

Memories of the Past

I was born Nancy Macy Streeter in 1934, the only child of Helen M. and Harold W. Streeter. I was baptized, with my cousin Jim, at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Portland, Connecticut, by my grandfather, Rev. Florus L. Streeter, then pastor of the church. My parents had joined Brainerd Presbyterian Church (now First Presbyterian Church) and shortly after my baptism, began my 73 year journey.

Brainerd enjoyed a very large membership and there were at least 150-200 children enrolled in Sunday School, with my

father serving as Superintendent. It was a wealthy church – many of the congregants were faculty from College and Hillcrest residents employed by Ingersoll-Rand as executives and engineers. There were a number of “old”



families and “old” money. In 1941 when we merged with First Presbyterian, we were “bursting at the seams.” Brainerd had become First Presbyterian Church.

Services began at 11:00 preceded by one hour of Sunday School. Children were required to sit with parents throughout the entire service. Dress code was formal – men wore suits and ties (not sport coats), and women and girls wore skirts and always hats and gloves year round.



Communion was a solemn occasion – elders wore black suits and ties with white shirts, and Professor Hall wore tails because it was his job to remove the cloth that covered the communion table. He was an elderly gentleman, bearded, and for some peculiar reason, I thought of him as resembling Abraham Lincoln. There

were no term limits when serving as an elder – one either retired or passed away. As I recall, they were a distinguished lot – Professors Streeter, Hart Cabeen, Hunt, Crozen, Hall, Realtor Ford, Rahn, Dr. Murray, Attorney E.J Fox. There were no teams; elders did all the work of the church and session meetings often lasted until midnight. It was a problem for the faculty with 8:00 classes the next morning. As a child, I remember the sanctuary as being very dark, particularly on a rainy day. From Easter 1954 to Easter 1955, the room underwent extensive renovations. Both the wall panels and pews were sanded and stained the color we enjoy today, and the carpeting was changed from burgundy to red. The organ was replaced in the 1960s under the guidance of E. Lee McMillen.

The choir loft differed slightly from today. Our red chairs replaced pews facing the organ. Robert Kuebler, our lifetime organist, directed the choir as he played. Adelaide Dougherty was our paid soprano, Charles Bealer, our bass. I also remember, early on, Jane Troup, Bonnie Elder, Laura Wilson, Geraldine Hoadley and Lew Dawson.

Two restrooms were located in the basement of the Church House. We thought of them as “indoor outhouses.” During worship if one had a “hurry call,” one needed to leave the sanctuary, run down the sidewalk, into the church house, and down to the basement! Additional facilities were added in the 1950s.

The appearance of the Church House was quite different in the 1930s and 1940s. It consisted of one large room with a cathedral ceiling, two very large arched windows on the Bank Street side and beautiful stained glass windows adjacent to the sanctuary building. These were removed when the second floor was built.

There was a large room at the South end of the building (Brainerd) used as the Cradle Roll Room and another at the North end of the building which was the pastor’s office. The church office was, I believe, where the Christian Ed office is located. There were open balconies over the North and South rooms. Wood and glass walls separated these rooms from the large room, and these walls could be retracted and folded back to enlarge the “great room.” The light fixtures in the “great room” were large, white globes suspended from the ceiling, and I seem to recall four wall sconces with small globes. A raised dais, with lectern and two chairs, was located between the stained glass windows. The location can be seen from the court yard. The current fire doors replaced brown swing doors with windows, and the coat racks are in the same position as they were 70 years ago.

In the early 1950s, a decision was made by Dr. Robert T. Williamson to build a chapel with a cathedral ceiling. It was for small weddings and funerals and was used extensively during the year of sanctuary renovations.

I remember the large room as rather shabby – surprising, considering the wealth of the church. We sat at round tables in mismatch chairs, obviously from a dining room. The rug was thread bare. Along one wall, there was a black horsehair sofa, springs popping. The walls were covered with photographs. An upright piano stood where the organ had been, and I remember the girls chasing Cappy Vanderbush around the piano.

We always had a short service prior to our lessons. Favorite hymns were “Onward Christian



Light Bearers – Spring 1942
Nancy Streeter in the middle

Soldiers” and “Fairest Lord Jesus.” I was the pianist (Dad had me practice prior to Sunday School). In the service kitchen area, there was a large desk shielded by a portable screen. Church treasurer Maskell Ewing would sit there to work on books and count money. Children age two and under were in the Cradle Roll Room, and children in second grade were in the balconies, having been walled in for safety. Third

grade advanced to the large room. We always had a large communicants’ class joining about age 12-13 years. Junior High and Senior High met every Sunday evening for sandwiches and milk prepared by our moms. Dr. Williamson always had some sort of lesson for us to work on. Back then, youth group was known as Westminster Fellowship. We had great fun – hay rides, doggie roasts and Easter sunrise services on Paxinosa Mountain.

