THE WOMEN OF OLD FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
HUNTINGTON, NEW YORK

Senior Project
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Women and History Need Each Other

Women have been cut out of history for centuries, crippling their consciousness of themselves. Asking the right questions about women's perceptions will help make whole both female identity and history.
This research project was developed around a collection of tape-recorded oral histories taken from members of the congregation of Old First Presbyterian Church in Huntington, New York. I used the oral interview technique not only in order that previously unrecorded history could be, in a sense, discovered, but in order to give life to those women who have long been hidden beneath the face of the male-dominated denominational church.

It would not have been possible to determine through traditional research routes the picture of women in this Church that has emerged from these oral interviews.

The preparation for the taped interview was equally as important as the interview itself. In order that a clear picture of the information I was seeking could be drawn from the minds and memories of those interviewed.

I found that I needed to be very flexible with each interviewee, not only in questions, but also in technique, in order to elicit the most pertinent information. I was not as successful with some as with others. On the whole, having some period of pre-taping time to relax and chat together, interviewer and interviewee, built a more trusting relationship and people presented a more open and thoughtful response to my questions. When that pre-taping period of time was not possible, a relationship of trust had not been established, and the responses were not as easily forthcoming, nor were they as introspective.

The most difficult of the oral interviews were done with more than a single individual. As the people talked, together and with me, their reminiscences aided in obtaining information,
but it was also difficult to maintain the focus that I intended. In interviewing a husband and wife together, the husband's responses and attitudes were most dominant. It was almost assumed that I had come to speak primarily to the husband, which I had tried to make clear at the beginning of the interview was not the case.

In studying history in this manner, I became very aware that my presentation of the facts I had gathered was slanted by my own biases, and I'm not really sure that I tried to avoid letting that happen. That lead me to the realization that all of history needs to be studied with a critical eye; to look between the lines for the motives of the historians (both conscious and unconscious), and for what was left unrecorded.

In order that this history of Old First Church would be a truly representational one, I have chosen to give fictitious names to those men and women whom I interviewed. The information presented in the vignettes is a combination of opinion and documented fact, when possible.
The history of Old First Presbyterian Church in Huntington, New York as presented in recorded documentation is an important part of the life of the Presbyterian denomination on Long Island, for it is one of the oldest churches in the Presbytery of Long Island, and certainly is of great interest to the community in which the people of its congregation live. The recorded history of the Church as part of the life of Huntington documents the physical changes in the Church itself, the lives of the pastors who have led its congregation and the works of the Church officers. It does not document the work and worship of the laywomen of "Old First," as it is known.

The thrust of this research project has been to do just that; to attempt through oral histories taken from members of the congregation to present a picture of the women of Old First.

I believe the stories presented here represent the denominational church in microcosm, especially as being representative of the role of women in the church.

According to the *History of Old First Presbyterian Church of Huntington, New York* by Ruth Hackstaff, the Church's original congregation gathered together in Huntington with its first minister, Mr. William Leverich in 1653, having come together from Sandwich, Massachusetts, for the purpose of not only settling on Long Island, but to do missionary work among the native Americans here. For the first five years services were held in the schoolroom until a church building large enough to hold 200 people was built next to Meeting House Brook, just west of the present church site in 1665.
In 1669 the first minister retired and services for the congregation were conducted by its lay members until a new minister arrived in 1675.

In 1715 the size of the congregation necessitated a new church, and the site chosen was the present one, at the top of East Hill.

Two more ministers served the Church and in the late 1770's, the Rev. Mr. Ebeneezer Prime and his congregation so enthusiastically supported the Revolution that the Church became a prime target for the British soldiers. It was occupied and used as a storage depot and stable, and in 1779 was torn down and its timbers used to construct "Fort Golgotha" on what is now the Huntington Rural Cemetery. The Church bell was taken to be used aboard a British war ship.

In 1784 the Church was officially separated from the town government and was able to elect its own trustees. The congregation set about rebuilding the church on the East Hill site, and the bell was somehow recovered and hung in the new steeple. Several more pastors served the Church as it grew in size. In 1863 approximately ninety members left the church due to irreconcilable differences and formed the Second Presbyterian Church in Huntington. Following the leadership of three more pastors, the pulpit of Old First Church was filled by Dr. J. Jeffrey Johnstome in 1911, whom some of the current Church members remember, in 1920 by Dr. Edward J. Humeston, affectionately called "Hummie" by some of the people with whom I spoke, in 1940 by Dr. William S. Hess, and in 1961 by Dr. Stanert L. Dransfield. During this period of time, as the congregation continued to grow, several additions were built into the Church. It also mothered several other Long Island
churches including the First Presbyterian Church of Babylon, the Sweet Hollow Presbyterian Church, and Bethany Presbyterian Church in Huntington Station. During the last twenty years of the church's life the congregation has also been led by three different assistant pastors. Its present pastor is the Rev. William W. Rogers.

Most of the information I've been able to document on the role of the women in the congregation of Old First Church has been from about the beginning of the Twentieth century. Prior to that time the information I could gain was scarce, but seems to correlate with an overall picture of the women's role in the Christian church at least during the 1800's as pictured by Rosemary Reuther and Rosemary Keller in their book *Women and Religion in America*.

In the late 1800's women began to exercise their leadership roles in religion by forming foreign missionary societies and deaconess orders. Large numbers of female missionaries were sent into the foreign and national fields in their own merit, not because they were married to missionaries. Women's organizations worked tirelessly to fund and support these missionaries.

"By 1894, 33 foreign mission societies had sent 1,000 female missionaries abroad, most of whom were trained in deaconess homes of Protestant denominations. They served as teachers, evangelists, and physicians in churches, schools and hospitals on every continent...They also started schools, industrial homes, agricultural projects, and chapels on Indian reservations, in prairie towns and in backwood settlements."
Their primary purpose was, as witnesses for the church, to evangelize the world. They focused on bringing the good news to women who suffered in oppressive social customs and to expand and bring greater awareness to the women's roles in their own churches. "Woman's work for Woman" was a phrase used as the title for the monthly publication of the Women's Presbyterian Board of Missions.

