

Before Emily, were Esther and Anna Keyes

This article is the sixth in a bicentennial year series by church Historian Bonita Healy.

Long before Emily Keyes was born May 5, 1926, two other girls named Keyes grew up in West Henrietta Baptist Church and are remembered in its records. Esther and (Jerusha) Anna Keyes, daughters of the 19th century, lived lives quite different from that of the adventurous Emily, their first cousin three times removed. They never sailed to foreign lands to serve as missionaries. Neither lived to be 88, Emily's age when she died Oct. 19, 2014. Neither Esther nor Anna knew Emily's spinsterhood.

Place and name connect Emily to these collateral ancestors, but faith also stretches across the decades to make these Keyes cousins Christian sisters. Esther and Anna were themselves first cousins, the daughters respectively of twin brothers, Solomon and Isaiah Keyes, who came to the area from Connecticut in the 1820s. They were also first cousins to Albert Keyes, the son of Jeremiah Keyes and Emily's great grandfather. Albert's name is memorialized in a stained glass window in the church sanctuary.

Esther, born in 1822, was 17 years older than Anna. She became the first wife of William Bullard, who is also remembered in one of the stained glass windows. William was the oldest son of early Henrietta settlers Leonard and Eunice Bullard. Leonard, a leader in the 1827 union of Henrietta Baptists, died in 1829, leaving 10-year-old William to help his mother raise his six little brothers.

Esther was the only Keyes of her generation who, at 16, signed the letter of dismissal seeking separation from United Baptist. Her future husband, William, also signed, as did his



Emily Keyes's great grandfather, who is remembered in the stained glass window above, was first cousin to Esther and Anna Keyes

mother and the girl who would become his second wife, Almira Booth. Esther died childless at 31 in 1853. William and Almira named a daughter Marie Ester in her honor. William, who led the choir during his marriage to Esther, continued to play important leadership roles in the church.

Anna was just 14 when her cousin Esther died. Like Esther, she would marry a prominent church leader. Charles J. Smith arrived at West Henrietta Baptist in the middle of the Civil War. A 24-year-old teacher from Cortland County, he joined the church by letter. Two years later, in December 1865, Charles became the church's longest serving Clerk. He served 42 years, until Jan. 6, 1908. Charles became a prosperous Henrietta farmer, served 31 years as town justice of the peace, and spent a term in the New York State Assembly.

Anna, however, did not live to share that future. She died in January 1878. She was 38. The account of her funeral in church records indicates her faith and her importance to the congregation. Two former pastors, the Rev. Walter Holt, who served from 1864-1869, and the Rev. S.W. Culver, who served from 1875-1877, returned to honor her. The young women she taught in Bible class placed evergreen boughs on her casket.



The gravestone of Esther Keyes Bullard stands in Bushman Cemetery.

According to local historian and author William F. Peck, Anna Keyes Smith left a son. No record of Anna's son has been found, but looking in plain sight, he may have been William Smith, whose wife Anna is among the McFarlane Class portraits in the Fellowship Hall. That William is the right age with no alternative parents on record.

Anna's husband, Charles J. Smith lived to be 73, marrying three times. His third wife, Minnie Way, is pictured among the portraits in the Elizabeth McFarlane Memorial Class the year he died.