



Guarantor Spotlight by Cheryl Dungan

Meet Robert and Patsy Hassert, Strasburg, VA

BOB AND PATSY HASSERT have traveled from their home in Virginia to attend Festival for many years but Patsy's history with The Bach Choir and Festival goes back decades, to her visits with her mother, Lois Claytor Walthall. Patsy's mother was a well-educated woman who was intent on ensuring that her children had opportunities to develop appreciation for the fine arts and classical music, and especially for the music of J.S. Bach.

Patsy earned her M.A. in Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago and worked as a Medical Social Worker/Administrator at several large teaching hospitals in the Chicago and Philadelphia areas. She worked in several specialties, including Cardiology and Dialysis; served on a Bioethics Committee for many years, and was the hospital's HIV Coordinator. Since her retirement, she has become an avid gardener.

After earning a graduate degree in Near Eastern archaeology, Robert switched to a career in computers, working as a contractor for numerous companies, doing general programming and database development. In retirement, Robert remains interested in computer technology and has become an amateur genealogist.

Although Robert and Patsy were both students at the University of Chicago, they did not meet until later, as volunteers for an archaeological "dig" in Israel. Years later they re-met, and friendship grew into love and a happy marriage. Robert credits Patsy for introducing him to the music of The Bach Choir and the Festival, which they now share as a treasured tradition.

Patsy shares some wonderful memories and her enthusiasm for The Bach Choir, in her own words.

Recollections of the Bach Festival

My mother, Lois Claytor Walthall, drove to Bethlehem with a friend from our home in Atlanta to attend her first Bach Festival in 1961.



It was at this festival that the choir and orchestra made their first live recording of the *Mass in B Minor*; mother mentioned all the cameras and microphones. I have a copy of that album and enjoy knowing that she was in the audience; maybe one of the coughs was hers! She loved the experience, and told me that I had to come with her the next year – which I did. And the next, and the next, and....

In those early years we stayed at the Hotel Bethlehem and enjoyed visiting the Moravian Book Shop – much smaller then, only one store-front, I think. At that time the Saucon Valley Country Club invited Bach Festival attendees to have lunch in their lovely dining room; though if we were in a hurry we went to Saint Peter's. The ethereal tones of the brass "choir", heralding the concerts to come, wafted from Packer Church's tower in those days.



Dr. Ifor Jones, who was Director then, somehow controlled an enormous choir – around 200 members, I think. The concerts were heavily attended; the pews in Packer were moved as close together as possible, with rows of folding chairs added in the back. There was very little leg room, the pews had no cushions, and they were very hard. The beauty of the music helped us forget those discomforts; nevertheless, most people soon learned to bring their cushions as well as their scores.

Dr. Jones believed that proper reverence for the music meant absolutely NO APPLAUSE. During my second festival (1963) the great British soprano, Jennifer Vyvyan sang Cantata 51, *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*. At the conclusion of her breathtaking performance there was a moment of stillness. Then, almost as one, the audience stood and broke into enthusiastic applause. Horrors! We had broken Dr. Jones's cardinal rule! The next day the *Morning Call's* headline read: "Bach Festival Tradition Shattered by Applause".

Mother and I continued to attend yearly until her death in 1974. For the next ten years I continued to attend first with my father, then with my husband Robert. After that, our busy careers and a part-time antiques business, interrupted our long Bach Festival tradition. But when we heard the news of the 100th anniversary of the Festival in 2007, we came back and decided to become Guarantors, in memory of my mother. Our move from the Philadelphia area to Virginia's Shenandoah Valley has made our annual pilgrimage a bit longer – but it also makes the reward waiting for us in Bethlehem that much sweeter! I also love what you are doing with the Festival today, with your emphasis on training young people and in using Bach's music in contemporary ways – like the Paul Taylor dancers.

My most recent "special memory" is from last year's festival, when Professor Wolff told us about research on Bach's life and music. He spoke of a recently discovered piece of music that Bach wrote as a teenager, and he played a recording of it – music that no one had ever heard until this discovery. As I realized what I was hearing, the tears came and I felt my mother, very close to me.