By channeling their efforts into these missionary societies, women began to have opportunities for leadership, planning, and administration. These were roles that had for the most part been denied them in the past.

In the vault at Old First Presbyterian Church I found some papers which would seem to substantiate these activities of the women in the 1800's.

At Old First Church the Ladies Benevolent Association of the Presbyterian Congregation in the Village of Huntington was formed in September, 1846, "in order to promote such religious benevolent and charitable objects". The name of this organization was changed several times over the next forty years but they still participated in the same types of activities through that period of time. Their records indicate that the women made clothing to send to missionary families, held a festival in order to raise funds to purchase a carpet for the church, supplied funds to those in need in their vicinity, sent a Missionary Box of clothing by steamboat to the Persecuted Portugese in New York City, made several patchwork quilts, established a scholarship fund for Princeton College, provided funds toward the purchase of an organ melodeon for the Church, sewed for soldiers, and
sent boxes of clothing to the "Home for the Friendless". They also formed several other women's groups, one being the Ladies Board of Mission of the Presbyterian Church, which were arms of the original organization.

The attitudes of these women regarding all of the time and energy they expended for their church is not possible to know, but from the current older members of Old First Church who were a part of the church's life beginning in the early 1900's, it seemed from some of them at least, that they did not feel as though their contributions to the church were of as great a value as the leadership roles into which women have moved over the last twenty years in the Church's history.

In presenting this mosaic of the women's history at Old First it is only too obvious that the women have been the backbone of this church for many years, un heralded perhaps, but certainly worthy of becoming a part of the recorded history of Old First Church.

The following information was culled from tape-recorded interviews with members of the present congregation of Old First.

In the early 1900's women were singing in the Church choir, and teaching Christian Education classes to the young people. They met together in small groups known as circles for fellowship and in order to sew clothing for needy families. The women prepared food for church suppers which were a very common fund-raiser during most of the twentieth century, and then used the money to send to missionaries in the United States and in other nations. The women's circles, which also met for prayer for the church and missionaries, were part of a larger organization known as
the Women's League. This League gave the women an opportunity to utilize their leadership and administrative abilities as they chaired their various circles, planned programs, and led Bible studies. It also gave them the chance to do what we today call networking. In their leadership capacity some of these women visited churches all over Long Island to meet and share ideas with other Women's League officers from the various Long Island Presbyterian churches.

The women in the circles also met to sew gowns and sheets for the hospitals, as well as quilts which were donated to homes for the poor. The circle women made infant layettes to send to missionary workers in the South.

The women took a very active role in Christian Education area of Old First, not only teaching the young people but also conducting adult Bible classes, one such class was the Edith Sammis Sem Bible Class for Women. One of the women I spoke with was the secretary of the Sunday School department for 17 years, keeping attendance records along with other business in order to give attendance awards as a part of the Presbyterian Cross and Crown System at the end of the Sunday School year.

For a number of years in the early 1900's the church organist was a woman whose family had been a part of the congregation for two generations.

During this period of time in the church's history any records that I was able to locate indicate that all leadership roles in the Church were filled by the men of the congregation. These positions would have been the trustees who were elected to manage financial, legal and property affairs of the Church and the ruling elders who were
elected to oversee the day-to-day work of the Church and to give guidance in spiritual matters.

In the 1940's and 1950's, although the Presbyterian Church nationwide had decreed the ordination of women as church officers, there appeared to be none serving in that position at Old First.

In addition to the areas of church life in which the women had previously participated, the annual Church Fair held for the purpose of raising money for extras in the Church, but primarily as a source of mission funding, and which was begun in the 1920's, played a large part in the activities of the church women. The circle members did voluminous amounts of sewing of clothing, blankets and quilts. They canned and baked and did needle-work to be sold at the Fair, which was evidently a greatly anticipated event in the Huntington community and a very successful fund-raiser.

The church women began a Service League, now known as the Huntington Township Family Service League, in order to help physically and financially with the needy families in the local area. They also collected clothing to send to the Zimmerman family, a missionary family in North Carolina. The Edith Beem Bible Class began on-going support for the Clinton Eva Boys Club in New York City, assisting them financially as well as working all year long to donate a patchwork quilt annually for a number of years. The women played a major role in the church suppers, preparing, cooking, and serving dinners, as a very successful fund-raising activity. These suppers were an outreach into the surrounding community to which all people were invited, they were an excellent time of gathering people of all faiths together to share a common meal. The church supper has been an integral part of
church life for many years.

Another area of the church's social life which extended an outreach into the community were the plays that were put on by the Paint and Powder Club. Many of these were written, directed, and acted in by the church women.

Beginning with the 1960's, the women's role at Old First developed into one involving greater participation in leadership in the congregation. For many years the women had exercised their leadership skills in the only channel provided for them, the Women's League, which has just recently become known as United Presbyterian Women. A large part of the activities of the Women's League had for all those years been to conduct the charitable ministry of Old First, which began at this time to be a function of a newly elected position in the Church, the office of Deacon. Women were elected to fill some of the positions on the Board of Deacons. They delivered food baskets, flowers, tape recordings of church services to those unable to attend church services and made financial contributions to families in need. The women were doing the same kinds of things as they had previously, but they had begun to fill leadership positions in the Church and this carried over, very slowly though, into the other governing bodies.