There was, however, one Sunday evening that nearly ended in disaster. The choir closet in Brainerd was at one time a large dumbwaiter. That particular evening, Dr. Williamson was in his study, and the Senior High boys decided that it would be fun to put the smallest of the girls in the dumbwaiter. I was the first passenger, rode to the kitchen and back up.

Caryl Hart was the next: the rope twisted, and she was caught between floors. Dr. Williamson managed to rescue Carly, but needless to say, he was fit to be tied. He called every parent, and all five of us were grounded. And I can tell you from experience, that there is little to no air between the floors.

At one time, we had a half dozen or so families living on North Delaware Drive: the Heaters, Hillyerds, Frawleys, Wheelers, Felkers, etc. The parents never attended church, but the children were in Sunday School every week. When I was very young, our pastor was Dr. Mertz. He and his wife lived on McCartney Street. They were never blessed with children, and Mrs.



Sunday School – November 1937
Bank Street Side of the Building
Nancy Streeter on the far left

Mertz, with my mother's help, spent considerable time with Delaware Street families. Mrs. Mertz took food and clothing, purchased eye glasses, and paid for dental and doctor visits. After Dr. and Mrs. Mertz moved on, we learned that they helped to send more than one student to Lafayette.

When I was in 7th grade Dr. Spencer Edmunds was our pastor. Mrs. Edmunds

frequently invited youth to their home located at Lafayette and Cattell Streets. She always had cocoa and cookies for us, and we were a noisy group of kids. Dr. Edmunds contracted kidney cancer, and I remember singing Christmas carols under his bedroom window shortly before he died.

We had many "covered dish suppers" – always with linen tablecloths and napkins, china and silverware. Kitchen clean-up was done by Mrs Felker and her family. I know they were paid handsomely and the linens were picked up the following day by the old Easton Sanitary laundry.

The Women's Association, then known as the Women's Guild, met monthly in the large room – always with a speaker and refreshments. Mrs Felker was once again pressed into service. Tea and coffee cups went to the kitchen by way of the dumpwaiter. There would often be 150 women in attendance. Groups came into being in the 1950s.

In the early 1950s, the decision was made to build a chapel (Ridgeway Lounge) with a Cathedral ceiling. Classrooms were built on the second floor with a hallway connecting the North and South ends of the building. In the 1960s, Dr. James felt we needed a social room, and so with a generous bequest from Sara Ridgeway, the lounge took the place of the chapel, and the second floor was completed. The Church House was connected to the narthex in the 1960s. Prior to

this, the choir processed from the Church House to the sanctuary main door via the Spring Garden Street sidewalk despite inclement weather.

There are many stories. Sunday School picnics at Bushkill Park – always well attended and enjoyed by parents and kids alike.

The Christmas Eve Service with a bat soaring above us and the ladies with bulletins on their heads.

The Sunday Bruce Drinkhouse served the grape juice first.

The Sunday five year old Margaret M. threw up her breakfast on the cushion fourth row from the front.

The Sunday the neighborhood tomcat entered the sanctuary by the open door near the choir, and mother jumped up, grabbed the cat, and took him out while Dr. Williamson stopped his sermon. Dad didn't speak to her for the remainder of the day.

And the night every overcoat, some containing car keys were stolen from the coat rack while met in the doors.

Over the past 70 odd years the service of worship has changed very little. The bulletins are larger print, and the hymnals are missing a few of my favorite old hymns. Communion cups are plastic and served by both men and women in colorful attire. We no longer recite a responsive reading, and hopefully the choir will continue to process down the main aisle as in the past.

We use plastic tablewear and cloths, every door in the Church House is locked, and the red doors have replaced the old brown doors with windows. Children are in Sunday School during church. And it remains the friendly, family atmosphere I remember as a child.

As I serve on the Vision Implementation Team, I hope that in some small way, my recollections from the past have helped in building our future for generations to come and that our youth will come to realize what a privilege it is to be part of the First Presbyterian Church of Easton, Pennsylvania.

Nancy Streeter Wilson

May 18, 2007