

The Tale of the Red Derby

by Mark A. Nedel

Edmund Duplaga, is one of four members of our chapter that have been elected to the Johnny Appleseed Hall of Fame (1960). He is also the wearer of the "Red Derby," for which our chapter has become famous throughout the society. Although our chapter originally took its nickname (the Derbytown Chorus) from the association with Akron, and the "All American Soap Box Derby", (which has not set well with Soap Box Derby officials), Ed's chapeau has increasingly become the symbol that we identify ourselves with. Allow me to present a bit of biography that will explain the origins of the hat, and reveal some of the accomplishments of this august member of our society.

Ed was born on July 4th, 1920, and grew up in Tiltonsville, Ohio where he was valedictorian of his high school class, and a member of the National Honor Society. He was a 1942 graduate of Ohio State University, with a Bachelors degree in Chemical Engineering. His first job out of college was with the Hercules Powder Company (of Baraboo, Wisconsin), which manufactured smokeless propellant for 30 & 50 caliber ammunition. He was a technical supervisor with 220 to 250 people under his jurisdiction. One of these was a young college student named Dorothy Ann Burdick, from Reedsburg, Wisconsin, who came to work for Ed as a chemistry technician. They were married March 4th, 1944.

Among his other accomplishments in 1944, Ed, became a charter member of the newly formed Baraboo, WI. chapter of S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A. After only a few months, Ed, and Dorothy Ann, moved to Ohio in 1945, settling in Akron where Ed found work at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. He stayed there until retirement in 1980 as Senior Research Engineer. Ed holds 21 patents.

Ed, transferred his membership to the Akron chapter in 1945. Here again he was in on the ground floor. The Akron chapter was first formed on February 6th, 1945, with Bill Friedman, as President and H. A. Mathews, as Secretary/Treasurer. The membership was ten men. Their charter was granted on July 12th, 1945, and they were incorporated as a non-profit organization on July 17th, 1948.

Ed, has worn many "hats" since then as: secretary, bulletin editor, vice-president and president of the chapter. He spent several years on the executive board, various committees (many of which he chaired), and was annual show chairman several times. He served as general chairman for two J.A.D. contests hosted by the chapter, and was selected as chapter Barbershopper Of The Year, in 1962. (Now here's where we branch out.)

In the Johnny Appleseed District, he served as area counselor for 3 yrs. , Leadership Development 1 yr.; Vice-Pres. 2 yrs. , "First" Vice-Pres. 1 yr. & District Pres. 2yrs. . On to International Board member, representing the J.A.D. 1962-64; B.O.T.Y. for J.A.D. (1960) & charter member of J.A.D. Hall of Fame (1960).

He became certified as secretary in the judging program, at mid-winter convention in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1960, and later certified in chairman category. Served as Secretary and up to Asst. Chairman International Contest & Judging committee. He is Past Chairman of the Johnny Appleseed District Contest & Judging committee, and has served on countless judging panels in various districts, and on International Contest Panels (12 years in succession). In 1992, Ed, became a Judge Emeritus.

His "claim to fame" as he puts it, is his bright red derby, which he wears to all contests and conventions, and for many years has been an integral part of the international contest. It started out as a chance thing when the panel needed a hat to draw out of, to pick the final order of the contestants for competition, and has since become a tradition at International contest.

Concerning the origin of the lid, Ed, tells that in 1950, the Lorain "Hi Chords", (the 1950 District Champs), had an engagement at a "gay 90's" bash put on by Goodyear. They asked him to represent them, so he went along as business manager. Everyone who attended the party was given a red paper mache derby as a party favor. Ed started wearing his in 1956 as general chairman of the first of the two (the second was in 1973) J.A.D. contests hosted by the Akron chapter, and has been wearing one ever since. At one point the chapter had an "Ed Duplaga Day". He says they walked him into the room, and between two lines of barbershoppers, who all wore red "felt" derbys. As he walked down the line, the members stacked their hats on his head. At the end of the line, he had a huge armload of derbys, many of which he still has today.

Somewhere along the line, Ed, was given a real scarlet red derby to wear by Bob Bachman. Apparently he figured if Ed was going to represent the chapter, he might as well do so in style, with some quality headgear. So if you ever spy a red derby at a convention, go up and introduce yourself to Ed. He'd like to make your acquaintance.