

*Chorus*  
**NIAGARA**

Robert Cooper's 35th and Farewell Season



THE  
PHANTOM  
OF THE OPERA

CONCERT SPONSOR KEN REMPEL OF REMPEL ELECTRIC  
CONDUCTOR SPONSOR ANNETTE URLOCKER

CHORUS NIAGARA

PROGRAMME

ROBERT COOPER, C.M., ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

# We acknowledge ...

that we are on the traditional and unceded territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Attawandaron peoples. This land has been a place of gathering, celebration, and exchange for countless generations of Indigenous communities. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and express gratitude for their stewardship of these lands and waters.

The Niagara region holds a rich history deeply interwoven with the Indigenous cultures that thrived here for millennia. For countless generations, singing has been an integral part of Indigenous traditions, serving as a means of storytelling, prayer, healing, and celebration. The melodies have carried the wisdom and knowledge of their ancestors, passing down their history and cultural heritage to the next generations.

Singing has been a vessel for connection, allowing Indigenous communities to maintain their sense of identity and unity with the land, and as we gather on this land, we humbly recognize the profound impact that singing has had and continues to have in maintaining the rich tapestry of Indigenous cultures.

In the spirit of reconciliation, let us commit to honoring and respecting the traditions, knowledge, and contributions of Indigenous peoples. May we learn from their deep understanding of the land and its interconnectedness, and may we strive to be better stewards of this territory that sustains us all.



Dear Friends of Chorus Niagara,

Numerology fans consider the number 35 as an 'Angel Number'. . . a milestone signifying an arrival marker in a career, and a realization that one has taken the right path in the pursuit of one's dreams. The Angels certainly did not lead me astray when I had the good fortune in 1989 to become the Artistic Director of Chorus Niagara, a proud arts organization and community of singers that pursues its choral dreams with sincerity and zeal. Now, after thirty-five years of working with over a thousand singers and performing a multitude of works covering a panoply of styles, the time has come not only to celebrate our collective achievements, but also to pass the baton to the next generation.

What music then might best reflect this milestone? In a recent Audience Poll we asked you what repertoire and programming you enjoy hearing most of all. With that in mind I have chosen three magnificent, iconic choral masterworks along with one of our ever-popular 'not-so-Silent-Movie' spectaculars.

Supporting and encouraging the development of young singers has always been important to me so I am thrilled to showcase as soloists this year some of the amazing young vocal artists whom I have had the great privilege to mentor and conduct over my career.

Choral music mirrors life's momentous passages and can be a comforting balm in times of tragedy as well as an affirmation of all that is wonderful in life. The works of Verdi and Bach bookend my final season, with the monumental **Verdi Requiem** being the sensational opener. This thrilling work weaves together my passion for opera and choral music in a powerful plea for deliverance with a stirring symphonic score, breathtaking solos and supercharged dramatic choruses. "*Bach is the beginning and end of all music*", remarked the early 20th c. German composer Max Reger, so it seems only fitting I should conclude my tenure as artistic director with the most resplendent of mass settings, and a score that always enriches - the magnificent **Bach Mass in B Minor**.

No season is complete without Handel and our ever-popular **Messiah**, and this year we are fulfilling my long-held desire to also create a curated **Children's Messiah**. Joyously uplifting, Handel's glorious masterpiece is "always tuneful, dramatic, and hugely accessible for both the young and the old at heart." Then to dispel the winter 'blahs' it's our Silent Film classic, the 1925 cinematic marvel **Phantom of the Opera**. Lon Chaney is the disfigured composer whose passionate obsession for Christine leads to murderous love. CN breathes new life into this riveting story with our 'live' choral soundtrack along with inspired organ improvisations replicating this great silent film tradition.

