The Society reached a crossroads at the 1957 annual convention (as they were called then) in Houston, when hotel management refused to honor African American member Yvonne Clark’s room reservation. In the heat of the moment, President Miriam “Mickey” Gerla chose the path of inclusion, threatening to cancel the convention on the spot. Clark demurred and chose instead to stay with a local aunt and to accept the hotel’s concession: She could attend convention activities in the hotel, but must be accompanied by a white SWE member at all times.

More than a year later, SWE’s board of directors codified a premise of inclusion into its convention policies (while simultaneously reflecting the bigoted language of the time). “Segregation – The southern sections should be allowed to have the national convention,” the August 9–10, 1958 minutes declare before continuing, “the sections must provide equal accommodations for colored members; and ensure that no colored member is subjected to unpleasantness or embarrassment in attending meetings.” By 1963 the word “colored” in the policies on file had been smudged out, replaced in handwriting with “all,” a signal of the Society’s evolving understanding of diversity. While the Society foundered occasionally in the subsequent decades, it continued at a quickened pace down the path it charted in 1957 at the crossroads of exclusion and inclusion.

– Troy Eller English, SWE Archivist