The women at Old First during the 1960's, 70's, and 80's have not only served as members of the Board of Trustees but have held offices in that body and in 1968 there were three women elected to serve as Ruling Elders. Currently the women fill almost half of the positions in the Church Session. They have become involved in the higher judicatories of the Presbyterian Church, the Presbytery and the Synod.
Along with being responsible for the Church's Youth Ministry for a number of years, several women, along with the church's youth groups, introduced contemporary worship services to the congregation. The women have taken much more outspoken positions on such issues of social concern as peacemaking, migrant farm workers, and conditions in Latin American countries.

The present community involvement, which is an aspect of local mission, is extensive. Old First women are active in the Huntington Freedom Center, a day-care center for families in need, as volunteers in local hospitals, and in work with the Red Cross. They do volunteer work with the Huntington Food Council, collecting, warehousing, and providing food for families and individuals in dire need. They work with the Smithhaven Ministries, which in an interdenominational Suffolk County outreach providing crisis counseling to families. The women also volunteer many hours with the residents at the United Presbyterian Residence in Woodbury, a home for the aged, holding parties and shopping for residents' needs.

This mosaic of Old First women clearly shows the innumerable hours of their voluntary labor and also a deep love for their Church, which have gone into the life and mission of this church, much of it unrecognized. Through the vignettes of the members of this congregation a view of the depth and extent of their commitment will become a part of the recorded history of their Church.

The people presented here range from 89 to 29 years of age. Their length of association with Old First has for some of them been from infancy through all of their lives.
Others came to Old First following their marriages and to raise their children in this Church. These vignettes have been arranged in order from the older to the younger women, which also closely represents their lengths of membership. The picture that emerges from this presentation is not only the changing of the roles of the women, the increasing emergence into more visible leadership positions, but also their continuation in most of the traditional aspects of church life. Also made visible is the very recent self-validation of these women and their positions in the church.
HELEN JENSEN BLACK

Mrs. Black was born in Huntington in 1892. She is a widow with two sons.

She and her sisters were all sent to Old First by their parents who did not belong to the Church themselves. Mrs. B. has been a member for 62 years, and still drives her own car to Church every Sunday which she was proud to say she never misses.

As a young woman, around 1910 or so Mrs. B. was involved in something similar to a youth group, called Christian Endeavor, and she also taught Sunday School to the younger children.

Mrs. B. and her husband sang in the church choir during the 1920's and 30's, where they developed many friendships. She helped to cook meals for the Church suppers which were fund-raisers and social events in the community.

Mrs. B. belonged to the Women's Circle at Old First which met regularly to do crafts together and to sew for the needy in Huntington. She was invited at one time to sing a solo for the Circle meeting.

She and other members of the Women's League met also for prayer and support of missionaries. They collected clothing for needy families and to send to people in the mission field.

One of her memories was of paying for her family's pew in the Church for a number of years, and even though that is no longer a practice in the Church, she still almost always occupies that same pew in Church every Sunday.

As we talked about the roles of women in the Church today, Mrs. B. said that she had never thought about being
a church officer when she was younger because women just
didn't do that, although she doesn't object to women as
officers now. She believes that women have become more
visible over these last years, but she wouldn't like to see
one as a minister because their voices don't carry and she
is used to a man in the pulpit.

As Mrs. B. has gotten older the Church has come to
play a more important part in her life. Her faith has
deepened as she continues to worship with her church family
as often as she can. She is sure that this is helping her
to face death unafraid.
Jane Farber was born in New Jersey, in 1897, and moved to Huntington in 1919. She worked for many years as a High-school English teacher, retiring in 1967 at the age of 70. During her teaching career, she traveled to New York City, in the 1940's, to earn her Master's Degree from New York University. Mrs. Farber is a widow and the mother of two daughters. I found her to be very much interested in current and social issues, a politically well-informed. She told me that she particularly enjoys an intellectual church service.

Mrs. Farber’s husband, John, was a member of Central Presbyterian Church where his family belonged, and where he retained his membership through the rest of his life. Mrs. F. joined Old First, 62 years ago, in 1920, just prior to her marriage, and both of their daughters were baptized, nurtured and married there.

During most of the years that Mrs. F. taught full time she was not involved in many of the activities outside of worship at Old First, but prior to that time, during the 1920's and 1930's, she taught many Sunday School classes. In the late 1930's she became President of the Women’s League, and in that capacity attended interchurch meetings with the leaders of other Leagues from Presbyterian Churches in many other parts of Long Island. Mrs F. mentioned that she was one of the few women with a car and so did much of the transportation around Long Island. During the time of her involvement with the League, fund-raising church suppers were held in order to raise money for Presbyterian to support missionaries nationwide. The women in the League held bake sales and helped to support the beginning of the Mission Church in
Huntington Station now known as Bethany Presbyterian Church.

Mrs Farber saw these groups of women coming together not only for the purpose of fund-raising but also to support one another by talking about their lives in their homes, as wives and mothers, for prayer and to listen to speakers on a wide variety of subjects.

As we talked about the changes in the lives of women and the church over the years, she spoke about the fact that it was not as easy for women to come together during those years. They had to stay home with their young children. She sees women's role in the church today as having changed because of their greater mobility and the change in attitudes about child-care. Women bring their young children out to meetings with them and excellent child-care is provided for them, not only on Sunday mornings.

Large groups of women travel to church related events in Long Island and New York City, enabling a greater variety of interests to be developed and shared.

She sees Old First, partly because of this, as a standard-bearer for new and worthwhile causes.

There has been a spiritual awakening among many of the younger families, the church has come to play a major part in their lives. The women today are multi-talented, have the advantages of greater avenues of communication and with their greater experience in the business world, they have become more capable leaders. She still does not feel, though, that women should become members of the clergy, because there are many opportunities for them to have forums to speak out about issues in the church, especially through organizations such as the United Presbyterian Women.
Mrs. Farber has been brought up since childhood to have close ties with the church which she has maintained all through her life and which has kept her in close relationship with God during all those years.
ELLEN M. PERKINS

Ellen Perkins was born in 1904 and has been a member of Old First for 60 years. Her mother and grandmother before her as well as her sister and her sister's children and grandchildren have been members of the Church. They, along with Miss Perkins, who is a single woman, have occupied the same pew in the Church as long as they have belonged to Old First.