There is music for ALL in our Sensational Season. Thank you for allowing me to share my choral enthusiasms with you these past many years and thank you for supporting Chorus Niagara so faithfully and fully with your applause, your patronage and your love!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Cooper', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Robert Cooper  
Artistic Director



**CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF**  
*Extraordinary* **LEADERSHIP**  
**ROBERT COOPER, C.M.,**  
**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**



## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR ROBERT COOPER'S NOTE ON THE MUSIC FOR *PHANTOM*

***"The 1925 Phantom of the Opera is legendary and still astonishing after almost 80 years. Its fevered melodrama and images of cadaverous romance find a kind of show-biz majesty. It creates beneath the opera one of the most grotesque places in the cinema, and Chaney's performance transforms an absurd character into a haunting one. Throughout the entire film, you're looking at it with your eyes wide open."***

Curating the music for this 'live choral' soundtrack for the 1925 *Phantom of the Opera* has been a fun challenge which I hope enlivens for you, the viewer, the grand sweep and spectacle of this moving and mysterious story of love.

I have always been curious to explore differing ways in which choral music can be presented beyond the usual 'stand and sing' format. There are so many wonderful choral scores that intrigue me. Unfortunately, they don't always 'fit' into the context of a regular concert program. The classic Silent Film era, with its fascinating storylines, opens up new possibilities of expression when merged with the vocal poignancy and excitement of choral music.

Set in Paris's grandiloquent opera house, the magnificent Palais Garnier, *Phantom* opens with the debut of a new season at the Paris Opera: Gounod's *Faust* is being performed. Immediately, we are taken through the splendour of the opera hall's grand staircase and into the Chagall-festooned theatre. The house is full, and the large pit orchestra and busy stage action thrust us into the Romantic world of French grand opera.

As the drama unfolds, we enter backstage scene shops, wings, the fly gallery, through trap doors to dressing rooms, and further into the darker world of the catacombs, tunnels and sewers that lie beneath the spectacle above.

With these visual riches in mind, the world of French opera and some of its greatest composers – Gluck, Gounod, Bizet, and Saint-Saëns, along with Boito and Tchaikovsky – became my sources for complementary background music to the film. In addition, further works by more traditional choral composers – Lauridsen, Morricone, Ravel, Mozart, Sisask, Orff, Stravinsky – were chosen to act as specific mood enhancers as the scenes shift quickly from comedy to intimate tenderness, from undercurrents of suspicion to overt tension, and from sorrowful empathy to high dramatic action.

A staple of the Silent Film tradition in many early movie theatres was the accompanying musical inventiveness of the local pianist. Chorus Niagara is joined by the superb talents of organist Christopher Dawes, improvising the needed dramatic transitions between choral selections, along with our own collaborative pianist Krista Rhodes on piano.

The result will, I hope, introduce you, our audience, to both traditional and non-traditional choral music, and allow you to hear and appreciate the innate emotional context of these scores in a new and different way through the medium of film.

*"If I am the phantom, it is because man's hatred has made me so.  
If I am to be saved it is because your love redeems me."* (Erik)  
— Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera*

# THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Tonight's performance will run approx. 100 minutes without intermission

**Oremus** | *Gloria Patri*  
Urmaz Sisask

**"Ainsi que la brise légère"** | *Faust*  
Charles Gounod

**Oremus** | *Gloria Patri*  
Urmaz Sisask

**"Ange purs, anges radieux"** | *Faust*  
Charles Gounod

**Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis** | *Trois Chansons*  
Maurice Ravel

Sarah Chadwick, soprano; Bailey Williams, soprano;  
John Wilson, baritone; Alexander Hajek, baritone

**Jewel Song** | *Faust*  
Charles Gounod  
Rebecca McKay, soprano

**Miser Catulli** | *Catulli Carmina*  
Carl Orff

**"Viens dans ce séjour paisible"** | *Orphée et Eurydice*  
Christoph Willibald Gluck

**Nella Fantasia**  
Ennio Morricone arr. Audrey Snyder  
Elise Naccarato, soprano

**Dies Irae** | *Requiem*  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

**Waltz** | *Eugene Onegin*  
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**Sure on this Shining Night**  
Morten Lauridsen

**"Gloire a Dagon"** | *Samson et Dalilah*  
Camille Saint-Saëns  
Rebecca McKay, soprano; Alexander Hajek, baritone

*"You are crying! You are afraid of me! And yet I am not really wicked.  
Love me and you shall see! All I wanted was to be loved for myself."*

— Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera*

**"Il était un roi de Thulé" | *Faust***

Charles Gounod

Rebecca McKay, soprano

**"Quelle voix nous appelle?" | *The Pearl Fishers***

Georges Bizet

Alexander Hajek, baritone

**Exaudi & Laudate | *Symphony of Psalms***

Igor Stravinsky

**"Ave Signor, Signor Egli Angeli" | *Mefistofele***

Arrigo Boito

Alexander Hajek, baritone

**Rebecca McKay, soprano | Alexander Hajek, baritone**

**Robert Cooper Choral Scholars: Sarah Chadwick, soprano and Bailey Williams, soprano**

**Featured Choristers: Elise Naccarato, soprano and John Wilson, baritone**

**Christopher Dawes, organist**

**Krista Rhodes, pianist**

**Robert Cooper, artistic director and conductor**

*"Poor, unhappy Erik! Shall we pity him? Shall we curse him? He asked only to be 'someone,' like everybody else. But he was too ugly! And he had to hide his genius or use it to play tricks with, when, with an ordinary face, he would have been one of the most distinguished of mankind! He had a heart that could have held the empire of the world; and in the end had to content himself with a cellar. Surely, we must pity the Opera ghost!"*

— Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera*



# THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

## Programme Notes



Within the catacombs of the Paris Opera is a resident phantom who demands tribute in the form of his own private box for every performance, and when crossed, tends to leave a trail of strangled bodies. The phantom's desire has turned to a beautiful, understudy soprano, Christine (Mary Philpin), who is also the lover of nobleman, Raoul (Norman Kerry). A spectral music teacher promises to make Christine the prima donna of the opera, and as she becomes drawn to the allure of this mysterious presence, Raoul feels increasingly jealous.

It turns out that her music teacher is the masked Erik (Lon Chaney), aka The Phantom of the Opera, who lures Christine into his underground lair, confesses his love and proposes. Christine cannot resist her curiosity and against Erik's wishes, unmasks him. We all know how well that goes!

The terrified Christine rushes back to Raoul, but before they can run away together, Erik kidnaps and imprisons her, threatening to blow up the entire Paris Opera if she does not agree to marry. Raoul attempts a rescue, assisted by a mysterious secret policeman (Arthur Edmund Carewe) but soon falls victim to one of Erik's deadly traps and almost dies.

As an angry mob descends into the depths of the Opera House, Erik abducts Christine and escapes above ground, madly careening his carriage through the streets of Paris. As the horde pursues, Christine escapes, and the Phantom finally meets his demise on the banks of the Seine, where he is torn to pieces before being dumped into the river.



### THE STORY BEHIND THE MOVIE

"Phantom of the Opera" remains a beloved classic of silent cinema. Gorgeous sets and costumes, Lon Chaney's charismatic performance, and the Phantom's iconic makeup have cemented its place in film history.

Its origins trace back to 1922 when the president of Hollywood's Universal Pictures, Carl Laemmle, took a vacation in Paris where he met author Gaston Leroux who gave Laemmle a copy of his 1910 novel "Le fantome de l'Opera". Laemmle stayed up all night reading the book and proceeded to buy the rights immediately.

A new era of studio production was launched when filming at Universal Studios began in Hollywood in 1924. Whereas prior film sets had comprised simple wooden platforms and muslin covers, a need to recreate the Paris Opera House and accommodate thousands of extras in the cast generated the construction of a full-size set built of steel and concrete, complete with trap doors and scene lofts to allow the movie-makers to stage an actual opera (this later became Studio 28 – home to many subsequent blockbusters such as "Dracula" and "The Sting").

A notable moment in the filming is the famous chandelier drop, which was created using an exact replica of the Paris Opera original – weighing 16,000 pounds and spanning 40 feet across.



In order to avoid smashing such an expensive prop, the scene where the Phantom cuts loose the chandelier was filmed in stop-motion (watch closely and you'll see this), lowering the massive construction a little at a time to just above the heads of the audience.



The Phantom's red cloak was also a breakthrough moment in black and white films, with each frame hand-painted red to astonish the audience with a burst of colour.

The iconic look of Chaney's Phantom is probably the most famous image of the film. True to his reputation, Chaney took meticulous care in creating his portrayal of the character – painting his eye sockets black, pulling the tip of his nose up and pinning it with wire, enlarging his nostrils with black paint, and wearing a set of jagged false teeth to create the iconic look.



