



Ahoskie Men's Chorus inspired by local woman

By Clarence S. Newsome
Centennial Education Committee

AHOSKIE — A group of men from Ahoskie and the surrounding communities met in February, 1969, to form what became known as the Ahoskie Men's Chorus.

The genesis of the organization was inspired and initiated by Mrs. Eliza Y. Jenkins, who, of her own intrinsic motivation, undertook the challenge of becoming the instrumentalist and director of the group for as long as it was active.

Little did the members know, at the beginning, that they would like what was started as much as they did, as time unfolded.

Original members of the chorus included:

First tenors: A.T. Canady, Louis E. Newsome, Godwin B. White and C.S. Yeates Jr.

Second tenors: William Bazemore Jr., George Harrell, Henry Lee Jones, Charles H. Peele and Robert Ward.

First basses: Clarence S. Newsome, Aaron Peele and John Sesoms.

Second basses: Raymond Grant, William Jones, Hawley J. Newsome, Willie Little, Raymond Robinson and Malachi Staten.

The chorus entertained from 1969 to 1991 when adverse circumstances forced a suspension in its performances.

The first appearance of the chorus was before a group of area ministers. It was well received; and from that first assignment on March 19, 1969, it moved steadily forward in building a repertoire and filling additional engagements.

The chorus appeared at many gatherings, including the National Elks Convention in Philadelphia; WTAR (Norfolk, Va.) and WTTN (Washington, N.C.) television shows; the Scope in Norfolk;

churches in Elizabeth City, Suffolk, Va., and Portsmouth, Va.; Chowan College in Murfreesboro; the Gallery Theatre in Ahoskie; and most of the area schools and churches.

The first president of the chorus was Raymond Robinson.

Through the years, death claims the lives of many original members. However, with replacements and the dedication of surviving members, the chorus continued to provide a service of music whenever possible — until adverse circumstances in 1991 forced the group into inactive status indefinitely.

The last person to serve as president was William D. Jones.

The Ahoskie Men's Chorus solicited and received abundant support and encouragement in its effort to make life a little better through music.

Helping Mrs. Jenkins was director and instrumentalist was Clarence S. Newsome as assistant director.

Ahoskie Men's Chorus

Charter members of the Ahoskie Men's Chorus in 1967 were (front row, from left) A.T. Canady, Godwin White, Mrs. E.Y. Jenkins, Charles H. Peele and George Harrell; (middle row) Henry L. Jones, Clarence S. Newsome, Raymond Grant, C.S. Yeates Jr., Aaron Peele and Malachi Staten;

and (top row) William Bazemore Jr., John Sesoms, Robert Ward, Willie Little, William Jones and Raymond Robinson. Not pictured were Hawley J. Newsome and Louis E. Newsome. Mrs. Jenkins organized the chorus. (Photo courtesy of Clarence S. Newsome)

Believe it or not! 'USS Ahoskie' exists as large Navy tug

By Ramona S. Goode
Retired News Editor

Yes, Ralph, there is a ship named *USS Ahoskie*.

There is a distinct possibility that some might not refer to it as a ship, because it is designated YTB (Large Harbor Tug) 804 by the Navy.

The fact there is such a boat came to light in a rather unique and unusual way.

Back in August, 1978, Ralph Basnight and his wife were on a tour of Ireland with some University of North Carolina alumni.

While in a large Irish department store, Switzer and Company Ltd., he was waiting "patiently" for his wife to buy some material and was browsing around when he saw three young Irish boys looking at some patches.

"I noticed one of them, the smallest one, had a Navy patch of some type on his shoulder that read *USS Ahoskie*," Basnight explained.

Irish boys wear patch

Basnight stopped the boy and asked him where he got the patch. His older brother said he got it in Germany for his young brother.

"The older youth first told me the patch was bought in Germany," he said.

Basnight said he explained to the boys that Ahoskie was his hometown of approximately 5,000 people.

"I even showed them my driver's license to show that I had not made up the story. They weren't too impressed," Basnight said with a laugh.

Basnight said the boys could not tell him what type of ship it was or why they bought that particular patch.

"I thought about asking him if I could buy the patch but then decided I would not," Basnight said.

He did not give the matter much more thought, he said, until he arrived home and mentioned it to Joe Parker, then the publisher of *The News-Herald* and other area non-daily newspapers.

Search for ship

Then the search was on. With the help of a staff reporter, it was learned that a publication, called *Jane's Fighting Ships*, listed all such vessels that had been constructed.

With the assistance of Louise Boone, director of the Albemarle Regional Library, it was soon discovered that there actually was and is a ship by the name of *USS*

Ahoskie.

Constructed by Peterson Builders Inc., the keel for the tug was laid June 6, 1970, at Sturgeon Bay, Wis. It was later launched on Jan. 14, 1969. The *USS Ahoskie* was delivered to the Navy on July 10, 1970.

Then a call was made to the naval base at Norfolk, Va., where Commander Jerry Pope said he would give all of the assistance that he could. Later a telephone call was received from Carl Nandrasny, deputy public affairs officer at the Charleston (S.C.) Naval Base.

Ship found at Charleston

"Yes, there is a *USS Ahoskie* and it is now in service here in Charleston," he said.

Asked where the name originated, Nandrasny said he did not know but that all naval tugs were named for small Indian tribes.

The *USS Ahoskie* is one of the 83 largest harbor tugs in the Navy. In addition to it, there are four other YTBs assigned to the Service Craft Branch in the Port Services Department at the Charleston Naval Base.

The primary mission of the *USS Ahoskie* is to assist in mooring and unmooring Naval ships entering and leaving the Naval station in the Cooper River, which is adjacent to the naval base, and in their docking and unloading at the shipyard.

YTB-804 displaces 350 tons fully loaded, is 109 feet long and 35 feet abeam and has a draft of 13.6 feet.

Propelled by one 10-cylinder Fairbanks-Morse diesel engine that drives the single shaft and propeller, she has a 2,000-gallon-per-minute fire pump that is used to fight fires on other ships and at piers.

Her crew of seven is headed by a chief boatswain's mate, Christopher C. Elmore of Blytheville, Ark. Rated as a tugmaster-craftmaster, Elmore is a Navy veteran of 18 years and has commanded the *USS Ahoskie* for 18 months.

The remainder of the crew is made up of two engineers, an electrician, a fireman, a cook and a seaman. The seaman, Michalia Runica, is a woman.

The YTB-804 has living quarters for 10 persons and a galley (kitchen) where meals are prepared for the crew while the ship is at sea.

Editor's note: A copy of this article as it appeared in the Nov. 8, 1978 issue of *The News-Herald* was supplied by Mrs. Martha Hope Basnight Smith.

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