

HERE WE STAND, III: BOB SHAW AND THE CONTINUING TRADITION

by Tom Cox

Author's Note: This essay is the last in the series prepared for *News & Views* in commemoration of the First Presbyterian Church's centennial. These essays will be combined with other material in a volume tentatively entitled *One Hundred Years! The First Presbyterian Church of Pocatello, 1904-2004*. When the volume appears, members will have an opportunity to purchase copies.

When First Presbyterian's session first met in 2003 it included not only a new class of elders, but also a minister relatively new to the church. To help the group get better acquainted, the Rev. Mayes asked each elder in turn to say a bit about how it was that he or she came to serve. As the testimony moved around the table, one after another stated, "Bob Shaw asked me," as if that were all that needed to be said — although, to be sure, additional explanation followed in every case. Finally, one member said what had been implicit in the statements of the others: "Bob Shaw asked me, and you don't say 'No' to Bob Shaw." Indeed. Warm and devoted, open-handed in his relationships, Shaw has won a myriad of friends during almost three-quarters of a century of membership in First Presbyterian. Having filled nearly every church office at one time or another and sung in the choir for over fifty years, Shaw has more than carried his own weight. How could one possibly say "No" to a man who has himself been so giving to the church?

Bob Shaw's roots run deep in First Presbyterian. His maternal grandmother, Mary Maio, had been a member of the church from its earliest days, although just when she joined is not clear — congregational rolls list her as member #463 and give her initial date of membership as February 11, 1934, but clearly she belonged well before that. In any case, about 1905 Mary Maio enrolled her daughter Hazel in the church's Sunday School. Subsequently Hazel became active in Christian Endeavor and, in due course, joined First Presbyterian — a membership she was to maintain for over half a century. For many years during the 1920s and 1930s, Hazel worked as W. P. Havenor's secretary, an association which served to strengthen her ties to the church, which she served in a variety of capacities including as a deacon. On the other hand, Bob's father (also named Bob, but Robert E. as opposed to Robert L.) was a mechanic who had come to Pocatello in 1919, established an auto repair and machine shop on East Center Street that finally grew into auto dismantling and new car parts. He worked day and night, six days a week until finally retiring in his eighties. Immersed in his business, he had little time for church and did not join until well after his son. Known in those days as "Curly," the younger Shaw became a member in 1931.

Initially, the Shaw family lived at 325 South Sixth in a house owned by Mary Maio, a house that still stands. Close proximity made attendance at the original church building on Fifth Street easy, and gave young Bob a day-to-day view when the new (present) building was erected in the late twenties. Repeatedly workmen had to shoo Bob and his compatriots away when they climbed temporary ramps to investigate building activity on the second story. Their misadventures continued after the new building was completed. Bob's Sunday School classes met in the choir loft at the rear of the sanctuary (where the glassed-in cry room now exists); when the teacher would step out for one reason or another, the boys launched paper airplanes

into the sanctuary below. He was also active in the church-sponsored Boy Scout troop and in various skits and plays presented at the church, a highlight coming one Christmas Eve when he walked slowly down the center aisle of the sanctuary playing “Silent Night” on his harmonica.

Bob’s youth was like that of many another. He attended Pocatello High School, graduating in 1940. That fall he enrolled in the University of Idaho, Southern Branch, but the outbreak of World War II interrupted his academic studies. He enlisted in the Navy, where he received secret training to learn to operate the radar systems just then coming into use; afterward he was stationed on Tinian in the Central Pacific. Discharged in 1946, Bob returned to Pocatello, worked for his father, and attended the Southern Branch or, as it became known the following year, Idaho State College. In 1948, he met Louise Kofoed, his wife-to-be, during an outing to Lava Hot Springs, where she worked in a soda fountain. He and Louise were married at his grandmother’s house not long thereafter with the Rev. Hamblin presiding and Emma Kelly as pianist.

As befitted the son of a auto mechanic and parts vendor, Bob had a vested interest in cars. From 1941 to 1990, he owned thirty-six cars, most of which needed to be repaired or rebuilt. In 1991, he bought his first new car, a red Jeep. It served he and Louise well until it was broadsided in 2005. The insurance company totaled the vehicle, but Bob bought it back and rebuilt it — as he puts it, old traditions and Jeeps never die.

Along the way, Bob had become an accomplished violinist, playing in orchestras both at Pocatello High and the Southern Branch. Only later did he become involved in choral music at the First Presbyterian Church, at what by then was being called Idaho State College, and in the community-based Camerata Singers. For years he and Ray Pence — and later Chilton Phoenix — often were the tenor section at First Presbyterian, and although Pence has moved and Phoenix is no longer around, Bob continues active in the church choir — as well as in the handbell choir — and on occasion still solos. As he summed it up recently, “I have always loved music. What a privilege it has been for the past fifty-plus years to have been able in my own small way to join kindred souls in raising our voices up high to the rafters in praise of our Father in heaven!”

Bob’s dedication to the church’s music program led to his appointment in the late seventies to a committee to evaluate various pipe organs that were available and to determine if the church could afford one. Chilton Phoenix, Wesley Harris, and Keith Forrest completed the committee, which in due course recommended the purchase of a Wicks organ. Informed that in two months there would be a major price increase, the promotion committee chaired by Harris which had been formed to turn the recommendation into reality had to scramble, but sufficient funds were raised in time, and in October 1978 the organ was installed.

Bob’s activity in the church has embraced far more than music. He was active in Mariner’s, the Men’s Club, the monthly work parties, and for some thirty years on the Worship and Music Committee in the service of which he was responsible for getting the first women ushers for services at First Presbyterian. He also taught sixth-grade Sunday School classes. In 1947-1948 he served on the Board of Trustees, which handled church finances until merged with the session. Subsequently he would serve terms on the session during the ministries of Jo Lininger, John Wells, Coke McClure, Jim Cramer, and Pamela Mayes — each of whom, he says, had

“strengths and weaknesses [but] all had the gift in different ways of translating God’s precepts into words that we poor laymen can understand.”

Bob Shaw’s seventy-plus years of membership and his level of commitment are unmatched in the history of First Presbyterian, yet when told he was to be the subject of a concluding sketch in this history he seemed genuinely flattered. Such humility is not the least of his many virtues. Indeed, it can safely be said that Bob Shaw stands for all that is best in First Presbyterian.

When Jo Parris asked him recently what advice he would give future members of the church, Shaw replied that he would tell them “not to take for granted all of the spiritual, social and physical blessings which come to our members . . . what we have now was made possible by the hard work, sweat, tears and sacrifice from generations of our forebears. If you don’t know where you have been, how can you know where you are going?” It is a valid question — and one which provides the justification for the preparation of the history of which this essay is a part — as well as a fitting capstone.