

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1351

MARY BENNETT

Interviewed

By

Jane Butterworth

On

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

INTERVIEWEE: MARY BENNETT
INTERVIEWER: Jane Butterworth
SUBJECT: St. John's Episcopal Church
DATE: November 29, 1990

Bu: This is an interview for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Mary Bennett about St. John's Episcopal Church. It is November 29 at 11 in the morning.
When did you first come to St. John's?

Be: We came from New York in 1950.

Bu: So you didn't grow up here. Where did you grow up?

Be: I grew up in Eau Clair, Wisconsin. There was a Cathedral. It was the Eau Clair Episcopal Diocese.

Bu: Where did you go to school?

Be: I went to Kemper Hall, which was an Episcopal Girls Preparatory School. I loved it.

Bu: What was it like?

Be: We wore uniforms and we were busy all the time.

Bu: Did you go on to college?

Be: Yes. I went to Bradford out in Bradford, Massachusetts. Then I went to the University of Colorado and I also graduated from there.

Bu: Where did you meet your husband?

Be: I met him in New York. He was in Cornell Medical School. I was out there with some friends trying to be a businesswoman. I didn't do very well.

Bu: You were married. Did you live in New York for a while?

Be: Yes. We were married in St. Bartholomew's in New York. We lived there until he finished medical school and interned. Then he went into the service and went to New Mexico at Ava Hospital for two years. He came back and had two more years at the New York hospital.

Bu: What brought you to Youngstown?

Be: He was from Poland and wanted to come back.

Bu: What were your first impressions of St. John's?

Be: It was a lovely church. They had 9 o'clock and 11 o'clock services. We were trying to get the two services together to get to know each other.

Bu: Did they do anything special to get them together?

Be: Some did, but we laughed about it. It was crowded.

Bu: Where your children little then?

Be: Oh, yes. The third child was born in January and we moved in October.

Bu: Was your son ever in the boy's choir?

Be: No, he couldn't sing.

Bu: Was Dr. Bennett in the choir?

Be: Off and on. It was hard to do extra things with his practice.

Bu: If the children were little then it was probably a while before you started to get involved in the church?

Be: It seemed like we were always busy, but it was a little while. We were both active for years. The people were friendly.

Bu: What was Sunday School like then?

Be: I felt sorry for the teachers. The children seemed to like it, but there were a lot of children in their classes. They always wanted to go. They learned the fundamentals.

Bu: So all of your children were confirmed at St. John's?

Be: Yes.

Bu: What other activities were you involved in? When did you start the Altar Guild?

Be: I can't remember. The Altar Guild was an awesome thing at the time. Everything had to be so perfect.

Bu: Who was the director when you started?

Be: Joan Bolington. I think.

Bu: Where you involved in the Kinder Club?

Be: Yes. There were couples. We had wonderful get togethers and dinners.

Bu: What would a typical evening be like?

Be: We ate and had a program. I don't remember too many dances.

Bu: Were the programs like speakers, films, or slides.

Be: All of those. I really can't remember, but we had a good time.

Bu: Was the dinner potluck or did someone cook?

Be: Both.

Bu: About how many people were involved?

Be: I think it was about 25 couples. There were some that were older than us.

Bu: What happened that made it end? It seemed to be going so strong there for a while.

Be: I don't know. Other people moved away and it started to dwindle. We tried to make it into a woman's group.

Bu: Were you a member of the women's group when you came to St. John's?

Be: Every woman was a member. They did quite a bit. They had a house keeping committee and that was quite an honor to be on. They made money to decorate the parlor.

Bu: All the furniture in the parlor was from that.

Be: Yes.

Bu: When was that changed over from a poolroom?

Be: I don't remember that.

Bu: I guess that it was a room for the men that had a pool table. When did women start to take a bigger role?

Be: It hasn't been a long time.

Bu: Can you share some of your recollection of some of the clergy since you have been here?

Be: John Burt and I came at the same time. I was very grateful to him. He could see that things had to be changed at the church and he made it a more democratic church. Then, there was Clark Oler. I don't think that anyone disliked him. He was so kind. Next, there was this boy, a student from Brazil. He stayed at our home. He never should have been there. He wasn't very happy here.

Bu: Whose idea was it to bring him?

Be: The Diocese was studying on Brazil. I don't know whose idea it was though. The Bishop did not give him his approval, though.

Bu: Where you here for all of the major renovations?

