

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

1926 - 1976

READING MUSIC TEACHERS
ASSOCIATION

THE HISTORY OF RMTA

1926 - 1976

When the history of an organization is to be written, no better beginning can be made than to refer to the recorded minutes of its meetings. Therefore, the following is the re-written minutes of the first meeting of a group of music teachers whose names may be remembered by some of us today; others are long forgotten.

"On Friday evening September 13, 1926, twenty-five (25) music teachers of Reading met at the home of George D. Haage, 226 S. 5th St., for the purpose of forming an organization to be known as the Music Teachers Association of Reading.

The purpose of such an organization would be to raise the position of the music teaching profession to a higher degree of public recognition and to afford protection of the proper rights and interests of those engaged in the music teaching profession.

Chester Wittell acted as Chairman of the meeting and Margaret Zell Nagle recorded the minutes.

Mr. Wittell introduced Mr. Haage, who gave a talk on the purpose of such an organization and what it should stand for in the community. Mr. Haage stressed the point that the organization should be formed not for the purpose of changing individual methods of teaching, but that the members get together to discuss matters of vital interest to the profession. Mr. Haage also mentioned the "missed lesson" problem as one of the matters which might be solved by such an organization. The principle of ethics was discussed.

Officers elected at this meeting were:

George D. Haage	President
Hans Nix	1st Vice President
Richard Wagner	2nd Vice President
Caroline Fox	Secretary
Russell Heilig	Treasurer

A Board of Directors was also elected:

Otto Wittich	Walter Heaton
Chester Wittell	M. Evelyn Essick
Helen Cleaver	Henry Miller
Winfield Biery	Harry Berlin

A Committee to draw up a tentative set of By-Laws was chosen. Members were:

Howard Keehn	Ruth Kitzmiller
Carroll Hartline	George DeHart
Harold Dorwin	

Then followed the reading of the names of all music teachers who had been notified of the meeting. New names were added to the list. The question of an initiation fee and dues was brought up, but the decision was left until the following meeting.

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Caroline Fox, Recording Secretary."

The second meeting of the Association was held October 6, 1926, at Hagen's Music House and was attended by forty members. A temporary set of rules was read and discussed and a recommendation was made that a set of By-Laws be adopted.

Among the suggestions made at that time were:

1. that the membership be extended not only to Reading teachers but also to those living in the suburbs.
2. that a new member be accepted without having an examination, if vouched for by the Board of Directors.
3. that the Initiation Fee be \$10.00.

Also discussed at that time was the matter of adopting a minimum lesson fee. It was decided to adopt such a policy but an individual teacher could make an exception if he felt it was justified.

The question of missed lessons, one of the primary reasons for organizing, was discussed. A committee of three was appointed to visit the Reading School Board in an effort to bring about better cooperation between private music teachers and school teachers on the matter of pupils' detentions which interfered with private teachers' schedules.

From the above, one can see that there is nothing new, even fifty years later, with the problems faced by music teachers.

Continuing on through the minutes of those early years of formation, one can gather the following information:

In 1927, dues were set at \$5.00 per year. If a member withdrew from the Association, his Membership Certificate had to be returned.

In the period from 1927 to 1940, many famous people in the music world were guests of RMTA. Among them were:

James Francis Cooke, Editor of Etude Magazine
John Wummer, Flutist
Albertos Jonas, Pianist
Nicholas Douty

Dr. John Ersking
Edwin Fleischer
Harl MacDonald

Ellis Clark Hamman
Hans Kindler
Francis Eaton

In 1935 the Association undertook the project of establishing a Music Section in the Reading Public Library. By 1936 a Committee headed by Byron Nunemacher had catalogued over 500 items including biographies, histories, vocal music, operatic scores, organ and piano compositions.

In 1940 the original By-Laws were revised for the first time. One of the revisions established a committee to vote on applications for membership, instead of the Board of Directors.

In 1941, Leonard Liebling, Editor of Musical America, pianist, teacher and lecturer, was a guest of honor at a dinner meeting. He spoke of his personal contacts with great artists such as Rachmaninoff, Paderewski, Rosenthal, Hofmann and Gershwin.

During the years of World War II, the Association's activities settled down to two meetings a year, Spring and Fall. Again, guest speakers were musically prominent people of that time. One outstanding experience occurred when the members were guests of Mr. Haage at an "after concert" supper, at which they met the American born violinist, Albert Spalding.

In 1945 many members attended a reception for the First Piano Quartet at the Rajah Theater. Two years later the Association paid tribute to M. Evelyn Essick on the 25th Anniversary of her service at Christ Episcopal Church.

On November 1, 1947 RMTA sponsored a testimonial dinner for its president, George D. Haage, who had served for 21 years. This was also the occasion to honor him for his contribution to Reading in presenting the leading concert artists of the world for forty years through the Haage Concerts.