As we talked about the kinds of things women have done at Old First over the years, Miss Perkins could remember often hearing about her grandmother and other women in the church, packing barrels of clothing which were sent to aid those people left homeless following the Johnstown, Pennsylvania flood in 1889. She could also remember that her mother and grandmother used to bring foot-warmers with them to church on the coldest winter days.

In the 1930's following the Depression, the church women began the Service League which gave financial aid to families in need in the local area. During the early 1940's this League collected and sent boxes of clothing to the Zimmerman family in North Carolina, which they used for the poor mountain families. It continues still today and is now known as the Family Service League and it is supported by a thrift shop in Huntington where many Old First women volunteer their time.

The Edith Sammis Seem Bible Class for Women along with their study of the Bible, worked all year long to make a quilt, each year for a number of years for the Clinton Eva Home for Boys in New York City. They also helped support the Home with monetary contributions.

Miss Perkins has played an active role in the life of
her congregation since she was a young woman. For seventeen years she was the secretary to the church Sunday School Department, keeping records of attendance for all children as part of the Cross and Crown System, which was a system of pins given as rewards for exemplary attendance in Sunday School. She was instrumental in beginning the evening Women's Circle in 1945, for those women who were unable to meet during the day. The circle women gathered items to be sold at the Church Fair, known as the White Elephant Fund, they assisted in raising funds for a new church organ, and met together to talk and do handicrafts which would be sold to raise money for the Church.

At the United Presbyterian Residence, a nursing home affiliated with the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions, Miss Perkins has done craft work with the residents, has been a shopper there, buying items which the residents are unable to get for themselves. She has also been in charge of a group of women from the Church who would prepare a celebration for all residents who shared birthdays in a particular month, bringing homemade deserts and beverages to the Residence and setting up a birthday party for them.

After the Deacons became an elected office in the Church, Miss Perkins served on that Board doing some of the same kinds of things: delivering Christmas baskets of food to local families in need, taking flowers to those church members who were in the hospital, or ill at home, along with tape recordings of the regular Sunday morning worship service.

Miss Perkins said of her church: "Old First has always been a working church, .... not just a society church."
As we talked about the different areas of the Church in which were active over the years and whether that has changed, Miss Perkins mentioned that in the earliest decades of the 1900's the wife of the Church pastor was expected to be an integral part of the life of the congregation: working in circles and such along with the women of the Church. "Ministers' wives in those days considered themselves as part of the church... You didn't just hire the minister, the wife went along... Nowadays you just hire the minister." It sounded, as we talked, as though the expectations of the ministers' wives were still the same but the wives themselves had changed.

Miss Perkins had a strongly negative reaction to women as members of the clergy, and as ruling elders, because she believes that area of the Church to be a man's field. When we discussed why she felt so strongly about this, she wasn't really sure, but thought perhaps it had to do partly with tradition(hers), and partly because she sees the minister in an authoritarian role and as representing a "father-figure".

Miss Perkins continues to attend worship services at Old First regularly and to avail herself of the educational opportunities in the adult Bible classes.
SANDRA JOHNSON STANFIELD

Sandra Johnson Stanfield was born in Huntington in 1910, was baptized at Old First, and joined when she was confirmed at the age of twelve and has been a member of the Church since then through the present. Her father, his parents, and his ten brothers and sisters all belonged to Old First, her mother was of Methodist background but attended Old First along with her husband. Sandra has one brother who was raised with her in the Church.

She is married to George Stanfield. This is the second marriage for both of them. Mr. Stanfield was born in Brooklyn in 1909, and moved to Huntington in 1925. He is the first member of his family to belong to Old First Church. He had formerly attended the Episcopal Church in Huntington, but joined Old First in 1944 following his marriage to his first wife whose family of origin was one of the original settler families of Huntington in the early 1600's.

The three children of Mr. and Mrs. Stanfield's first marriages all were baptized into the fellowship of Old First and raised as members there. They have since married and no longer live in the Huntington area.

Mrs. Stanfield remembers that her aunt was the church organist for a number of years, during her childhood, in the 1920's.

Her own adult activities in the Church focused on her journalism contributions to the congregation. The Church publishes a monthly newsletter containing information about the various meetings, speakers, and participation of the members. It is called The Weathervane and for a number of years,
Mrs. Stanfield was its editor. She also wrote a play for the 300th Anniversary Celebration of the Church, entitled *Faith of Our Fathers*, and in 1953 wrote a history of the Church and its pastors.

She was an active member of the "Paint and Powder Club", an offshoot of the young adults social club known as the Carter Club, and made up of Old First members. This club put on plays at the Church which were open to the public and were another of the outreaches of Old First into the local community, along with Mrs. Stanfield's involvement in one of the women's circles and in preparations for the Church Fair.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanfield were eager participants in the Carter Club dances and lectures. Their social life was greatly intertwined in the activities at Old First.

Although Mrs. Stanfield had maintained her membership with the Church, over the past twenty years she has not worshipped there. Her relationship with one of the former pastors had created some animosity and she did not feel that attendance at worship services would be meaningful to her.

Even so, during this time, in 1974, she revised and updated the Church history that she had prepared twenty years before.

Mr. Stanfield has continued to be actively involved in the life of the congregation. He has for a number of years served as both a member and officer of the Board of Trustees and has been a chief usher during the Sunday worship services for almost thirty years, which is currently his major participation in addition to regular attendance at worship.

In speaking to the Stanfields, Mrs. Stanfield seemed to feel that one former pastor, Mr. Hess, was particularly supportive of the contributions of women to the life of Old
First, in whatever area of Church life they felt most gifted to serve. Mr. Stanfield observed that the church women are more visible in their involvement now, "They've come out from behind their aprons." They serve on all Church Boards and also usher, although they usually so so in the balcony of the Church.