The scene in which Christine unmasks Erik was said to have made theatre patrons scream and faint, and has become one of the most famous moments in silent film, coming in at #52 in Bravo's 100 Scariest Movie Moments.

The other two leading roles were played by actors who have received far less critical acclaim for their portrayals of Raoul and Christine, Norman Kerry and Mary Philbin.

Stories around the filming indicate that Kerry had a less than stellar work ethic on set, which drove the perfectionist Chaney crazy.



Philbin also had her challenges. In a later interview, she noted, "I remember Norman Kerry very well. He was very naughty, on screen and off, but he was a very handsome and charming man despite his roving hands. . . They did the scene (at the top of the opera house) several times and he always found a new place to hold me. I could not react to this on camera... I finally had to take his hand and hold onto it to prevent it from wandering."

While watching the famous love scene on the roof of the opera house, you will see Philbin grab Kerry's hand in hers and pull it away from her back, exactly as she describes above.

This first adaptation of Gaston Leroux's novel, "Le fantome de l'Opera" remains the movie that inspired five remakes (in 1943, 1962, 1983, 1989, and 1990), numerous spin-offs or homages, such as "Phantom of the Paradise," and the blockbuster Andrew Lloyd Weber musical.

The production cost \$632,357 by the time the final print was previewed, including about \$50,000 in retakes. But it was, in the end, a box office success, earning more than \$2 million in revenue, one of the largest figures for any silent film.

And now, we welcome you to enjoy our special choral soundtrack screening of this movie classic.



## **ROBERT COOPER CM, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

One of Canada's foremost choral musicians, Robert Cooper is also the Artistic Director of the Opera in Concert Chorus and former Artistic Director of the Orpheus Choir of Toronto.

He taught for several years as a member of the Choral Department, Faculty of Music, University of Toronto and has had a long association mentoring youth, having conducted the Toronto Mendelssohn Youth Choir for over 20 years, several provincial youth choirs, the National Youth Choir of Canada and the Ontario Youth Choir on three occasions.

In addition to founding the Ontario Male Chorus and conducting the professional Black Creek Festival Chorus and Stratford Festival Youth Choir, Mr. Cooper made his Carnegie Hall debut conducting a Celebration of Canadian Choral Music.

Mr. Cooper has adjudicated internationally, including the BBC choral competition Let The Peoples Sing, as well as World Choral Games in China, USA, Russia and South Africa. In addition to his work with choirs, Mr. Cooper has conducted symphony orchestras in Halifax, Winnipeg, Edmonton and London, and has been involved with the presentation of more than 150 operas in Victoria, Ottawa, and Winnipeg as well as Toronto Operetta Theatre and Opera in Concert. Over his career Mr. Cooper has prepared choruses for many international conductors including Helmuth Rilling, Sir David Willcocks, Sir John Rutter, Sir Andrew Davis, Charles Dutoit, Robert Shaw and Elmer Iseler.

For 31 successful years Robert Cooper brought fine vocal and choral music to Canadian listeners as Executive Producer of Opera and Choral Music for CBC Radio Two. He has served as President of both Choirs Ontario and Choral Canada, was on the Board of Chorus America, the Advisory Board of the International Federation of Choral Music and acted as Canada's representative to the World Choir Council. Recipient of the St. Catharines' Trillium Arts Award, Robert Cooper has also received the 2016 Distinguished Service Award from Choral Canada, an Honorary Doctorate from Brock University, the Order of Canada as well as the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for his significant contribution to the Canadian choral community.