Three of his former pupils, Mary Gaul Gale, Mary Spadafora Dornier, and Elizabeth Zug, provided a part of the entertainment for that evening.

The Association was fortunate during the following years to be addressed by many fine musicians who came to Reading as judges for the National Piano Guild auditions. Among the most notable were Arthur Hice, who was the teacher of David Garvey, a Reading-born pianist, who today is the accompanist for many great concert artists, one being Leontyne Price. Other judges included Dr. John Carre, Leo Podolsky, Rose Raymond, Thelma Callahan, Inez Palma, Barbara Lounsbury, and Dr. Iliff Garrison.

At a dinner meeting in 1956 Mr. Haage presented Peter LaManna, a Reading High School and Temple University graduate, who had been a member of the world famous Trapp Family Singers for three years. Peter recounted his experiences while touring in Australia, New Zealand and the Hawaiian Islands. Later he became an active member of RMTA.

One of the most ambitious undertakings of the Association in 1957 was the sponsoring of the State PMTA Convention, to be held in Reading, October 27 and 28. The following members were appointed to head committees:

William E. Maier	Honorary Chairman
George D. Haage	General Chairman
Ruth K. Snyder	Co-Chairman
Miriam Heisler	Program Chairman
Wilma Yoder	Luncheon & Banquet
Marguerite Scheifele	Publicity
Pearl Kahler	Registration
Norman Hiester	Hospitality
Richard Miller and Arthur Unger	Finance
Richard Miller	Printing
Grace Mease	Decorations.

Many committee meetings were held during that year to plan and prepare for the Convention to be held at the Berkshire Hotel. The schedule of events follows:

Sunday (pre-convention day)

Berks County Bus Tour
Dinner at Alsace Lutheran Church
Music Program at the Church

Monday

AM 9:30 Registration
9:30 - 11:00 Business Meeting
PM 2:00 - 4:00 Seminar: Alfred Mirovitch
4:30 - 6:00 Voice Clinic: Marian Freschel
8:00 "Amahl and the Night Visitors"
10:00 Party

Tuesday

AM 8:15 Breakfast for State Officers
9:30 Master Piano Class: Katharine Mason
PM 2:00 Recital: Katharine Mason
4:00 Seminar on Elementary Theory:
Mary Spayd, Temple University
7:00 Dinner: Edwin MacArthur, Speaker

All who attended felt rewarded inspirationally, were more knowledgeable, and grateful for the fellowship. Most gratifying to the Association was the fact that there was a deficit of only \$5.05.

It was around this time that fifteen members of RMTA were accepted into PMTA. They were:

Catherine Breedy
Angela Ganster
Miriam Heisler
Pearl Kahler
Richard Miller
Minnie Rowley
Marguerite Scheifele
Mrs. James Chatterton

Julia Elmer
George D. Haage
Norman Hiester
Peter LaManna
Grace Mease
Ruth Snyder
Arthur Unger

In 1958 RMTA and the Reading Music Club joined in a program to provide music and leadership of group singing for patients at the State Hospital, Wernersville. In September 1959, RMTA was invited to have representation on the Volunteer Council of the hospital. Accordingly, Miriam Heisler and Helen Smith were selected. This volunteer service to Wernersville State Hospital has gone on without interruption to the present time thanks to the dedication of just a few of our members.

Membership in PMTA benefitted the whole of RMTA because from time to time the various presidents of PMTA were guests at our dinners at which time they recounted the activities of the State Association, and brought valuable messages to us.

In April 1961, RMTA was asked again to sponsor the State Convention of PMTA in October of that year. The next six months were used to plan and coordinate the activities for the Convention. It proved a huge success. Among the notable speakers on the program were Julius Herford, Westminster Choir School, and Elaine Brown, Director of Singing City of Philadelphia. The musical entertainment was provided by Reading musicians, and by Louise Doschek of Pittsburgh.

At a later meeting it was announced that Miriam Heisler was named President of PMTA, and George D. Haage, Vice President. Our Association could be proud that two of its members were regarded so highly by the State Association.

On March 17, 1962, during a dinner meeting, Mr. Haage announced that he would contribute three \$500 scholarships to be awarded in the next three years. These scholarships were to be administered by the Association. Pupils seeking the award must be those of members of the Association and must offer assurance that they would follow a musical career by attending either a college or school of music. Miriam Heisler, Vice President, thanked Mr. Haage in the name of the members, for his generosity and encouragement of young musicians. The first audition winner was announced at the dinner meeting in May 1963. Kathleen Lignelli, pupil of Dorothy Bechtel, would enter Dayton College, Ohio.