Both felt that although they couldn't explain just why, they would not opt to fill any openings in the pulpit of Old First with a woman member of the clergy, perhaps tradition plays a large part in their thinking.
ELIZABETH ARNOLD

Elizabeth Arnold was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1917. She is 65 years old. As a child she moved to Jamaica, New York where she worshipped at a Baptist Church, although her parents background was Lutheran and Dutch Reformed. The family then moved to Great Neck where they joined the small Community Church, which say much involvement on the part of Elizabeth's mother.

In 1954, after moving to Huntington, Elizabeth and her husband joined Old First Church. Their three children were raised and confirmed there and as recently as the last few months her son and daughter-in-law who live in Florida brought their infant daughter to be baptized here.

Mrs. Arnold has always held a job outside of her home, part-time when she was raising her children, and is currently employed as a bookkeeper for a large medical group, but she still found time to be actively involved in all aspects of the life of the congregation. She began being active in the Church by joining the choir, which was an excellent way to meet a lot of the church members at one time.

She began helping out in the kitchen for Church suppers and over the past eight years has been in charge of sitting up all new member and all-board suppers: arranging menus, and cooking the food and heading up a group of women who assist with the serving and shopping and preparing of the food. She plans meals for 50-80 people which she co-ordinates during her lunch hours.

Every Sunday for twenty years at one of the two worship services, Elizabeth took care of the babies in the crib room, she continues to do that today, but about twice a month instead
of every week. During all these years she has continued to sing in the choir. She is Co-chair of one of the night circles which is made up of almost all women who have jobs outside of their home. In addition to meeting for fellowship, the Circle does one project for the Church Fair each year. The women have made a quilt — by hand, developed an Old First Cookbook, and then prepared 500 of them by hand for sale at the fair. Women in the circle made sixteen huge tablecloths for Church dinners, by hand, and are now officially in charge of washing and drying the tablecloths following any church dinner. They have also hand-made table-covers for the handbell choir out of special washable felt.

In the past Mrs. Arnold supervised the preparation of Church pancake breakfasts, which the Church used to put on as a fundraiser. The cooking was all done by the men of the Church. She also used to visit the residents of a nearby nursing home between the end of her work day and another way to pick up her husband at the train station.

Mrs. Arnold felt that the encouragement of the Rev. Dransfield was of key importance in her increasing participation in areas of church leadership, because he viewed men and women as equally capable in all areas of church life.

She served as a member of the Board of Deacons in an outreach program to other members of the congregation, and has been the only woman to be Clerk of Session as a member of the Board of Ruling Elders. Mrs. Arnold was the first woman on the Board of Trustees and in that capacity served one term as secretary and another as Vice-President. She chaired the property committee, during the time of the renting and the
refurbishing of the Church Manse and also was responsible for the Church's antiques for insurance appraisals.

Mrs. Arnold said that she had a willingness to move on to increased responsibilities within the Church as people voiced confidence in the work she was doing, and because of the fact that her husband has always been very supportive of her church involvement.

It was not comfortable for her to be speaking of only her participation in the life of Old First, but that there were numerous other dedicated women in the church who do not want recognition, and who will go around the outside of the church and pick up litter, or clean off fingerprints on the Church pews, as well as those who clean and arrange clothing for Church fair rummage sales.

Elizabeth sees the women over the past ten years as more involved as spokespersons in the Church. There is an 8:00AM Summer Sunday worship service led by families during the Summer at which time both husbands and wives share in the preaching.

As part of the last two Search Committees, as the Church has sought to fill the position of Senior Pastor, and currently that of Assistant Pastor, she has taken an active part in the serious consideration of a clergywoman for those positions. She believes them to be equally valuable and depending on qualifications of either sex, credible for the pulpit of Old First.

As she has become more active in the life of her Church, Elizabeth's faith has changed and grown with her.
Alicia Cane is seventy years old, she is married and the mother of one son. She was raised in the Methodist-Episcopal Church, as was her husband, but after moving to Huntington in 1955, she and her husband visited several different churches and decided that they would prefer to worship and bring up their son at Old First Church.

Twenty-five years ago they started attending services at the church and they have never joined. Mrs. Cane says she's not really sure why. They have continued worshipping and attending adult study courses at the church. Their son was confirmed and joined the church as a young boy.

The kinds of things that Mrs. Cane has done over her years of involvement with Old First have been many and varied. Although as a non-church member she is not qualified to serve on any of the Church governing boards, she has always belonged to United Presbyterian Women and along with another woman, was the co-leader of a circle, involved in program planning for worship. She has taken care of the babies in the nursery during Sunday morning worship services, and has done a great deal of work in the Church kitchen to prepare Church-sponsored family suppers. She has helped to prepare for a major social event in the life of the Church, the Annual Christmas Ball, open to church members and friends.

Every year Mrs. Cane works at the Church during Spring Housecleaning Day. She is the official "window-washer" and has been in the past an official refrigerator-cleaner. If it had not been that another of the women I interviewed told me about these things, Mrs. Cane would, I'm sure, never have
spoken of them, even though she said those kinds of times are some of her most enjoyable at Old First. She "enjoys the fellowship of the women and everyone working together to make our Church sparkle." This sounds like the old-fashioned barn-raising and is certainly a ministering experience.

Mrs. Cane volunteers in the community with the mobile units for the American Red Cross, and she co-chairs the evening Volunteer group at Huntington Hospital. In all these things she is represented to the community as a part of Old First Church.

Women are more visible and more involved in the life of O.F. Women are serving in positions on the church governing bodies, which she believes to be very beneficial to the health of the whole congregation. She also sees the offering of good child care as a primary reason for the increase of activity among the younger married women of the church. They are taking over where the older generation left off, allowing them to move on without guilt and bringing with them their new ideas.

