

## Member Spotlight: Robert and Nancy Powell

Over the coming months, we hope to highlight some of our members – both those who are more mature and those who are younger members of the Greenville Chapter. In this article, we are spotlighting Bob (Robert J.) and Nancy Powell.

One hardly says one name without including both, and they have been active and faithful members of the AGO even before moving to Greenville 52 years ago. Between the two of them, they have served as organist, assistant organist, or organist-choirmaster for over 100 years. What an accomplishment!

A Mississippi native, Bob's early musical training included piano, organ, and clarinet. He earned the Bachelor of Music (BM) degree in Organ and Composition from Louisiana State University, studying with Frank Collins (organ) and Frank Page (composition), and the Master of Sacred Music (MSM) degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City (NYC), studying with Dr. Alec Wyton. Nancy grew up in Ohio and also studied piano and organ. She holds the BM degree from Baldwin-Wallace University, studying with Dr. Farley Hutchins, and the MSM from Union, studying organ with Dr. Robert Baker. They met at Union.

Bob's church positions include two years as Assistant Organist at St. John the Divine (NYC), St. Paul's Episcopal Church (MS), Organist/Choir Director at St. Paul's School (NH). In Greenville, he served Christ Church, Episcopal (35 years), Trinity United Methodist (16 years), and Episcopal Church of the Redeemer (1 year). While at Christ Church, Bob oversaw the planning and installation of the Goulding and Wood organ (67 ranks/2001). With encouragement from Gus Leist, the organ was moved from the front to the rear gallery. Upon retirement from Christ Church, Bob was awarded the honorific title, *Organist Emeritus*.

In addition to serving churches in OH, NJ, MS and NH, Nancy served as organist at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Greenville for 30 years.

During his two years at St. John the Divine, Bob read through over 900 anthems in their choral library – gaining a wealth of knowledge from composers and arrangers of the past. He also studied composition with Searle Wright and Alec Wyton and credits Dr. Wyton with encouraging him to submit anthems and organ pieces to Abingdon Press and other publishers. To date, he has had over 1200 pieces published by a variety of music houses. Wow..., let that number sink in! His greatest influences as a composer have been improvisations in church; he smiles and says he follows Searle Wright's two rules for improvisation: 1. If you make a mistake, make it twice and the listeners will think you were correct the first time, and 2. When in doubt, trill!

Budding young composers/arrangers can benefit from advice from those with so many titles in various catalogs, and he says, "Write something every day; write fast – and make corrections after the piece is completed; submit music to publishers using a music notation program (Finale, Sibelius), if possible; and study the music of classical composers." Oh that more contemporary composers of sacred music would take these suggestions! Among many books, he recommends The Larger Forms of Musical Composition (Percy Goetschius) and The Shaping Forces in Music (Ernst Toch). Bob is well known for his church music including anthems, original organ music, arrangements of well-known hymn tunes, and music for handbell choirs. For years, his goal was to submit as many as two pieces each week, though this has slowed in recent years. His style is conservative and his tonal palette is neo-Romantic.

Bob and Nancy are long-time members of The American Guild of Organists. Nancy holds the Associate of the American Guild of Organists (AAGO) certificate; she is a member of Mu Phi Epsilon (honorary music fraternity) and the Music Club of Greenville. Bob holds two certificates from the Guild: Choir Master (ChM) and Fellow of the American Guild of Organists (FAGO). He has served on the certification committee of the National AGO as well as the Board of Directors of Choristers Guild. At LSU, he was a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, and in 1989 was awarded LSU Music Alumnus of the Year Award.

The Powells have three children (Lynn – San Diego, CA; David – Charlotte, NC; and Mark – Manassas, VA), five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. None of their children are professional musicians but Mark has an interest in organs and organ building.

Greenville has changed immensely since the Powells arrived in 1968. They have enjoyed living in the historic McDaniel Avenue area and have been active in our Chapter where Bob served as Dean for two years and Nancy served on the Nominating Committee. They value their involvement in the Guild and enjoy contact with professional organists, choir directors, and volunteers; they also benefit from recitals, masterclasses, and conventions (both regional and national).

We honor these long-time and influential members and look forward to growing with them in the Greenville Chapter of the American Guild of Organists!

