

St. Pauls Church

St. Paul's Episcopal Church as told to Patchwork by Ann Brandt.

Interviewed by Jake Baigis & Kyle Mauk in the spring of 2003

Ann Brandt's full name is Ann Margaret Harris (maiden name). She has lived almost all of her life in Columbia County. She is retired, but was a schoolteacher for most of her life. She received her degree from Bloomsburg State College. She has been attending St. Paul's Church for most of her life and is currently the archivist.

PATCHWORK: How long have you attended this church?

BRANDT: I've attended it since 1955, when I joined after I was married. My husband went here.

PATCHWORK: When was the church built, without any remodeling or changes made to the church?

BRANDT: This building was built starting in 1868, and completed in 1870 and it was dedicated in 1870.

PATCHWORK: About how many members were there when the church was first started?

BRANDT: Well, when the church was first started it was before this building. So the church began here in 1790 and the first Church was built in 1793 and it was a log hut. It was built where the rectory is now, next to the church. And that's where the next church was. This is actually the fourth building for the church.

PATCHWORK: What was the first church like? What customs did you participate in, How did you reach out towards youth, or weren't there many youth that attended back then at that time?

BRANDT: Well if you're talking about my personal experience in the 1950's, I first remember coming to this church before that, and I came to a dance and it was held right here in this room and it was because we weren't allowed to have a dance at the school in the gym,

which happened to be the building up here on center street, and for some reason we weren't given permission to have a dance and we wanted to have a dance before the prom, a pre-prom dance, and so we had it here in this building. We were invited here, and the orchestra played up on the stage there, and this was not carpeted at that time. It was, actually this was used for basketball at one time, believe it or not. They had a basketball league, so I'm told. This was before my time. I think there was maybe more outreach with the...There were fewer things for students to do and so I think the church came into play a lot more. For one thing there used to be a building out here in the yard that was known as the village barn but it was known as the scout hall. And if you remember Mr. Hutchison, he was one of the last scout leaders, Boy Scout leaders that used that hall. They had a very active Boy Scout troop here at that time. They had a basketball league in Bloomsburg where they played each other. If you know the Presbyterian Church, the old part in behind there has like a basketball court in it or it did. And so a lot of the older buildings had a kind of a gym in them or an all-purpose room. There were things like that that went on now when my husband was younger. They had a Canterbury club, which was a club for students at the college that was college age students had a Canterbury club here. My children at one time over in the rectory, in the basement, they had a pool table. The rectory had at the time it had a lot of activities for youth over there. So things change, things change.

PATCHWORK: How has attending St. Paul's influenced your life and the lifestyles of people of Columbia County?

BRANDT: Well it, the church, I think, is the center, is often the center of the community and community life. Of course in Bloomsburg you have a number of churches so there are different groups, but another thing we used to have was a Sunday school association that youth went to, attended. They had a spring meeting and so forth and would have guest speakers that were maybe jugglers or magicians or what have you, and maybe it would last a couple days and the youth would come from all over Columbia County. I remember going to Wesley Methodist's and to St. Matthew's Lutheran at two different times to attend the Sunday School Convention. So there were things for the county that were ecumenical, although we didn't use that word at that time. They were for a few days. I'm sorry I didn't I answer some of your questions directly. I didn't answer about membership. I think we did have more members in the 1950's than we do now. And our Sunday school is larger. We had more classes downstairs. We had five classes. I know, I taught the kindergarten class for a while. But other than that, the way it was done and also we had an adult Sunday school which was much more active. We had Sunday school separate. It wasn't during church. Now we have a Sunday school with students that get dismissed from church and

go and have classes. At that time you had the early service, then you had Sunday school, and at 10:30 you had the late service. There was time in between two services to have a separate Sunday school. You asked how much of a part it was of our life. We were here all day it seemed on Sunday. Also we had a very active women's group, we had, in fact, at one time two women's groups, a night group and a day group, that would meet in the day time or at night. For example during the second world war, now that was before I was here, but I often heard about the things that they did, from rolling bandages to making things, for soldiers, knitting socks and getting together to work on things. The women were very active. We had a bazaar every other year; in the fall we had a 3-day bazaar, which raised a lot of money. And we'd serve meals. We'd have, this would be all full of booths, selling different things. Handmade items, things like aprons, which today not many people wear, but at that time they were a big item we sold a lot of aprons and baked goods and things like that. I guess I'm saying it was a very big part of our life, even though we didn't live in town and so we had to travel to get here.

PATCHWORK: What has been your most memorable event at this church? It's kind of a broad question. You might have more than one, but just generally?

BRANDT: Well our daughter's marriage I suppose would be. Our daughter's wedding would probably be the big item because your daughter's wedding is always. Our son, when he was married, he was wed in his bride's church, not here, which is also in Columbia County, but is up in Millville. Our daughter was married the weekend after Christmas. Deliberately so, so that all the Christmas decorations would all still be up, and our church is known for their Christmas decorations. There was a picture there of the hangings and you know we still do that with all the candles and so forth. And so it was a very memorable occasion and people still talk about it in our family. What a beautiful time it was!

PATCHWORK: We know the church caught fire in recent years. How did this affect the members of the church and the people of Bloomsburg?