It can't be predicted what lies ahead for the church, because we can't know what the economic situation of most families will be and if we need to have two income families, all areas of volunteerism will suffer, including the church. The needs of the people will have to be served in another way as fellowship becomes a luxury.
CAROL KOENIG

Carol was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1923. Her family of origin, her mother, father, and sister were members of the Congregational Church. In 1947 she married Richard Koenig, they had three sons, and in 1962 the family moved to Huntington. At the invitation of her sister, they began attending worship services at Old First Church and in 1964 became members.

Carol's first experience in leadership at Old First was as leader of a Fellowship Circle, a gathering of Christian women who came together for enrichment: Bible study, and fellowship. She felt it to be not only an excellent learning time for her but it turned out to be a good stepping stone for the things that were to follow. She served as President of the Women's League, which entailed administrative duties, attended board meetings, oversaw and administered a budget, supervising the on-going women's circles.

As an ordained Deacon, her responsibility was for the welfare of the congregation by means of monitoring the crib room, helping to keep the Blood Bank supplied, ushering during worship services on Sunday morning, and providing transportation for those unable to get to the services.

Mrs. Koenig has served as a ruling elder, i. e. Session member, in which capacity she chaired the nominating committee which is responsible for the selection of new officers each year. She is currently Vice-President of the Board of Trustees, one of two women on this twelve member board,, and has responsibility for the property committee which is in charge of the Church and the grounds as well as all of the
historical and financial records which are stored in the church vault.

Carol is involved in several areas of volunteer work within the community, not as an official representative of O.F., but most assuredly she brings to all that she does the fact that as part of who she is, she is a part of the congregation of Old First Church.

Her vision of church-women in the past is that of having been taken for granted as the backbone of the church, but over the last twenty years their leadership capabilities have been recognized in so much as they have begun to become involved in the decision-making areas of the church, because of their abilities, not only as token women. She also believes that it needs to be seen that many women in the past were not skilled in leadership nor financial areas and so that too enters into the period of change and awarenesses of the visibility of women. Women have always been a force, but not a recognized force until recently, and looking to the future she is hopeful that all members of the church, both male and female, will be given equal opportunity to serve the church in all capacities according to their gifts, not according to their sex. Women in the clergy should be a natural progression of women's ministering to people in the roles that they are already filling.

As we talked of the women's role in the church, Mrs. Koenig was of the opinion that perhaps women's names do not stand out in the body that is the church because they have always had a commonality of goals and so they seem to be blended together into the overall picture of a busy background.
BARBARA BENTNER

Barbara Bentner was born in 1929. Her faith background was Episcopalian until she and her husband moved to Huntington in 1955. They joined Old First Church in 1962. Mrs. Bentner is now divorced and lives with the youngest of her five children.

Her involvement in the life of the Old First congregation has been continuous, challenging, and diversified.

She has taught Sunday School, has been elected to serve on the Board of Deacons, and in that capacity was instrumental in the preparation and donation of food baskets at Christmas time to needy families in the community, the preparation of flowers in the sanctuary every Sunday morning and the delivering of them to the ill or hospitalized. The members of the Deacons also are in charge of hosting the fellowship time following Sunday worship services. During her time of service in this capacity, the Deacons supplied materials for women prison inmates at Riverhead, so that they could make clothing for themselves as well as distributing some clothing to the inmates when they were able to return to the community.

Barbara has also served as a Ruling Elder. The best part of serving the Church in that capacity, for her, has been to be able participate in serving Communion to the rest of her Church family and knowing that they join other Christians world-wide in that same act. She made the comment here that this service is not very often permitted the women on the Elders, it is done mostly by the male elders with usually only two or three "token" women participating. Barbara has been elected by the congregation to serve on the Pastoral Search Committee for the present Senior pastor as well as
the current Committee in the search for a new assistant pastor.

At the present time, Mrs. Bentner belongs to the United Presbyterian Women in a working capacity. She bears responsibility for the use of the kitchen and cooking facilities. For the past eleven years she has served as a leader with the Senior High Youth Group, acting as friend and counselor to them. This involves an every Sunday night commitment as well as retreats and overnight camp-outs.

She serves on the Mission Council and in that capacity represents Old First on the Board of Governors of Smithhaven Ministries, which is an interdenominational community outreach for drug and family counseling.

The Mission Council members have been responsible for high-lighting issues of social concern to the congregation. They have been the sponsors of the churchwomen sent to Latin America to see for themselves the living conditions there and to bring that message back, not only to the church, but the surrounding community.

Within the community Barbara is a member of the Board of Eastern Farm Workers and works with the Citizens for Migrant Workers helping to educate the public to their situation and canvassing the workers themselves door-to-door in hopes of having them unite for better working and living conditions.

Barbara's views the women in the church as having greater openness to new issues, issues of social concern that could be possible areas for mission focus and as being more willing than the men on the whole to take steps to prod things to action. She called them "pioneers and explorers." Even though they are very busy with their homes the women seem to
be able to make time to deal with issues. She feels very supported by the Church as she sometimes steps out on a limb to take a stand on a controversial issue.

Mrs. Bentner said that people have suggested to her that she consider entering the field of professional ministry but she feels that her freedom to pick and choose issues and people to support would be very constrained. As a volunteer she has much more freedom. She commented on the fact that there doesn’t appear to be the kind of competitiveness among churchwomen as is often seen in the secular world. The women are supportive of one another rather than competitive. As to the future of women in leadership roles within the Church, she suggests that greatly increased participation by numbers of women might lead to the exodus of some men, along with their families, from Old First because of the threat to their authority in the body of Christ.
LAURA CARUSO

Laura was born in 1940, is married and the mother of two teenage children. She has been brought up in a Presbyterian Church since infancy. She and her husband and children joined Old First Church in 1974.