On October 12, 1963, Mr. Haage hosted the dinner meeting for 34 members and guests in celebration of his 37th year as President. Many fine tributes were paid to him by members. One said, "I have a great feeling of love, affection and admiration for this fine musician-teacher and humanitarian; one who, with humbleness in his personality, is a great leader, organizer, and an inspiration".

Later that evening a new set of By-Laws were read and accepted.

The September 1964 meeting started in just about the same way as any other meeting over the many years. But then it happened! Mr. Haage announced that he would not run for re-election. He felt, after 38 years, it was time for someone else to take the reins. He would still be around to offer advice, if asked. With reluctance, his wish was accepted.

Miriam Heisler was elected President and Angela Ganster, Vice President.

Another surprising change was also to take place. Ruth

Snyder, who had been Recording Secretary for 31 years, and a member since its organization, asked to be relieved of her position. Richard Miller was elected in her place as Secretary. A motion was made, and duly passed, that Mr. Haage be made Honorary President, and Ruth Snyder an honorary member.

The newly elected officers established a new custom of having frequent Board Meetings, held during the morning, to plan future activities. One such activity, which was to prove very successful, was the series of student recitals held in January and February. One recital was for students of grade school age, the other for high school students. All recitalists were chosen by audition judges. These student recitals have continued, with slight variations, until the present time.

In January 1965, Mr. Haage announced that he had established a \$25,000 Trust Fund, to provide scholarships to be given for ten years after his death. The amount would be determined by the earnings of the Trust. Those eligible would be high school students from Berks County who would aspire to a music career by attending a music school or college. The arrangements were to be in charge of a Scholarship Committee of members of the Board of Directors, with Angela Ganster as Chairman. Recipients were to be chosen by neutral judges. The announcement of this Scholarship Plan was gratefully received by all RMTA members.

On May 6, 1966 the first multi-piano festival was held at Albright College Field House. This project was co-sponsored by RMTA and Zeswitz Music House which furnished 26 pianos for the occasion. Two hundred fifty pupils of all ages performed under the able direction of John Harrison, a member of RMTA. An audience of over 1200 enabled the Association to realize a profit of more than \$1200. The Board of Directors decided to set up a scholarship fund to follow the one recently announced by Mr. Haage. These multi-piano festivals were

repeated again in 1967, 1968 and 1970, thereby increasing the scholarship fund, although the profits dwindled each year and the availability of new music was increasingly difficult.

On December 8, 1966 the Association was greatly saddened by the sudden death of its founder, Dr. George D. Haage, at the age of 91. His passing was mourned not only by the members but by all of Berks County. He had done more to enhance the culture of this area, especially in the field of music, than any other citizen, up to this time.

The activities of RMTA continued to flourish despite the loss of its founder, thanks to the solid foundation he built. Plans were made to present Sylvia Szantos in a lecture-recital, performing the 24 Chopin Preludes.

In March 1968 the Association sponsored a lecture-recital by Julio Estaban, a faculty member of the piano department at Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. Mr. Estaban's topic was "Style in Musical Interpretation". The audience included teachers and advanced students, members of AGO, and Pottstown area teachers. This was an outstanding presentation, and long to be remembered by those who attended.

In May 1968 the first George D. Haage Memorial Scholarship audition, arranged by Angela Ganster, was held at the Wyomissing Institute of Fine Arts. The judges decided that an award of \$500 should be made to David B. Brown, organist; and \$350 to Kathy Barth, flutist. Scholarship awards have been made in May of each year up to the present time. As of this writing, there will be one more granted, that being given before December 8, which marks the termination of the Trust Fund. A compilation of winners and their awards can be found in the Addendum of this history.

On October 8, 1969 a meeting was held for RMTA members and high school music supervisors. This meeting stressed the need for cooperation between public schools and private studios. The problems and objections of each group were introduced. This cleared the atmosphere for more profitable processes of cooperation, which would produce beneficial results for the students.

In the Fall of 1970 a new project was initiated by the Association. A lecture-recital series was given over a period of four months by Benjamin Whitten, then Chairman of the Piano Department of West Chester State College. This proved very successful and was the beginning of other lectures given by Harvey Wedeen of Temple University, and William Fairlamb of Lebanon Valley College. These programs were continued through 1972-1973. In addition there were the continuing pupil recitals presented in the Spring by elementary and high school students.

June 1973 was the first representation of RMTA in the Berks Arts Festival. The Association sponsored an organ recital at Albright College Chapel by James Harrington who had been a Haage Scholarship winner in 1969.

In the Fall of 1973 lectures were given by William Gillock and Edna Mae Burnam. These were co-sponsored by Brown's and Eckert's Music Houses.

