Keuper. Seeing the latter brought back personal memories about my experiences singing with the Robert Shaw Festival Singers in France and in the United States. We worked from copies of those meticulously marked scores that included part transfers between S2 and A1, for example, or T1 and A2. As a young professional, I recall the experience of learning how to balance an ensemble by moving voices among the parts rather than simply relying on dynamic changes within sections. By doubling an alto line with some T1s, Shaw was able to highlight a soloistic line by brightening the color and bringing the part into prominence. It seems a simple concept now, but at the time, it was a novel idea to me and one I adopted to good effect.

Archival Display

In October 2023, UIUC hosted the Illinois ACDA chapter's annual fall conference, for which Scott Schwartz and his assistants put together an archival display that was housed in the lobby of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts on campus (Photos 1-3). In the regular updates on the Sousa Archives website, Mr. Schwartz posted an article about the display.⁴ The description included this information:

The Sousa Archives' latest exhibition, "Singing Cities: American Choral Directors Leading the Nation in Song," which opened last week at the University of Illinois' Krannert Center for the Performing Arts for the American Choral Directors Association's (ACDA) 2023 Conference, has been moved to the Center for the rest of the school year. The Sousa Archives acquired the ACDA archives in January 2022.

During the Great Depression and World War II, American audiences listened and danced to Big Band performances. But during the post-war period, many Americans began listening to



Photo 1. Robert Shaw display

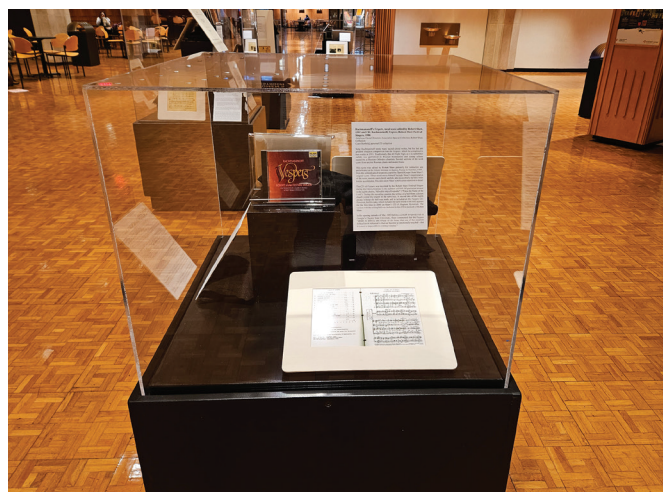


Photo 2. Robert Shaw display



Photo 3. Elaine Brown display

more choral music. People celebrated the war's end by communal singing in churches, and in community, high school, college, and professional choirs.

Americans were already listening to choirs on weekly radio programs like Fred Waring & the Pennsylvanians. During the late 1960s, Robert Shaw's Choir in Atlanta became popular. The Winter Olympic Committee selected Charles Hirt, a choral director from Los Angeles, to direct a choir at the 1960 Olympics in Squaw Valley, California. Following this, Walt Disney asked Hirt to conduct a series of concerts at Disneyland's Main Square USA in the early 1960s.

Nearly fifteen years before the Civil Rights movement gained national visibility, Elaine Brown, the director of Singing Cities in Philadelphia, included African Americans in her choir. Brown was also the director of choral music at Temple University, one of many universities where choral music grew in importance.


Meanwhile at the University of Illinois, Harold Decker established the first doctoral degree program for choral conducting, causing Decker and the University of Illinois to become leaders in the movement to educate generations of choral directors.

This exhibit highlights the work of four of America's leading 20th-century choral directors who shaped the nation's choral music traditions: Robert Shaw, Elaine Brown, Harold Decker, and Charles Hirt.

Conclusion

The ACDA Archives housed at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign provides a wealth of artifacts and information that sheds light on our profession and some of its outstanding luminaries of the twentieth century. Many of these people not only set high standards for choral music but also served ACDA in leadership roles as national presidents and conductors of perform-

ing choirs. Several of them taught generations of choral musicians, both directly and indirectly, and had powerful and lasting influence. There is a plethora of potential research topics for scholars, and I encourage our membership to investigate.

In addition, according to Scott Schwartz, the archivist, "The Center [for American Music] will consider adding other significant conductors' papers to our collections if they have a direct national connection to the work of ACDA, while other conductors' papers might be better suited in appropriate regional archives that best reflect those individuals' contributions at a regional level." Sometimes universities will house materials of distinguished graduates, for example. For questions about the ACDA Collection, please contact the UIUC Sousa Archives staff directly at sousa@illinois.edu. 

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NOTES

¹ For detailed information on the context of this program, see Marvin E. Latimer, "The Nation's First D.M.A. in Choral Music: History, Structure, and Pedagogical Implications," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 32, no. 1 (2010): 19–36. A more recent document about the program is Andrew Bruhn's 2023 DMA dissertation, "The History of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Graduate Choral Music Program, 1958–2023."

² <https://archon.library.illinois.edu/archives/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=13001&q=AC-DA+archives>

³ Readers may be interested in Janet Yamron and Sonya Garfinkle, "Elaine Brown: Breaking Down Barriers through Song," *Choral Journal* 58, no 5 (December 2017): 24–32.

⁴ <https://www.library.illinois.edu/sousa/2023/10/25/new-sousa-archives-exhibit-opens-today-at-the-krannert-center/>