

DARTMOUTH — Renate Hamer, 85, has always had a song in her heart. A native of Linz, Austria, she began writing music as a young child.

Mrs. Hamer remembers the day with sadness that she had to flee Vienna during the Nazi occupation of her homeland.

“I walked for a week,” she said. “A lot of my compositions were lost.”

More than half a-century ago she married Gilman Hamer, an American soldier and New Bedford native. Settling here, the couple joined the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth.

Over the years Mrs. Hamer continued to compose and perform on the organ and piano at SouthCoast churches.

“I like melodies and harmonies,” she said. “It’s a gift from God.”

In celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth, Mrs. Hamer will present the cantata “We Celebrate with Singing” at 10 a.m. tomorrow. The piece will be performed by the church choir with visiting members from Smith Mills Congregational Church of North Dartmouth. The community is invited to attend.

“Music is a language Renate is very good at,” said Dr. William Haffner-Jones, music director at the church. “It is pleasant to work when text and music language coincide. She writes very well for voices.”

Based on Psalm 136, the composition makes use of the hymn tune “Dundee.” The congregation joins in at the end of the cantata.

Following the service will be a coffee hour featuring a history corner. A timeline populated with special events in the life of the church also will be displayed.

“At the end of the timeline is a place for church members to share their hopes and dreams for the church for the next 200 years,” said Cecelia Roberts, chairperson of the Bicentennial Steering Committee.

The theme of the nine-month celebration is “Building a Loving, Living Church since 1807.”

Two hundred years ago a small group of men and women met to organize the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth. Services were held in the homes of the members and in the neighborhood schoolhouse.

In 1815 a severe gale ravaged the coast, and the church records were destroyed when the dwelling where they were kept was swept away.

“We don’t have original records and documents,” Mrs. Roberts said. “We simply have recollections of members.”

Two years later the cornerstone was laid, and the Middle Street church was dedicated to the worship of God.

Red-cushioned, straight-backed pews occupied the center of the church with aisles on the sides and one row of pews close to the wall. There were doors to the pews and low wooden stools in each pew to kneel upon. Members of the congregation brought their own foot-warmers to take away the chill from the drafty floor.

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