

# Returning to the Birthplace of “The Four Freshmen”

By Kathy Barbour Feese

Although The Four Freshmen had played a few performances before September of 1948, their professional career began in earnest when they performed at “The 113 Club” in Fort Wayne, Indiana on September 28th, 1948.

After hiring an agent, Dick Sheldon, they secured their first real gig at “The 113 Club” in Fort Wayne. It was named for its location at 113 Washington Boulevard. They knew all their songs down cold, but the stage act was a little rough. The club owner, Mr. Walsh, was not impressed with their initial performance and wanted them gone! But his daughter, Paula, liked them and thought Hal Kratzsch was dreamy! She prevailed upon her dad to keep them on the bill. With added reassurance from their new agent, that they would make some changes, the club owner decided to allow them to stay and finish out the rest of the week long booking.

They began to work on their stage act – breaking it up into sets and making it more like a **show**. They decided they needed to have an emcee, which Ross took on and at the suggestion of their agent, Ross began to play a drum instead of piano. Also, at the suggestion of Dick Sheldon, they began playing their instruments and singing at the same time. Don on guitar and Bob and Hal traded off on bass and horns. Before this they had played a few songs on their instruments and then sung a few all together on one microphone. Accompanying themselves while singing was not what other vocal groups were doing and it was difficult at first but each night they learned and improved. This was what set them apart from other vocal quartets who relied on big bands to accompany them.

The instrumentation added a layer of fun and excitement to their songs and created nuances that gave them the full package. Soon they had adopted a format that would become their performing style, showing off their musical talents, their unique vocal arrangements and their irrepressible personalities. On September 28th, they posed for their first professional pictures wearing tuxedos - very classy! Today, “The 113 Club” is gone, but in its place is the beautiful Grand Wayne Convention Center which will allow the Four Freshmen Society to hold their 75th Anniversary Year Celebration in style and comfort.

