



Eugenia Bowles Watkins

August 23, 1921 - November 18, 2018

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Eugenia Harris Bowles Watkins was born on August 23, 1921 in Jacksonville, FL to the Rev. Samuel Presley Bowles and Eugenia Harris Bowles. She died on November 17, 2018 in Indianapolis, IN. She was the eldest of four children, is preceded in death by her parents and her brother, Samuel P. Bowles, Jr. She is survived by her loving husband, Robert Bedford Watkins, Jr., sons, Robert (aka Bob) Bedford Watkins, III, and Thomas Wyatt (Donna) Watkins, 7 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren, as well as her sisters, Ruth Eckstine and Matilda (Dave) McLain

Eugenia graduated from Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina, with a double major in English and vocal performance. She worked briefly at the Third Airforce headquarters in Tampa, FL, and later attended Officers Candidate School at Smith College in Maine, becoming a WAVE-- Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, the World War II women's branch of the United States Naval Reserve. From 1943-45, Eugenia served in the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington, DC, attaining the rank of Lieutenant JG.

In Washington, she sang in the choir at the New York Avenue Presbyterian

Church, the church of Peter Marshall. She also sang over a summer with the celebrated choral conductor Robert Shaw.

Following World War II, Eugenia attended Southwestern at Memphis (now Rhodes College), earning a master's degree in music. At Southwestern, Eugenia met her husband of 71 years, Robert Bedford Watkins, Jr., who had served in the Rhineland, European Theatre during WWII. They were married in 1947 and, following Bedford's graduation, moved to Ann Arbor, the University of Michigan, where Bedford obtained an MM (master of music) degree. They relocated to Winthrop College, Rock Hill, SC, where Bedford served as asst. professor of piano.

In 1956, Eugenia and Bedford moved to Bloomington, IL, where Bedford became professor of piano at Illinois Wesleyan University. Soon their first son, Robert Bedford was born, followed two years later by son, Thomas Wyatt. The family lived in Iowa City, IA in 1962-3 where Bedford earned his Ph.D., an attainment greatly valued by Eugenia.

Eugenia served as choir director at the St. John's United Church of Christ, and later the First Baptist Church of Bloomington, where she led the choral program for over twenty years, with Bedford as church organist. Eugenia was active in the Illinois Wesleyan chapter of SAI (Sigma Alpha Iota) music sorority, as well as the PEO Sisterhood, an international organization devoted to providing educational opportunities for female students worldwide.

Upon retirement in 1988, Eugenia and Bedford relocated to East Point, FL, living alongside her sisters Ruth and Matilda and their husbands and becoming active in the Trinity Episcopal Church of Apalachicola. Eugenia became the choir director there, a role she fulfilled for over two decades. She also founded the Bay Area Choral Society and took the reins of the Ilse Newell Fund for the Performing Arts, expanding its scope to include a year

around performance series.

In 2011, Eugenia and Bedford moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, to be nearer their sons. They joined the Cumberland First Baptist Church in Indianapolis, where son Thomas Wyatt pastors, in which they participated regularly before Eugenia's decline in health.

A devoted wife and mother, Eugenia possessed a driving energy, which she poured tirelessly into her deep and abiding love of music and the life of the churches she served.

A memorial service for Eugenia will be held on Saturday, January 12, at 11:00 a.m., at Cumberland First Baptist Church, 116 S. Muessing St., Indianapolis, preceded by a visitation from 9-11:00.

Eugenia's ashes will be interred at Trinity Episcopal Church, Apalachicola, FL, on Saturday, February 2, 2019.

Memorial contributions may be directed to the music programs at Trinity Episcopal Church, Apalachicola, FL and/or Cumberland First Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN 12. 11:00 AM (ET)

Cumberland First Baptist Church
116 South Muessing Street
Cumberland, IN 46229