

October's hymn of the month 2019

James Rowe-the Rest of the Story

The hymn of the month for September 2018 was *Love Lifted Me*. The writer of this hymn, James Rowe, spent the last years of his life in Wells, Vermont. Wells is only a short trip from our log home in North Hebron, New York, so research on the song brought us to Wells over and over again. Through these visits, we found many answers to our questions. At the same time, we uncovered some mysteries yet to be solved.

All this research led to a glorious evening on September 21st, 2019, at the United Methodist Church in Wells. I had the privilege of leading an evening of story and song remembering the life of James Rowe. The 50 plus in attendance participated in song while I shared the life story of their former resident, James Rowe. As you might remember, when James died in November 10, 1933, he was buried next to his wife, Blanche, in St. John's Lutheran Cemetery in Colonie, New York, without a headstone. We were happy to announce that enough money was donated over the last year to purchase a headstone for the Rowes. The Vermont granite stone was put in place this past July by the Morris-Stebbins-Miner-Sanvidge Funeral Home of Troy, New York. (See A 1,000 Words Page- *Love Lifted Me*- The Rest of the Story.)

As far as the mysteries go, there are still unanswered questions. First and foremost, having written and published 9,000 songs, you would think a proper stone would have been affordable. Instead, during the last years of his life, he lived with his daughter, Louise Mayhew, in a rented apartment in Wells, I think James lived in Wells because his daughter and his brother, Richard (who was employed by the Wellsmere Farm) lived there. According to James' obituary, he also had a sister in Albany.

Louise died in 1963 and is buried in the Wells cemetery. At least, I think so. Her stone is on someone else's lot, and her last name is listed as Rowe-not Mayhew. This causes another mystery to remain unanswered. Why the last name change? I haven't found the death certificate as yet. (See the A 1,000 Words page, *Love Lifted Me*.)

According to Winnie, a native of Wells, the Rowes never lived in the Mayhew house in town—another mystery. Perhaps, the lack of finances would only afford them rental property.

James Rowe appeared to die penniless, but owned a beautiful mansion in Heaven which no amount of money can buy. That mansion was secured for him the day that James Rowe repented of his sins and asked for forgiveness from Jesus Christ. As he expressed so well:

I was sinking deep in sin, Far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more;
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
From the Waters lifted me, now safe am I.

How about you?

Bill Dagle, hymn historian, has been doing the stories behind the hymns since 1992 by way of radio, newspaper features, and personal appearances in local churches in the Northeast. The stories behind the hymns allow the listener and singer to understand the circumstances behind the writing of the hymns and how God has worked in special ways in the past to give us these wonderful songs today.