Be: Yes.

Bu: Dr. Gould said that the old organ was literally held together by scotch tape and paper clips.

Be: Most people didn't like removing the old pipe organ

Bu: Did those feelings disappear when the new organ came?

Be: I really think that they did. Most people wanted the renovations.

Bu: I understand that there was a year delay because someone was concerned about parts coming through communist countries.

Be: I don't remember that.

Bu: Where did you hold the Christmas Bizarre?

Be: At the church.

Bu: In the bridge?

Be: We had decorations all over the church. We worked very hard, but had a great time.

Bu: It's a great way to bring people together.

Be: It really is.

Bu: We don't have those anymore.

Be: After a while it started to just fall apart.

Bu: Did you hold the services in the chapel then?

Be: On Thursdays. We had a women's board and we gave money to missions.

Bu: How else did you earn money?

Be: We sold Christmas cards. The bizarre was where how we really made most of the money.

Bu: Where you there at the initiation of the Boars Head? Where you involved in that?

Be: Oh, yes.

Bu: I see new faces in church now.

Be: I am on the new member's committee and there are some very interesting people out there.

Bu: What do you do as a member of the committee?

Be: I try to be friendly and greet them at church. You can spot new members easily. We really try to make them feel at home.

Bu: I like to see new families with children coming in.

Be: We need them. That is the only way a church can survive.

Bu: Do you know anything about something called A Feast of Lights and the Canterbury's Choir?

Be: The Canterbury's Choir is a women's choir.

Bu: Tell me about Hunsdon Cary. What was he like?

Be: We enjoyed him. He was very liberal and I think he did a great job. He just wrote an autobiography and it is very interesting.

Bu: Did you do much with the banners?

Be: No.

Bu: Can you tell me what it was like to come to church in the 50's? Was it very formal?

Be: No, it was not a high church. I did not like the high church, but others do like it.

Bu: Was the procession a lot more formal?

Be: No. It's more or less the same.

Bu: Did people dress up more to come to church at that time?

Be: Oh, yeah. Women wore hats and white gloves.

Bu: When did that stop?

Be: Probably in the 60's. We had to wear white veils, too, when I was at Kemper Hall.

Bu: What do you think of the change over to the new prayer book?

Be: Some of the things I think are unnecessary. I'm not sure this new one helps too much. I've been having a hard time following it. It was an expensive change.

Bu: I think a lot of people appreciated the old prose.

Be: I'm not sure about it, but we'll see.

Bu: Do you think St. John's is letting go of a lot of its traditions?

Be: Some, yes. It still seems like a traditional church to me. I think the organizations have completely changed. There aren't as many things to be involved in.

Bu: Where you in on the start of the soup kitchen?

Be: Oh, yes. It was very exciting.

Bu: Whose idea was it to start the soup kitchen and about when did it start?

Be: I don't know when it started. There were so many people that were interested in starting it, but Jack Morris was a moving force.

Bu: What can you tell me about adult education?

Be: I think they are doing a lot more now. We used to have a Bible Study Group. The ladies would meet during the day instead of at night. People from different churches would also come.

Bu: Were there programs available for your children that no longer exist?

Be: No, the youth group still exists. I think it is wonderful. But I don't think that there were too many programs for the children. Children get to know each other a little better through the group.

Bu: Where you involved in the Medieval Festival?

Be: The first year I was in charge of selling cookies, but I was not involved in the committee. I don't remember the second year.

Bu: Have there been any other projects that you can remember that sounded good in the beginning but were short-lived?

Be: It's hard to remember all of this. The circle thing didn't work. That was where women decided what group they were going to belong to.

Bu: I heard that the 60's were a very vital time.

Be: I think all the churches were at that time. I think that there are more things going on now in the church to get people involved.

Bu: Were you involved in the Steven's Ministry?

Be: No. I was sick then.

Bu: What do you feel are the specialties of St. John's?

Be: All the activities that people can be involved in. I think all these different groups are wonderful.

Bu: Do you usually participate in the hanging of the greens?

Be: I used to, but I haven't recently. I haven't done much since I've been sick.

Bu: I think that it's a nice thing for the children.

Be: I think that they moved things more to the daytime, because a lot of people have stopped going out at night.

Bu: Is there anything else that you have been involved in or any other recollections that you would like to add?

Be: No, I think that it about it.

Bu: Thank you for your time.

Be: You're welcome.

End of interview.