ABSTRACT

The Mystic Area Ecumenical Choir Festival, which began in 1968, is now in its 50th year. The festival is sponsored each year by the Mystic Area Ecumenical Council. The festival combines multi-generational choirs from numerous churches in and around the coastal villages of Noank and Mystic in Connecticut. Numerous nationally recognized choral directors, composers, and clinicians have been invited to guest conduct the choirs of the festival. For festival milestones, new choral pieces are commissioned.

This research project explores the history of church choirs in New England, beginning with mandated singing of metrical psalms, the singing schools which started in Boston, and the formation of the Handel and Haydn society of Boston and the Boston Academy of Music (which ultimately led to the development of music education in the Boston public schools.) College singing groups such as the Harvard University and Yale University Glee Clubs in the 19th century and an a cappella singing movement in the early 20th century also contributed fertile ground for formation of the Mystic Area Ecumenical Choir Festival in 1968.

This paper documents the history of the festival through five developmental periods including its leadership, both clergy and laity. A record of the prominent conductors of the festival is provided. Important music associated with the festival is detailed, as is significant information related to yearly planning. An analysis of transferrable characteristics of the Mystic Area Ecumenical Choir Festival is provided to potentially aid other communities in starting successful choir festivals.