## KRISTA RHODES, COLLABORATIVE PIANIST

Krista Rhodes is a versatile collaborative pianist, educator, adjudicator, and recording artist in the GTA, Hamilton, and Niagara regions. She has appeared on stages in North America and Europe and has had her music heard on the Oprah Winfrey Show. During her career, Krista has worked with many choral ensembles, soloists, opera companies, orchestras and post-secondary institutions. Her passion is choral music where she enjoys working with a diverse range of choirs. Krista has accompanied some of Canada's most prestigious classical soloists and has made recent appearances that include: the Amadeus Choir and Elmer Iseler Singers of Toronto, the Hamilton Philharmonic

Orchestra, Niagara Symphony, Talisker Players, Symphony on the Bay, Opera Niagara, Sinfonia Ancaster, the Achill Choral Society, the Orpheus Choir of Toronto, and the Bach Elgar Choir. In addition to her musical endeavours, she is a secondary school teacher with the Hamilton-Wentworth school board and is the Music Director at Munn's United Church in Oakville. Krista resides in the Niagara region with her two incredible children and is overjoyed to be returning to Chorus Niagara as their collaborative pianist.

*Chorus*  
**NIAGARA**  
CHILDREN'S CHOIR

**SAVE THE  
DATE!**



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# GUEST ARTISTS



## REBECCA MCKAY

Rebecca McKay, Soprano, is an accomplished singer, educator, and community musician, performing and presenting internationally. Rebecca has performed as a soloist with The Elora Singers, Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, Spiritus Ensemble, Guelph Chamber Choir and Nota Bene Chamber Orchestra. She has been featured in numerous recital series and concert events, including St John's Music Series in Elora, and Conrad Grebel's Noon Hour Recital Series. While her performance work is primarily in the classical genre, Rebecca considers herself a cross-over artist, singing in a variety of styles from pop to musical theatre, to jazz. She has been lauded for her art song interpretation and warm, lush soprano voice.



## ALEXANDER HAJEK

Baritone Alexander Hajek has returned to Canada from a decade long operatic career in Europe. His formal education began at St. Michael's Choir School and The Royal Conservatory, before proceeding to earn his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from The Juilliard School of Music in Manhattan. Mr Hajek was then accepted into the young artist programs of both the Canadian Opera Company and the SemperOper in Dresden.

Described by critics as having a "creamy, romantic, and italianate sound" (96.3 Classical FM) and an "engaging combination of avuncular congeniality and dictatorial sternness" (Opera Canada) Mr. Hajek has won several awards including first prizes from the Oratorio Society of

New York, the Liederkrantz Competition and the George London Foundation. Currently he is co-producing a hit vocal variety show called Opera Revue in Toronto.



## CHRISTOPHER DAWES

Christopher Dawes is a Toronto-based concert artist, collaborative performer, conductor and consultant. He is a frequent collaborator with many of Toronto's top institutions and currently serves as Organist and Director of Music at Rosedale Presbyterian Church.

For two decades, he has served as Collaborative Accompanist and Coach to the graduate and undergraduate instrumental and choral conducting programs of the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, and as a Director of Canada's Summer Institute of Church Music.

Since 2018 he has also chaired the Executive of the Southern Ontario Chapter (SOCHS) of the Hymn Society of the US and Canada. Chris's graduate work in the area of Music Criticism and musical genre has led to occasional blogging and podcasting under the banner "Ideas About Music," speaking at conferences, and eventually founding the Celtic-crossover band Chroi in 2013.

# MEET THIS SEASON'S ROBERT COOPER CHORAL SCHOLARS



## SARAH CHADWICK

Hamilton native Sarah Chadwick is an accomplished soprano with an Honours BMus in Vocal Performance from WLU. She has performed with the Myriad Ensemble, KW Grand Philharmonic Choir, The Maureen Forrester Singers, and the Hamilton Children's Choir. In addition, Sarah is an accomplished musical theatre performer and has a thriving career in arts administration and digital marketing. Now in her second year as a Robert Cooper Choral Scholar, Sarah is honoured to be a part of Robert Cooper's final year as Artistic Director.

## BAILEY WILLIAMS

Bailey Williams is a fourth-year music student at Brock University, pursuing vocal studies. Since joining Chorus Niagara in 2022, Bailey has embraced numerous opportunities for growth and development, thanks to the choir's unwavering support. Now in her second season as a Robert Cooper Choral Scholar, Bailey is honoured to be this season's recipient of the Theresa Pothier Vocal Scholarship. Bailey is focused on preparing her Graduate Recital and is excited about auditioning for a master's program in vocal performance.



