

Tribute to JANET GAYLORD BUELL for Webpage
(By Shirley C. Stephan 7/15)

In 1825, our church building had an organ in it. Mrs. Sarah Harrington was the first organist who, like those who played it after her, had to pump air into the organ using foot pedals or bellows. If you've ever played one of those organs, you know that it's a lot of leg work. By the time our third church building was completed in 1850, a new and more elaborate pipe organ was installed. For nearly eighty years, the task of pumping the air bellows was delegated to the strong, young men from the Sunday School.

In 1928, a new Skinner pipe organ was given to the church by Myron Taylor and his brother Willard in memory of their mother, Mary. In the fire of 1936, this organ was nearly destroyed. Mr. Taylor provided funds for reconstructing the organ, with additional stops and chimes for the new 1937 church building. This is the organ we have today.

Janet Gaylord Buell graduated from Ithaca College in 1938, and worked in two other school districts before she came to teach vocal music in Lyons High School in 1945. She met Roger Buell, a local history teacher that many of us remember. In 1952, they were married. Two years later she left teaching to offer private piano lessons from home. She resumed studying organ at the Eastman School of music.

In 1954, Janet, while studying organ at the Eastman School of Music, asked if she could practice on our organ. The Elders, seeing a real opportunity, not only gave her permission to practice, but hired her as our organist. Bob Wadsworth, the church choir director at the time, was one of the elders who recommended she be hired full time. Bob knew about Janet's musical talents while he attended Ithaca College and said, "Janet is one of the most accomplished musicians you will ever find."

Camille Clark, the choir director since 1990, said in a 2004 interview, "Janet is amazing, extremely talented and patient. If she plays a piece once and then the next time it is missing a page, it hardly matters because she remembers it. If a song is too high or too low a key for the choir, she will transpose it at sight."

Those of us who experienced singing with Janet's accompaniment know that Janet always came through. Even when the center section of the Hallelujah Chorus flew off the organ music rack during performance, the only ones who knew it were those who saw it flutter to the floor. She was truly amazing. As the song says, "She was the wind beneath our wings."

Janet had a good deal of strength and stamina since it takes considerable effort to play the organ. For 57 years she sat on that hard organ bench for hours at a time, several times a week, for scheduled services for worship, weddings or funerals. Many hours of practice were also a part of her dedication and preparation. She drove to Lyons from Manchester for practice and services. Rev. Cynthia Hummel recalled an incident when Janet's car skidded on ice and overturned. The rescue squad broke the window, cut

her seatbelt and dragged her out. Although she had a broken rib, her first concern was that she would be unable to play for an upcoming worship service. Another time, she suffered a broken hip that would have ended the career of many people; however, following surgery, rehabilitation and physical therapy, she was back at the organ bench in record time.

Janet's faith was evident, not only in her music, but in her other involvements in our church. She served as an elder and a deacon. She has worked with women's groups and helped with fundraising and mission endeavors. Her example was why she was named "Woman of Faith" for 2004.

She always stressed that her musical ability was a gift from God. Every time we heard her inspiring and beautiful music, she passed this gift on to us. Janet said, "I will continue as long as I can" and she did. The last time she played was for the Sunday morning worship service just two weeks before her passing. We have been blessed and are truly grateful to have had Janet with us.