

Mantle, Bill & Beatrice

Belleville woman active in choir for 74 years

Beatrice Mantle walked down the aisle with St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church choir Sunday—just as she had done for exactly 60 years.

Her contralto voice first sang out with the choir on May 11, 1926.

But, Beatrice has been a church chorister much longer than that—for 74 years.

And, more than that—although it's nigh impossible to check—she may be one of the oldest serving members of a Canadian church choir. Beatrice is an active 90.

Not that she's the oldest member of the family in the St. Andrew's congregation, attending church regularly. Husband Bill Mantle is 94.

"Choral music? I just love it," says Beatrice.

Rudolf Heijdens, St. Andrew's music director and organist, says Beatrice is "a mainstay of the choir," who has rarely missed a practice session.

"It's amazing and her voice is true — hits all notes right on pitch," he adds.

Beatrice joined her first church choir at 16 in her native England.

She first met Bill during World I. He'd arrived in a year before war broke out. He enlisted in the Canadian Army was shipped out to Europe.

Bill brought Beatrice to Canada as "a war bride" in 1919.

A railroader, he went to work for Canadian National in Quebec, soon

Family focus

being transferred to Quebec City. That was where Beatrice joined the choir of St. Andrew's Presbyterian there.

Bill was transferred to Belleville in 1926—and Beatrice transferred to St. Andrew's choir in the city.

She has since much change—17 music directors and seven pastors have served the church during her 60 choir years at St. Andrews.

Another change—the decline in church-going—she feels "a shame"

Her taste in choral music is wide-ranging since "I can't say I really have a favorite hymn. There are so many—and I seem to like them all."

Bill and Beatrice have two daughters and a son, 11 grandchildren and are great grandparents to 12 youngsters.

Now, she's not the only member of the family in the choir. Daughter Mavis, who moved back to Belleville from Ottawa, joined St. Andrew's choir a year ago and now sings contralto alongside Beatrice.



Bill and Beatrice Mantle try a little harmonizing. (Staff Photo)

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