**INTERESTED IN APPLYING TO BE A  
ROBERT COOPER CHORAL SCHOLAR  
FOR THE 2025/2026 SEASON?**



SCAN TO  
LEARN MORE



# Our Choral Family

## **Chorus Niagara**

An auditioned adult choir dedicated to performing a wide spectrum of choral music to a high standard of excellence and fostering an appreciation for the choral art in the Niagara Region.

## **Side-by-Side High School Chorale**

Each season Chorus Niagara invites motivated young adult singers from Niagara Region high schools to rehearse and perform alongside Chorus Niagara in one regular season concert. Participants take part in weekly rehearsals with Chorus Niagara and perform in the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre.

## **Robert Cooper Choral Scholars**

The Robert Cooper Choral Scholars program supports and encourages aspiring post-secondary voice students. Scholars perform with Chorus Niagara for an entire season, work with one of Canada's top choral conductors, further their solo experience and receive a stipend. Scholars must apply and will be invited to audition.

## **Associate Conductor**

Chorus Niagara offers young conductors the opportunity to work with an auditioned SATB choir under the tutelage of one of Canada's foremost choral conductors. They will gain hands-on conducting experience both in rehearsals and performances.

## **Chorus Niagara Children's Choir**

Chorus Niagara Children's Choir offers children in the Niagara region the opportunity to develop their musical knowledge, build relationships and share their love of music with others.

**For more information about any of these programs, please contact Elise Naccarato, Managing Director at [chorusniagara100@gmail.com](mailto:chorusniagara100@gmail.com) or by calling 905.932.6642**

# Voices of Chorus Niagara



## Soprano

Diana Avila^  
 Nancy Boese  
 Sarah Chadwick\*  
 Teresa Cole  
 Megan Cooper  
 Thomasin Cooper\*\*  
 Erica D'Amore  
 Renate Dau Klaassen  
 Emily Denney  
 Marlene Dykstra  
 Cindy Ellis  
 Rebecca Goode  
 Lynn Huma  
 Susan Jagoon  
 Fiona Loughheed  
 Leslie Maddalena  
 Elise Naccarato  
 Jelena Nero  
 Claire Phelan  
 Emma Rotundo  
 Annie Schulz  
 Michaela Scrimger  
 Jane Thomas Yager  
 Alison Thomson  
 Yaya Wang  
 Judy Willems  
 Bailey Williams\*

## Alto

Allison Baker\*\*  
 Deb Bergen  
 Sue Biggs  
 Gemma Bishop  
 Joan Campbell  
 Ava Cattran  
 Jamie Church  
 Beth Cooper  
 Julia D'Amico

Gail Davidson  
 Michelene Hauber  
 Miriam Hauber  
 Laura Huh  
 Gigi Inara  
 Anita James  
 Sheena Jamieson  
 Susan Lewis  
 Ruth MacVicar  
 Gillian Mazzetti  
 Patricia McKenzie  
 Joan Medina  
 Claudia Meyer  
 Nancy Moffett  
 Annie Montgomery  
 Mi-Hyang Park  
 Kyla Paul  
 Laurie Reimer  
 Maija Saari  
 Stacey Thomas  
 Karen Toppila  
 Julianna Vanderlinde  
 Virginia Vickers  
 Debbie Vreken  
 Ruth Wiebe  
 Ursula Witkowska  
 Katie Zartman

## Tenor

Christopher Bee  
 William (Bill) Durksen\*\*  
 Charlie Dufton  
 Andrew Hayes  
 Albert Heemskerker  
 David Johnson  
 Michael Maddalena  
 George Martinak  
 Romulo Martins de Menezes  
 Daniel McColgan

Daryl Novak  
 Greg Rainville  
 Hugh Thomson  
 Daniel Titone  
 Glenn Vint

## Bass

Lydell Andree-Wiebe\*\*  
 Jeff Baker  
 Dean Bonsma  
 Warren Booth  
 Gordon Froese  
 Noah Game^  
 Hugh Gayler  
 Chuck Greenham  
 Jonathon Hauber  
 Peter Hauber  
 Dick Holden  
 Steve Killoran  
 Brian Mellen  
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 John Wilson

\*RCCS

\*\*Section Lead

^ Associate Member

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