

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1356

ROBERTA JONES

Interviewed

By

Jane Butterworth

On

November 19, 1990

Roberta G. Fowler was born in Youngstown, Ohio on August 18, 1913. She graduated from South High School, and married Paul A. Jones in 1931. They had three children, twin daughters Sally and Diane, and one son, Robert. Called “Bert” by most of her friends, Mrs. Jones grew up at St. John’s, and has wonderful memories of Sunday school.

Through the years, Bert has been involved in many of the projects undertaken by the women of St. John’s. She was part of the group who made needlepoint kneelers for the chancel, and also worked diligently to create the colorful memorial banners, which now hang in the church. She has received the St. John’s Silver Cross from the Vestry for a lifetime commitment and contribution to the church.

One of the most interesting aspects of this interview is her recollection of the major renovation in 1954. Her husband kept a faithful pictorial record of the weekly changes as St. John’s was transformed to its current state. As a member of the Boar’s Head Lunch Committee, and the Altar Guild, she has contributed numerous hours to St. John’s. Her other hobbies include needlework crafts, golf, and bowling.

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERTA JONES  
INTERVIEWER: Jane Butterworth  
SUBJECT: St. John's Episcopal Church  
DATE: November 19, 1990

B: This is an interview for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program with Roberta Jones, regarding St. John's Episcopal Church, on November 19, 1990.

How long has your family been at St. John's? Were your parents originally members?

J: My mother was and my father happened to be Lutheran. My mother couldn't drive so my first experience was by being taken there by my sister, on the bus, who was five years older. We started Sunday school when I was about 7.

Following that, I had an aunt that was also a member. My mother had two sisters that were members of St. Catherine's Guild in the church. My aunt could drive so she started to take us to church. Her son sang in St. John's choir. I was subsequently in Sunday school and then Confirmed in the church.

B: What are your memories of Sunday school?

J: It was very different for me. We had walked to a Presbyterian Church on Market Street, which was Evergreen Presbyterian. When I started at St. John's, I came home and told my mother what I learned there. It wasn't too long that we were learning things that would lead to Confirmation. I kept telling her all these things that I had learned that were innovations to me and she knew them all the time. The Presbyterian Sunday school was nice and we were treated nicely but I didn't learn too much there.

B: Do you remember specifically any of the Sunday school teachers?

J: Mrs. Cook, Mrs. Sydney Taylor, and Edith Porter. I can't remember too many after that. I think that after I was confirmed we were more interested in other things.

B: Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood and where you lived and where you went to school?

J: I was born on the north side. Before I was born my father worked for the railroad and had been in an accident and lost his one leg. I never knew my father to have two legs but it never hampered him whatsoever. He should have had benefits from the railroad but he didn't because they caught him at a bad time when he was over medicated and they had him sign a paper denying benefits, which he was never able to claim later. He worked for Truscon Steel as an electrician. When I was five we moved from the north side to the south side area. That was where I really grew up. I went to Princeton School, at the time it was to remain a junior high. I stayed there for the full nine years through junior high and finished up at South High. I walked to school and came home for lunch and walked back.

It wasn't much time; you had to walk pretty fast to make it. It was quite an experience.

B: Were you involved in the youth group at church?

J: Yes, and later on I was involved in a young adult group. That was where I met my husband. My sister was also in that group. We stayed there in that group until we got married or went off to college or moved away. I really enjoyed the youth group though.

B: What were some of the activities that you participated in with the youth group?

J: The younger group had meetings every Sunday evening and had meetings in the old parish house that was besides the church in an old big house. We had some hayrides and had discussion groups. We would organize and have a dance. The older group was more organized. They put on plays and had committees. By that time we had the parish house like there is now. They held dances regularly. Two of the men in the group were very talented. One could play the piano so well. After I was married I went on to other activities.

B: Were the plays more religiously oriented or socially?

J: They had many of them. They had musicals and others that were more on the dramatic side.

B: Would the congregation come?

J: Yeah, everyone was invited. Many of the dances were also open to everyone.

B: You guys made quite a use of the stage, then?

J: Yes, we did. Before that the auditorium was a gym. St. John's used to sponsor a men and women's basketball teams. I was also involved in another church team.

I was very interested in sports when I was younger. I took gym all the way through school. There were gymnastics shows and all those different teams in school. I really enjoyed them but I think they caught up with me after awhile.

B: I think they always do. Were you involved in the choir?

J: I can't carry a tune in a basket. My husband was a soprano. His mother and father were also involved in the church. His father was a very quiet but good member. He went to church regularly.

