

## Bottskill Baptist Church History Minute

### Church Historian Ken Perry

May 2025- Lydia Baker



Lydia Baker photograph late 1800's. One of the earliest photographs of an African American who has lived in Greenwich, NY. Collection of the Bottskill Baptist Church, Greenwich, NY.

Lydia Baker is the subject of this month's History Minute, an image we see here from our collection, probably one of the earliest photographs of an African American who has lived in Greenwich.

She was the nurse and companion of Mary Robinson, a daughter of Gen. Henry Robinson of Bennington, Vermont.

She came here following the marriage of Mary to James I. Lourie of Jackson, a Harvard educated lawyer who became the Superintendent of the Greenwich Academy, the old brick building that now houses the village offices.

The Lourie home was the second building past the church, long familiar for many of us as the home of the Lyttle family, now occupied by the family of [REDACTED], whose family attends our services.

One of the things hidden from view is a typewritten sketch of Lydia's life, found on the back of the frame. It says that Lydia was born "somewhere south," but in every census record that I've seen except one, it said that she was born either in New York or Washington County. It also notes that Lydia first began caring for Mary Robinson when she was in her cradle, which means that by comparing both of

their ages, she began serving her when she was only eleven years old.

With these factors in mind, it's quite likely that Lydia was a child of New York slaves and obtained her freedom at an early age by an indenture of service with the Robinson family. As this sketch mentions, Lydia was considered a powerful source in prayer, sought after for that gift.

"Aunt Lydia Baker", as she was known in this Church was born in the South before the Civil War, living when a child, in ----- Robertson's family. Mary Robertson, one of the children, was never well, and Lydia Baker cared for her devotedly, sitting often in the foot of Mary's cradle to amuse her, and to the end of her life, called her, "My Mary".

Judge James Lowrie, born in Jackson, Washington County, N.Y., married Mary Robertson and eventually came to live in Greenwich. He owned the place which now belongs to Judge Herbert VanKirk, and lived there when he died. Lydia Baker was a faithful servant in his home, and remained devoted to "Her Mary" until death.

Lydia Baker was a power in prayer, and some of our older members can remember her reverent attitude, as she arose from her seat in the prayer room, facing the audience, her face upturned to God, pleading for His mercy and blessings on this Church. She was often besought to pray for a son, a daughter or a friend, with the confidence that her prayers would reach the throne of grace. Of her it can be said, that she lived the abundant life.

She died March 14, 1880, aged 73 years, and was buried as she requested, "at Mary's feet", in Judge Lowrie's lot in Greenwich Cemetery.

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March 24, 1935.

Without any doubt, this picture was given to Bottskill Church by Judge Lowrie after Lydia's death.

It has suffered some years of neglect. Now, at the request of Miss Lucinda H. Owen (aged 92 years) the frame and glass have been restored, and this picture is again placed on these walls, as a memorial to "Aunt Lydia Baker", with the hope that her spiritual influence may forever rest upon this Church, like a benediction.

Typewritten sketch of Lydia Baker's life found on the back of the picture frame. Collection of the Bottskill Baptist Church Greenwich, NY.

Her gravestone is, at her request, found at the foot of Mary's. The Lourie and Baker stones in the Greenwich cemetery are found to the left of the one for the family of Rev. James O. Mason, who was Lydia's pastor.

For her presence in this church and her power in prayer, we remember Lydia Baker.

Gravestones of James and Mary Lourie in the Greenwich Cemetery, Greenwich, NY. Lydia Baker rests at the foot of Mary Lourie's stone.