RMTA again participated in the 1974 Berks Arts Festival by presenting a group of young local artists, all of whom were pupils of RMTA members. They were:

John Cooper	Baritone Horn
James Keller	Oboe
Jonathan Reinhold	Baritone
Vicki Snyder	Soprano
Lisbeth Seleski	Piano
David B. Brown	Organ

Incidentally, three of these performers were winners of Haage Scholarships, namely: John Cooper, Lisbeth Seleski, and David B. Brown.

In 1974 the program committee planned and presented a lecture-recital by Sigurd Rascher, internationally known saxophonist. He was very well received by a large audience.

To meet present conditions, the By-Laws were again revised and updated in October 1974.

In January 1975 another "first" happened. Instead of pupils giving a recital, the teachers did! Featured was a program of ensemble playing of piano or instrumental music. Three pupil recitals also were presented that year - two solo recitals and one ensemble recital.

In 1976 the Association sponsored a joint recital by two scholarship winners: Peter Orth, pianist, and James Harrington, organist. This was given in December at Atonement Lutheran Church in Wyomissing, and was attended by a large audience.

At the election of officers during the Spring dinner meeting, the entire staff of officers was re-elected. It was said by the members present that this was their reward for having served so well in the past.

The Board of Directors continues to plan for the Fall dinner meeting in September 1976, to mark in a special way the 50th Anniversary of The Reading Music Teachers Association.

Historians: Ruth Snyder
Grace Mease
Editor: Drawdē Retsnag

ROSTRUM OF OFFICERS OF RMTA

1926 - 1976

President	George D. Haage	1926 - 1964
	Miriam Heisler	1964 - 1970
	Pearl Kahler	1970 - 1972
	Rachel Kooker	1972 - 1974
	Angela Ganster	1974 -
Vice President	Hans Nix	1926 - 1935
	Helen Cleaver	1935 - 1939
	Miriam Heisler	1939 - 1964
	Angela Ganster	1964 - 1970
	Elizabeth Homan	1970 - 1972
	Angela Ganster	1972 - 1974
2nd Vice President	Pearl Kahler	1974 -
	Richard Wagner	1926 - 1934
	Miriam Hompe	1934 - 1936
	Wilma Yoder	1936 -
	(discontinued until 1968)	
	Eugenia Matz	1968 - 1970
	Mary Wiltrout	1970 - 1971
	Angela Ganster	1971 - 1972
	Miriam Heisler	1972 - 1974
	Alma M. Dundore	1974 -
Recording Secretary	Caroline Fox	1926 - 1930
	Margaret Z. Nagle	1930 - 1933
	Ruth K. Snyder	1933 - 1964
	Richard Miller	1964 - 1966
	Mary Soper	1966 - 1970
	Grace Mease	1970 - 1974
	Annie McInnes	1974 - 1975
	Grace Mease	1975 -

Financial Secretary	Earl Bickel	1928 - 1937
	Arthur Unger	1937 - 1966
	Elizabeth Homan	1966 - 1970
	Vesta Minnich	1970 - 1974
	Susan Loch	1974 - 1975
Treasurer	Elizabeth Homan	1975 -
	Russell Heilig	1926 - 1935
	Carroll Hartline	1935 - 1939
	Minnie Rowley	1939 - 1962
	Pearl Kahler	1962 - 1968
	Marion Kelley	1968 - 1974
	David Bilger	1974 -

HONORARY MEMBERS

George D. Haage* - Honorary President
 Evelyn Essick
 John Harrison
 Minnie Rowley
 Marguerite Scheifele
 Kathryn Schnabel
 Ruth K. Snyder
 Richard Miller*

*deceased

HAAGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

1968

David B. Brown	Organ	Westminster Choir
Kathy Barth	Flute	Indiana University

1969

James Harrington	Organ	Oberlin Conservatory
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1970

Janine Hangen	Piano	Eastman School
Joan Wiest	Soprano	Indiana University

1971

Kim Feinauer	French Horn	Lebanon Valley
Lisbeth Seleski	Piano	Ithaca College

1972

Diana Heffner	Clarinet	New England Cons.
Peter Orth	Piano	Juilliard School

1973

John Cooper	Baritone Horn	Lebanon Valley
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1974

Walter Hollis	Saxophone	Hartford University
Robert Wisniewski	Organ	Lebanon Valley

1975

Ricky Merkel	Flute	Phila. Musical Acad.
Betty Leslie	Soprano	West Chester State

1976

Debra Schlegel	Organ	West Chester State
Mark Lawlor	Organ	Westminster Choir

To date, a total of \$8,000 has been awarded to sixteen winners.

PRESENT OFFICERS

President Angela H. Ganster

First Vice President Pearl A. Kahler

Second Vice President Alma M. Dundore

Recording Secretary Grace E. Mease

Financial Secretary Elizabeth M. Homan

Treasurer David V. Bilger

Immediate Past President Rachel L. Kooker