I think that he instilled that into my husband. He sang in the choir as a soloist. They sang for weddings and funerals.

B: Were you married at St. John's?

J: No, I was married in West Virginia because I was still in school. I made my mother a promise that I would stay in school, so I did. I lived at my house and he lived at his. When I finished school I lived with him and his father for a while.

B: So, how long were you away from St. John's?

J: I wasn't away then. They lived in town. He lived on the north side.

B: You went away for college, then?

J: I didn't go to college. I just graduated from high school. We lived at his father's house until we built our own house. We going to move out and get an apartment but we had two children instead of one. It was quite a surprise. We got a house when my girls turned a year old. My father-in-law moved in with us and lived there for about four and a half years. He was a very nice man. He and my husband both worked at U.S. Steel.

B: Were you involved in the Kinder Club?

J: I was there when it was first formed, but we were not involved in it because my husband didn't want to be involved in that much of the social atmosphere. When the girls were old enough they went to Sunday school. There was a seven and a half year difference between the girls and my son, so my husband took them to Sunday school until they were too old and then there was quite a gap until my son started nursery classes. Mary Agler was one of my son's teachers. He just loved her. Then he went into the choir when he was about seven years old.

B: It must have been wonderful to have a boy's choir in the church.

J: It was great. The boys enjoyed it. I have tapes of him singing.

B: If possible, can you share some of your recollections of the various ministers that you have known? Maybe starting back with the first one that made an impression on you.

J: I think the first one was Reverend Striker. He was a friend of my family, especially my aunt because my mother didn't like to entertain. I got to know Dr. Kinder pretty well. He baptized my son.

B: Do you remember which Rectors married your children?

J: John Weigle married my son and Harold Luxon married one daughter, and Clarke Oler assisted with the other daughter's wedding.

B: Do you have any special recollections of them?

J: John Burt, I do. My daughter's mother-in-law, Ruth Luxon used to care for his children when they went away. He seems to remember me when I see him. I think I knew him pretty well but not as well as others. I wasn't that involved in the church until later. And then my mother was still with us so I couldn't go to

church as often because of the situation. My mother was quite active and went to her own church but made the change and had our minister's blessing to join the ministry. It was good for her because she lost her mother and her husband in just a couple months of each other. She tried to get herself organized and could never find her place until she came to St. John's. She lived to be 97 years old. She was a little radical in the things she believed in.

B: Do you recall the making of the painting that hangs by the parish office?

J: No, I knew the painting and knew when it happened but I didn't know much about it. I wondered a little bit. I knew a lot of the people that were in the choir at that time and I can name a lot of them. I don't know who painted it.

B: It's interesting to look at it and see the old St. John's.

J: Yes.

B: I'm sure you recall that major remodeling that followed that painting.

J: Yes. That was another thing. My son was a member of the choir at that time and had to go to practice on Saturdays. My husband usually took him down. There is a series of pictures with the tearing down and building up of the church. I have made up a set for the church. I have some other pictures at home. It was amazing. We still went to church but the services were held at Jones Hall across the street at the college.

B: I wondered where they held service?

J: That's where it was held.

B: Just in one of the rooms?

J: I haven't been back since that time. It was in one of the larger rooms. It was



- quite a change and challenge for the Altar Guild. It's really amazing what they did with the church. There was no floor on the church at all. It was just a shell.
- B: How long did all of this take?
- J: I'm not sure how long it took but it seemed like forever. Of course, we could do some things at the parish house. That was fixed up a little bit, too. There was a locker room for the choirboys and some pool tables. The office upstairs was a larger lounge with a fireplace.
- B: And since the larger lounge was made into smaller rooms?
- J: Yes. Of course, my mother was in the St. Catherine's Guild. It was really the one that came to the group it is today. I went down when my children were in school. They needed people to sew and stuff like that. I started when my mother was still living. People she was in it with, were still there. I really enjoyed them because I have known them for so many years. They always had some kind of project to do.
- B: We are looking at some photographs that Mrs. Jones' husband took during the remodeling. The first one shows the pews and the floor removed with the view towards the west door and also the pews removed looking towards the front of the church with the wooden guards protecting the statues on the altar. The next photograph is rather startling because the floor is totally gone. It's taken from the undercroft looking towards the door. So, you are looking at the height of the church. With the choir stalls and the flooring removed. Was the floor in such bad shape that this had to be done? Or did they take out the floor to do a better job with the undercroft?