Mrs. Caruso was one of the founding members of the Women's Center at Old First as part of the pilot program for it. She spent one year with eleven other women doing ground work for the center which consisted of acquiring space, finding furnishings and simultaneously taking courses to become a support group leader. Other women working with her were soliciting funding for the center. The Women's Center opened March 9, 1981 with a crowd of 300 women, 200 of whom were unexpected.

Mrs. Caruso is the current President of the United Presbyterian Women. She has been a member of their board for seven years. She is concurrently serving as a Deacon and a member of the Christian Education Council. She also volunteers her time to the Community Food Council, along with several other women from Old First. She had been teaching cooking outside of the Church, but made the decision to discontinue because she felt called to use her time to do something more meaningful with her life, and at that time accepted the Presidency of U. P. W.

"Women have become more confident" than they had been and in the last twenty years women have taken much more of a leadership role in the church. In fact in 1981, "There were more women elders than male elders, which caused quite a commotion...(because) I think it was a threat...It was corrected the following year (in order to equally divide the group)".
Mrs. Caruso thinks that women's work in the Church has taken on more value in the eyes of the whole congregation. When issues of social concern are raised, "if UPW is behind it, we'll hear our session say, we'll go along with it."
ERICA TAST

Erica Tast was born in 1952. She comes from a family of Methodist background, and has two brothers and a sister. She is married to a former assistant pastor of Old First Church and they have two young children.

Erica converted to Presbyterian following her marriage and joined Old First in 1973 when her husband was called as assistant pastor. She came to the Church as a bride, and having completed her junior year in college. For their first year of marriage, Erica lived in Maryland commuting to Long Island on weekends, in order to complete her senior year of college. She commented as we talked on the fact that Old First was the only Church that was willing to accept their new assistant pastor and wife on those not-so-traditional terms, because a church still calls a pastor and spouse. Other churches turned him down. They felt Old First was really unique in having a very traditional reputation and yet being open to accepting their assistant pastor in a non-traditional life-style.

Erica has taught Sunday School and has been very involved in United Presbyterian Women as a circle leader, helping to plan programs for the circle for young mothers (so that young mothers could feel good about their contrive butines to the life in the church), cooking luncheons and church suppers and working offor the Church Fair. As a result of being a circle-leader she was on the UPW Board in a policy-making position. She has been heavily involved in youth ministry in the church, assisting on retreats, holding suppers in their home, and leading Bible studies. It's her firm belief that she and her husband were an excellent role model of a newly married couple for their youth
in a non-traditional role, with her working and her husband occasionally preparing meals.

Erica was one of the circle which was involved in the beginning and continuation of the Women's Center and which is housed at Old First and was set up by the Presbytery of Long Island's Council on Women and the Church in conjunction with the Presbytery of New York as a mission outreach of the Presbyterian Church on Long Island. She really believed strongly in the development of such a center because it would provide a Christ-centered opportunity for women to utilize their leadership skills, which perhaps they had not done in the past, in a very safe-supportive atmosphere. The twelve women in the original circle were to become the support group leaders. Erica is now a paid staff person in charge of programming for the Center and serves as a leader of support groups.

In Church Women United, an ecumenical women's group comprised of women of a variety of religious backgrounds she has served as a member of their board and as well as being the Old First representative to C.W.U. She has taken the time to do volunteer work in the community with the Huntington Food Council and as an art teacher at the Freedom Center, a day-care center for low income families.

Erica believes that her somewhat non-traditional life style has been very well accepted by the congregation of Old First and has played an important part in the increased membership at the Church of young married couples and their families, as an example that Old First is a church for them, and not only focusing on the older church-goer.
Perhaps they have helped the congregation to see that there is a very human side to ministers' wives. There is the possibility that they have had more freedom because her husband was not the senior pastor.

With her husband no longer the assistant minister at the Church and their decision having been to remain as members of the congregation, she is experiencing some anxiety about their acceptance in this new role. She is hopeful that her church life will become even more meaningful in terms of the wider option for participation in all phases of church life, as a parishoner. Beica sees her role at present in the laity of the Church, as fulfilling an aspect of ministry and that is building community, promoting supportive fellowship among the people of the congregation.

The kind of changes that she would like to see come about, but is not sure how realistic her hopes are, would be to see some real role-exchange within the congregation. Bankers as care-givers, and those who have been the traditional care-givers in the home as becoming involved in the financial aspects of the church life.
There are many other women who have played an important role in the congregation of Old First Presbyterian Church as seen by those with whom I conducted interviews:

Mildred Connors who was for many years, beginning in the early 1900's in charge of the Sunday School and worked as an administrative assistant to the pastor of the church, and served as President of the Women's League, and possibly to have been instrumental in its inception.

Mrs. Kieth and Miss Overton who spent long hours sewing childrens clothing and layettes for the Piney Grove School in one of the Southern states in support of the missionaries there.

Miss Joan Hoffman the treasurer of the Women's League during the 1920's and the 1930's.

Elizabeth Anders the church organist during the 1920's.

Helen Fuller, a talented director who worked with the members of the Paint and Powder Club in the late 1940's and early 1950's.

Lorraine Kroft, a Director of Children's Work, who also takes an active role in Long Island Presbytery as a member of the Candidates Committee.

Suzanne Jordan who initiated the group known as Children's Concern, which distributes clothing to welfare families in Suffolk County and was instrumental in the charter movement for the Huntington Freedom Center.

Viola Wortman and Hazel Dixon, two women who have been very active in the church's Youth Ministry and who initiated the Contemporary Worship Services in which the youth participated.
The service of women in the church laity is a testimony to the Christian tenet of "the Priesthood of all believers". Through all of the years of women's invisible part in the history of the church they have still lived their part in that priesthood.

