

Choir members royally entertained in Holland

By BILL HYDE
Herald Special

Going Dutch for Georgetown and Achill choir members means a warm, generous and superbly well organized people for whom "No problem," means just that. During

the recent visit to Holland, the 108 people from the two choirs were impressed, touched and royally entertained by members of the hosting Ettens Mennchoor. The friendships which were forged over the ten days of meals, parties, local visits and singing were

glorious. The trip had three components.

Being pampered tourists was the first component. The hosts made the tourist feel at home from the beginning. They ferried their guests from home to bus stop and returned, often late at night, to pick up their charges. The touring was interspersed with a very full musical program so the organization to get two bus loads to the same place, from homes within a 50-km radius of Ettens, was substantial. Each hosting family had a critical path plan, with precise time schedules, over which they pored every night. There were no hitches and even substantial changes were updated almost immediately with a revision.

The scheduling allowed the Canadian visitors to see the blaze of color, tulips and azelias et al in full bloom, at the Keukenhof, the Old Dutch Village at Arnhem and the countryside in short trips, with hosts, on Sundays and holidays. The windmills were everywhere helping to keep the polder, reclaimed land, free and adding the water medium to so many Dutch landscapes.

The second component was the sound. The medieval churches trap sound and swirl it around, like wine tasters, but then echo it back in 3 to 5 second lags. It's a challenge for conductor and organist, which, once mastered, gives that cathedral sound with its infinite variety of tones and volume. The choir sung four concerts and had a day of recording in St. Joris Kerk, Amersfoort, Restoration vintage. Concert stages were shared with

the local Mannenchoor, usually our hosts from Ettens. The very kind Dutch were most responsive even standing and applauding as the Canadian choir entered. The final number in each concert was a setting of The Wilhelmus and Oh Canada, by our own Willem van Suydam. The choristers were never far from tears as the audience joined in the singing and raised the noise level by another 100 decibels.

The singing became a reinforcement and a bridge for the third component, let's call it heart. The Canadian choir took the trop up the hill from Arnhem, at Grosbeek, and visited the Canadian Cemetery. It is a quiet, majestic place where the graves stand like sentinels guarding the tranquility of the place. The focal point is the cross which quietly embraces the fallen. The choir placed the Legion's wreath and stood awed by the sadness, even over the 45 year gap. The blooms again were reminders that the victims were in the spring of their lives when they were cut down, the worst time to die but the best time to honor their memory.

The wise and proud Dutch, caught by history between large countries, take no chances. Their Remembrance Day May 5 is

followed by the Celebration of Liberation on May 6. The Remembrance Day services were ecumenical, and for the visiting Canadians, said easily in Dutch and English, as though language could never be a barrier or a hurdle. The congregation then filed quietly to the local cemetery, where many Allied fighting men were buried. Amid the blossoms and peeping tulips, the Last Post and Long Reveille echoed hauntingly around the cemetery.

The next day, the flags were moved to full staff and the celebrations started. The festivities celebrated youth and the potential for growth in converting information for use. It was a good time, celebrated nationally, with services and music to keep memories fresh in the minds of those who lived through those sad days and those who must know them from the tears of their parents, and grandparents. It's a good way of carrying on an important tradition and a powerful stimulant for the choirs, as Canadians wrestle with their own divisions.



The Georgetown Choral Society recently toured Holland, laying a wreath at the Canadian cemetery. Here, four past and current presidents of the Georgetown Choral Society, Paulette Thibeault, Barbara Koszler, Fan Oldaker and Bill Hyde, take a leisure break at Arnhem Village. (Photo submitted)

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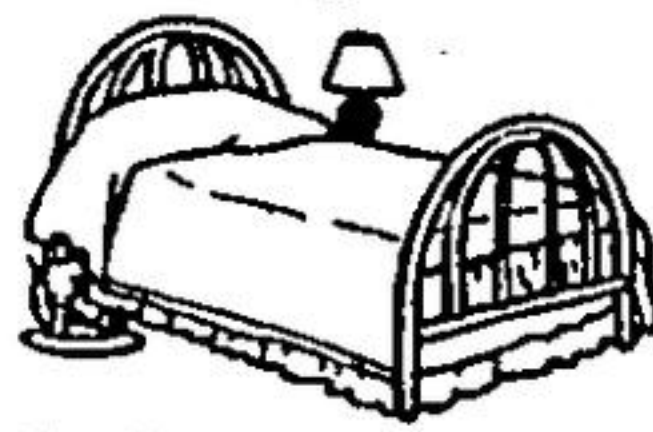


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