- J: I think that it had to be reinforced more. It was totally a wood floor before and when they redid it they put a tile floor down. Being that they were going to do that they had to tear everything up.
- B: That is just incredible. How was the sacristy changed?
- J: I did not work in the Altar Guild at that time but it was very primitive. They had just an old cupboard that they used for the silver and beneath that was a drawer for the silk, hangings, and linens. They all had to be covered because of the heat and being in the valley. Everything would be covered with soot because of the mills around us. Having lived on the north side I can understand this, but it wasn't as bad on the south side.
- B: I notice that they left the altar up.
- J: They left it up but it had to be built up from underneath because it was so heavy.
- B: It looks heavy. Here's a picture of the blockings used to hold up the altar while the new beams are being put in place. Here's June 13<sup>th</sup>. We are already a month into this. Wow. And here it is with the new concrete floor. On July 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> there were no changes made because of a hod carrier strike.
- J: The hod carriers went on strike so they couldn't do anything.
- B: Oh, that had to make everyone concerned.
- J: That happens sometimes when you are building.
- B: There's a wonderful record of all these changes.
- J: My husband took my son down there every week so these pictures were very current with the changes that occurred.
- B: Who redesigned all these changes? Was it all voted on?

- J: I'm not sure who designed it. It's probably in the church records.
- B: It's just so wonderful that he had this kind of forethought to take all these pictures and write everything down.
- J: He was very interested in the church and the choir and the people but he was not interested in the social aspect. We went to church a lot but he did not want to be deeply involved. When my son was in the choir Pauline Jones was in charge of the Altar Guild and she would always ask for me to join but I had my hands full. I said that until Bob was out of the choir I couldn't do anything more. Then my son joined the Acolytes and I started doing things for that group. It wasn't until my son was no longer an Acolyte that I became a member of the Altar Guild under Pauline Jones. She met with an untimely death in 1965 soon after I joined. She was always there when anything came up. We were very fortunate to have her. Here he has "Sunday, November 15, 1954 "the big day." Everything was already to go." Thank you for sharing these pictures with me. In the most recent history books there's talk about A Feast of Life. Do you remember anything about that?
- J: No, not really.
- B: You're not alone. Nobody else I spoke to remembers either.
- J: There's another thing that you weren't a part of. The Christmas service that we have is a beautiful service and I don't want to take anything away from that, but at one time they had the choir in the undercroft of the church and sang carols. There were so many people that came to our service that they had to set up chairs in the aisle. There came a time when they had to issue tickets for the congregation and

- they couldn't allow anyone else in. Many people were turned away because they couldn't get in.
- B: How long didn't we have a boy's choir?
- J: Ron Gould tried to keep a few boys. Frank Fuller had a real knack for the boys. Ron didn't really have the patience to teach the boys to sing. Frank really knew how to teach.
- B: So, it just phased out for a while?
- J: I think so. There were few boys interested.
- B: Tell me about the banner? Whose idea was it to start that?
- J: I don't know whose idea it was to start the banners but Karen Kelly was really the one who led it. Karen basically took the lead in it but there were a number of people who took part in the sewing of the banners. Mrs. Russo would bring the designs over. She brought two sheets with the designs on them but one was the enlarged version. One we cut up and the other we worked from. Each one was marked with the colors. The backs we had to do for the most part by hand, but there was parts of it we could use the machine for. We would do as much as we could on a sheet but it didn't always work out.
- B: How long did it take altogether to create a banner?
- J: I'm really not sure. It was a good amount of time. We would put them up gradually as we got them done and put them up as we went.
- B: Do you remember what year you started?
- J: 1986 was the year we worked on them.
- B: I was just wondering because they have been there as long as I have been at St.

John's.

J: I can't remember off hand. I'm sure the records would show that. Karen was to receive an award for that and I got one, too. She was not able to receive it because she was ill on that Sunday. It was a fun thing to do. We would have coffee and donuts. We only had a few sewing machines to work with. Karen was great to work with. We were there all the time but the others did come and help. I volunteered to do it because I felt I could be of some help but I wasn't in favor of it. I thought that the church was beautiful without it. I think they grow on you.

B: I see that you do a pretty tough looking needlepoint. Did you help with the cushions?

J: That's when I started to do needlepoint. I also started knitting for the church, too.

B: How long have you been in the Altar Guild?

J: It must be about 20 years or longer. I can't remember the year that Pauline Jones was killed. I was involved five years before she was killed. (1965)

TAPE ENDED IN MIDDLE OF CONVERSATION.