

12-10-1988

RS-obit; 1988-12-10; Willis, Fred (c)

The Royal Serenaders Male Chorus

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To most people who knew him, Fred was synonymous with music. The list of his accomplishments and involvements in music includes the Carl Ditton Choral Society of Atkins High School, the Acme Septet and the Acme Quartette of Winston-Salem. In Buffalo he continued his musical career with Cavaliers Quartette, the Royal Serenaders Male Glee Club, the Carolina Four Quartette and Director of the Twin Coach Choir to name just a few. He was recognized as a soloist, a director, arranger and musical consultant by many people in the local community and literally throughout the music world. One of the high points of his career was his collaboration with Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington in a concert of sacred music in Buffalo at Kleinhans Music Hall. In addition to this, Fred developed a television series entitled "Portraits of My People" in cooperation with Mr. Malcolm Erni which featured the Emmanuel Temple Chorale and the Pastor of Emmanuel Temple, Elder Russell T. Wilson. He also developed a special Christmas Program for television which also featured the Chorale and Elder Wilson.

Fred was equally active in community affairs. He was a life-long Democrat and numbered among his associates were many of the prominent local and state political figures. Through these associations Fred became active as a community leader. He wrote a proposal for the Drug Abuse Rehabilitation and Treatment Program (also known as DART) which was to bring him into association with the Buffalo General Hospital where he was last employed.

At the Buffalo General Hospital, Fred's association grew from Director of DART to member of the Board of Trustees, to his position as special assistant to the President of the hospital. He took special pride in his service at the hospital and was of all people most grateful to God for the blessings which enabled him to become involved with the many projects and issues to which he devoted much time and energy.

Mildred Esterline (Cureton) Willis, Fred's beloved first wife preceded him into the final passage of this life on September 11, 1981. A few years later Fred married Alice McPheters who, along with her daughter Rosalind, were added to the intimate circle of those to whom his love and devotion were given in a most special way. It was in their presence that Fred ended his earthly journey and slipped into his final rest.

To the end he remained active in the church as an elder, choir director, teacher of his own Spirit of Prophecy Class and many other activities too numerous to mention. His love for God was evident in all of his associations and activities.

FRED DOUGLAS WILLIS

"...when the long day is ended, the journey is o'er, I shall enter that blessed abode, for the Savior I love will be waiting for me when I come to the end of the road."

Fred Douglas Willis, the first of five children born to Sadie Cannon Willis and William Ranzer Willis, began his journey in Winston-Salem, North Carolina on April 15, 1918. There he attended Columbia Heights Elementary School and went on to Atkins High School. His life-long association with and love for music was nurtured in those early years by his father in their home, as well as in the community through organizations such as the Brotherhood Choral Society, a male chorus under the direction of Fred's father. It was also during his high school years that he encountered Mildred Esterline Cureton who would eventually become a most significant part of Fred's life.

Fred felt the need to help support his brothers and sisters during his high school years. He began working at the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company as a teenager, in order to do this, and he continued throughout his life to serve as big brother, mentor and counselor to them.

On July 29, 1939, Fred married Mildred whom he had become reacquainted with during her years at Winston - Salem Teachers College. Through Mildred and Fred's union came seven children; Mildred E. (Willis) Gill, Ruth E. Willis, Fred D. Jr., Cleo V., Linda C. (Willis) Edgecombe, Karen A. (Willis) Britton and Ava M. (Willis) Rivers.

In 1943, Fred brought his wife and his two young daughters from Winston-Salem to Buffalo, New York where the other five children were born. Shortly after their arrival in Buffalo, Fred and Mildred became members of the East Side Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Fred and Mildred remained active throughout their lives in the church and through the evolution of the church from the small East Side church to what it is today, known as Emmanuel Temple Seventh-Day Adventist Church. As an active member and supporter of the church, Fred served as Treasurer, Sabbath School Superintendent, Senior Choir Director, Founder and Director of the Emmanuel Temple Chorale and also a local elder.