BRANDT: Well it affected the people in Bloomsburg more than I would have thought and I think that meant that it had a big affect on the people here. People were so kind and so generous. We received money from other churches here in town, and lots of offers of things to use or to use their buildings. We didn't. We met here, in this parish house instead of in the church, during that. Well, from September to May when we moved back in. We are very fortunate that it didn't do any more damage than it did. It was mostly to the roof. But we used vestments that were from another church that lent them to us. We used a chalice

and so on. Oh, that was a different occasion. That was when we had to send ours out to be repaired. We actually used a chalice and so forth, for the communion service from another church here in town. They lent it to us. One that they weren't using. The fire, I think brings people together when you have a crisis, and that was a crisis. We really were devastated, not only. First of all, we did lose our pews. And our pews were built, the reason we lost them was they were built right in the structure of the church. And when the roof came down on the pews, to try to take them out, to repair the roof they had to take the pews out. They had to tear them out. They were just all bolted together right to the floor, the uh, the rafters or whatever. So we lost our antique pews, which I was very sorry to see go. They were unique I thought. And when we had the re-dedication, the whole town of Bloomsburg, I swear was here. We had so many people from the community that came and sang and participated. The church was packed. It was wonderful.

PATCHWORK: Has any other crisis ever happened to this building?

BRANDT: There are always crises, of course, but not to that extent. I'm trying to think. There was a big fire. One of those pictures shows a couple of buildings up here where the parking lot is now. Those belong to the church. Those buildings belong to the church. There was a house there. The house, actually the custodian of the church lived in that house with his family. And some of the members of that family are still members of the church here by the way. And I know one of the, Fred Morris is the person I'm speaking of, said he was on the way home from school when he saw the flames. As they got closer they realized it was their house, their home, and it burned down. It was, of course, then never rebuilt. That was in the 30's, I think, or the 40's. So that was traumatic. We had trouble with the tower; we had trouble with the roof lots of times. In a way, that was a blessing when it burned, because we got a new roof, which we desperately needed. Since we're in the Historic District, it had to be replaced with the same slate roof that was there before. And slate is very expensive now to put on although it lasts a long time so it was only replaced on the one side. It wasn't the whole church. That's the side where it used to leak. In fact they were up there doing some repairs just before that. That's how it was discovered. Earlier than that, some of the stones used to fall off the bell tower. The ball tower was built last. I think you may have noticed that on one of the pictures. It wasn't built until 1890 and the church was built in 1870. It was that long before. I may be wrong about that because I think there's some pictures. The bells were not put in until then. The bells were not put in the bell tower until then, but the tower itself may have been completed a little earlier than that. But the stone was not as good a limestone as the original church is what we were told later and it started to flake off. It had to be replaced because of the

street. It was dangerous. If it were to flake off when somebody was walking underneath, they could've been hurt. So they had to tear that back down, and that was maybe in the 1960's. I remember when that was done. They just took the surface limestone down so far, and replaced it. If you go out and look you can kind of see where that is, and we had to get different limestone to match.

PATCHWORK: How has the church changed since you first started coming here?

BRANDT: Well, it's not as conservative. I think at first, when I first started coming here, I found it very stuck in its ways, very conservative, very hard to do anything different and I think that's just true of the church in general today. It's a lot more open to different ideas. Moving the altar out, you know putting it. The altar that's there is actually the first altar that was in the church. The stone altar was put in about 1950. So they brought back the wooden altar which had sat over here and use that now. But, there's more music, more freedom to do different things, and we have some more, I don't know what to call it- Mod? It wouldn't be unheard of to have a little rock music played in church. When at one time, when I first came, I think people, when I first came to church here the women all wore hats. If you came in to work around during the week, you put a little lace veil on top. You pinned it on your head to go into the church because women were supposed to have their heads covered in church. I know my mother-in-law was aghast, when women started wearing slacks, and by the time, before she died, she was wearing slacks to church every Sunday and she didn't wear a hat anymore. So things do change you know and get a little more modern, but also the service itself got a little more contemporary. The language was changed for the service itself.

PATCHWORK: In Columbia County itself, there have been many floods, crisis and things of that nature how has the church reached out.

BRANDT: Out in the vestibule, when you come in, you'll see a plaque on the wall that lists all of the people who served, in the Second World War. I wish I could say that they came here during the flood and all, but it wasn't asked of us. Okay, the college was the main place for that. We do have or we did have a very well equipped kitchen, but we don't have quite as many stoves and so forth as we did at one time. We used to serve a lot of meals to the community. I mentioned the women's group; we served meals to make money, basically, and so the rotary club might come. At one time the Rotary Club met here and they were served a meal every week, but that's before my time. Okay? But then we did serve the DAR, The Daughters of the American Revolution. If they had their fall banquet,

they might have it here, and we would serve the meal. We used to have fashion shows, and card parties and things like that downstairs, more or less as moneymakers. The money would usually go to missions and sometimes some of it would go to the town as we do now with outreaches. We quite often divide the money between needs locally and needs outside of the area or outside of this country. I can't say that we did anything particularly for the flood. We were usually available to serve meals. I was trying to think whether we may have. We may have done some, like soup. We used to have Lenten luncheons for the community where we made soup. We'd make soup every week, different soup, and people could come in for soup once a week. That's basically all I can think of off hand.