What I have endeavored to do in this study is to fill in some of the faces of those who had been invisible, to allow myself and others to be witnesses of some small part of the mostly undocumented history of that work which has gone on, while yet unrecorded and unheralded; to give visibility to the invisible.

Through the years of history women have been in subordinate and subservient positions in society as a whole, not only in the church. Some few women stand out in the denom- inational church, as we know it today, as making public their awarenesses of that position, and they have fought for a hearing, but for the most part they have not been heard.

The women's Movement, beginning in the 1960's in the secular world has had a ripple effect in the sacred world of the church. Women began to be able to see clearly that for hundreds of years they, in their traditional roles, had been buried under the debris of this bastion of masculinity -- the church. The Women's Movement helped us, as women, not only to finally be able to realize that, but also to begin to come to terms with it. Women struggled to step out into the forefront where they could be seen and could share equally with the men in all facets of church life. They have begun to succeed. Yet a long road lies ahead, this is just a beginning! Something more has to happen. As people have viewed "women's work" in the church (as in the home), it was seen as not worthy, as devoid of value in the whole scheme of
things. Gradually that was changed and as women on the whole became more powerful in the church, they realized that it was almost at the expense of stepping on the bodies of those who had gone before, perhaps denigrating them even more. The "women's work" was and is currently being examined under a new light which is casting a fine beam of approval and appreciation on the past. Women's traditional role is being affirmed and validated and as a result, the women in the church today are experiencing self-affirmation for their hours of dedication to God through energies spent in the church.

This process has been and of necessity is a slow, gradual and nurturing one. There are some very angry women who are banging on doors, creating anger in response, but also creating a new vision for men and women today. They are also paving the way for other, allowing them to be part of this gradual, slow process.

This is the picture that I have seen emerging in the congregation at Old First Presbyterian Church. Women have been the backbone of its existence as far back as I could factually determine. Without them it appears that the Church would probably have not been more than a place to worship on Sunday morning. The Church, as a whole, is beginning to recognize that this "flower and music" ministry, as well as the women's ministry of compassion must be seen as having been and as continuing to be important, necessary and as valuable as all else that goes on in the life of a congregation. Together, it is "The Church".

There are a small number of women in positions of authority at Old First but the majority are still in the more traditional roles in the church.

Women as officers and women in the clergy are presenting
new kinds of role models for men and women in the church today. They are in process, creating change; change which may be painful, and threatening to some, but hopefully exciting to most of the people who sit in a church pew on Sunday morning.
It was with great difficulty that I stepped outside of the circle of my life in the Presbyterian Church to look at what has emerged through this project. I'm not sure how successful I have been at doing that, nor whether I could have done it, had I been totally an outsider. The title of Elizabeth Verdili's book, *In But Still Out*, feels very much as though it applies to where I stand today. My personal journey in the church, and in faith, has been very much a part of this project, and has been examined, shredded, evaluated, negated, and validated. I'm not sure where I stand today, for I too am in process. At this point in time I anticipate church work of some sort or another as a major part of my future. I know that what lies ahead for me as a woman may be difficult, for the spading of the ground has only just begun. That makes me feel a little anxious, and angry, but still excited, and a great deal challenged.
NOTES


4. 300th Anniversary Report.

5. This class was begun in the 1920's by Mrs. Shadbolt and following her death, the leadership of it was taken over by Mrs. Seem and subsequently given her name.


7. Collection of Papers and Newsclippings regarding Old First Presbyterian Church, (Huntington Historical Society).
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PROJECT: The Women of Old First Presbyterian Church,
Huntington, New York

May, 1982

1. Twelve Cassette Tapes: Oral History Interviews
2. Release forms for Oral History Tape Cassettes.
3. Index Cards for Tape Cassettes
4. Pictures of those Church Members recorded on Tapes.
5. Old First Church Pictorial Directory - 1981
6. Pamphlet: History of Old First Presbyterian Church
8. 1982 Publication of the United Presbyterian Women of
   Old First Presbyterian Church.
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 13, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

[Signature]
NAME OF NARRATOR

[Signature]
Date: April 13, 1982
DATE OF AGREEMENT

[Signature]
ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

Huntington, N.Y.
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on March 25, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

Jean C. Kellogg
Name of Narrator

2 Greenview Circle
Huntington 11743
Address of Narrator

March 25, 1982
Date of Agreement
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 15, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

[Signature]

NAME OF NARRATOR

38 Nathan Hale Dr.
Huntington, N.Y. 11743

ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

April 15, 1982
DATE OF AGREEMENT
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 16, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

NAME OF NARRATOR

ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

DATE OF AGREEMENT
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 16, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

[Signature]
NAME OF NARRATOR

3 BRANCHLIFT PLATE
Huntington
ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

4/16/82
DATE OF AGREEMENT
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 16, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

\[\text{NAME OF NARRATOR}\]

\[\text{ADDRESS OF NARRATOR}\]

\[\text{DATE OF AGREEMENT}\]
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 21, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

MARIANNA H. DAVISON
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11 Rome Rd.
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Apr. 21, 1982
DATE OF AGREEMENT
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 21, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

MARY SOMEROY CLUM
NAME OF NARRATOR

27 WOODHOLLOW LANE
HUNTINGTON, NEW YORK
ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

APRIL 21, 1982
DATE OF AGREEMENT
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 21, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

Cindy Humphreys
NAME OF NARRATOR

18 LaRue Drive

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ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

4/21/82
DATE OF AGREEMENT
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in
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with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

[Signature]
NAME OF NARRATOR

[Address]
ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

[Date]
DATE OF AGREEMENT
I hereby release all rights, title, or interest in the tape-recorded memoirs made on April 26, 1982, with Frances Carr, to the College at Old Westbury.

[Signature]
NAME OF NARRATOR

16 East SalE Rd.
ADDRESS OF NARRATOR

Huntington, NY

April 26, 1982
DATE OF AGREEMENT