

Bottskill Baptist Church History Minute

Church Historian Ken Perry

June 2026- Irene Wilbur

We have Carol Batchelder's suggestion for this History Minute and some images supplied by Carol Herrington.

Irene Wilbur was born here in 1899, a daughter of Fred Stiles and Cora Lee. She married Harold Wilbur in 1919, and has deep ties to the church family, as her daughter and church member, Alice Morehouse, was the mother of Nancy Morse, and her other daughter, the recently deceased Helen Dixon, was the mother of another current member, Ronna Dixon.

Irene was our church organist for 37 years, beginning on Oct. 8, 1942, which is longer than the longest ministry of any of our pastors, performing her musical ministry over the tenure of four pastors.

She is seen here in October 1972 with Rev. Stephen M. Tolander and pastor emeritus Lewis N. Powell, when she was honored for 30 years of service as our organist. There is no evidence of whether she ever called in sick but, if not, an uninterrupted attendance until her retirement in 1979 would make a remarkable record.

After a choir rehearsal on Oct. 20, 1946, a motion was made to formally organize the choir and was entered into the church records. The complete choir in 1953, consisted of 36 members, 16 in the senior choir and 20 in the junior choir.

The 1968 choir might easily be called

All In the Family or Family Ties. There were 19 members, with Irene seen on the right hand of the first row, and on the left hand side, our current organist, Carol Herrington, with her sister, Barbara Mattice, behind her. Next to Carol was Gordon Herrington, the choir director, and on Barbara's right side was his wife, Marjorie



Mrs. Wilbur Is Honored

Stephen M. Tolander (L) and pastor emeritus Lewis N. Powell (R), honoring Irene Wilbur for 30 years of service as Bottskill Baptist Church organist. Photo from the Greenwich Journal & Salem Press in 1972.

Herrington, and Jude Dube, now Judy McClay, followed her. Next to Judy is Sandra Saunders. The man behind Barbara is Donald Judd, who was one of the music teachers in Greenwich. Next to Irene is Mr. Judd's wife, Peggy, who also taught Sunday School here. I believe that Clifford Mattice, the father of the Mattice sisters, is the person in the very back of the photograph, and Bill Herrington is at the very beginning of that row. Next to him was Peter Judd.



1968 Bottskill Baptist Church Choir. Photo collection of the Bottskill Baptist Church, Greenwich, NY.



The complete Bottskill Baptist Church choir in 1953. The choir consisted of 36 members, 16 in the senior choir and 20 in the junior choir. Photo from the Bottskill Baptist Church library. Photo in the collection of the Bottskill Baptist Church, Greenwich NY..

The Greenwich Journal, in its April 18, 1951 issue, contained an article about the Wilbur family as being outstanding musicians. Irene began playing piano at the age of 8 and her husband Harold played the violin. Both were later part of the County Grange Orchestra in Washington County.

Each of their three children had some musical education. Alice and Helen both studied violin, Helen, beginning in the 4th grade. Alice later developed her alto voice as a member of the church choir. Their brother Don studied trumpet and voice. Along with his mother, they were part of the Bottskill Quartet. Whether the name has any connection to our church name is not clear.

Musical talent in the Wilbur families did not end here. One of the surprising things that I found in connection with the musicality of the Wilbur family is that Harold had a brother named Albert, who lived in Easton on Cheese Factory Road.

Coincidentally, our family lived in the other part of their house during most of my high school years. Training for track, I remember doing laps from the house to Rt. 40 and back, which was about a mile round trip. But I also remember that on Sunday afternoons, their grandsons, Larry and Cliff, would come over and sing to the accompaniment of their grandmother's organ playing, Irene's sister-in-law. We could hear the music coming through our living room wall. That is, if we weren't watching Wild Kingdom on television. Larry would later be part of a local barbershop quartet.

Irene finally retired in 1979, receiving this plaque in the photograph of her retirement ceremony.

For her service to the church, the musicianship of her family and the sustaining presence of members of her family in this church, we remember Irene Wilbur.