

Woodbridge Public Library Oral History Interview
The Reverend W. H. Schmaus
WPL05

(digital audio)

On April 25, 1978, The Reverend W. H. Schmaus was interviewed for the Woodbridge Public Library Oral History Interviews. There was on female interviewer.

Female Interviewer: Reverend Schmaus, can you tell me where you were born and what was your education?

Reverend W.H. Schmaus: I was born in Brooklyn, Pennsylvania, the son of The Reverend Harold Eugene Schmaus, a priest of the Episcopal Church, and Eleanor Uler Schmaus. I was educated in the public schools of Pennsylvania, graduated from The Pennsylvania State University with a degree in the Bachelor of Arts, received a Master of Arts Degree from Columbia University and graduated from the General Theological Seminary with a Degree of Master Divinity. After ordination as priest I began my ministry as assistant rector of St. Simon's Church in Buffalo, New York. I came to New Jersey in 1940 and served for two years as vicar of St. John's Church in Fords and The Church of Our Savior in Cheesequake. I became rector of Trinity Church in Woodbridge in 1942 where I have remained during the past thirty-five years.

Female Interviewer: Can you tell me anything about the Trinity Episcopal Church?

Reverend W.H. Schmaus: Well, first of all I should like to say that I have always been interested in people and an accordingly endeavor to make an effective pastoral relationship my first objective. During a period of thirty-five year one gets to know people intimately and shares in both their joys and sorrows, the birth and baptism of children, the attainment of the years of discretion of confirmation, the establishment of new homes through holy matrimony, the ministrations to the sick and eventually the burial of the dead. Only those who've had a long ministry in the same parish can appreciate what it means to baptize a baby, prepare him for confirmation, solemnize his marriage and baptize his children. Trinity Church in Woodbridge is a growing parish in an enlarging community which has the advantage of roots in the historic past. Originally a mission of the Church of England its first service was held in 1698. It became a parish in 1702 and its first church building was erected in 1713. Although a Royal Charter was granted by King George III in 1769 the original intention of the English crown was to provide for the established Church of England as early as 1669 when Woodbridge was founded. Accordingly there was a clause in the original Woodbridge Town Charter which provides two hundred acres of land for the use of a minister or ministers for the service of God in the administering of his Holy Sacrament. Language, which at that period in

history, could of applied only to the Church of England. The Charter also provides religious freedom in as much as it also tolerates those of different judgment in matters of religion. As it turned out Woodbridge was originally settled not by members of the Church of England but by a congregation of Kits and Presbyterians. The Congregational Church was built on the portion of the two hundred acres which later voted to become Presbyterian. The First Trinity was built on what remained of the two hundred acres. This tiny framed building was replaced in 1756 by a larger one which stood there until 1858 when it was destroyed by fire. It seems that while two ladies of the older guild were preparing the sanctuary of service they neglected to tend to the cast iron stove which overheated and set the church roof afire. In those days the Woodbridge Fire Company was a bucket brigade lacking water mains. They were obliged to break the ice and carry water from the nearby creek but by the time all this was done the building was completely gone. The sum of twenty-five dollars and fourteen cents was realized from the sale of nails, old iron, odd bricks and other items salvaged from the ruins. This became the nucleus for a building fund from which the present church was financed. The church was built according to plans and specifications prepared by Richard Upjohn, famous American church architect. The actual construction was supervised by another architect, namely C. Harrison Condit. The church was completed in 1860 and consecrated in 1861. For many years following the building of the church the parish flourished and actually founded three new church, St. John's in Fords in 1880, St. Mark's in Carteret in 1893, and St. John's Church in Sewaren in 1895. In 1872 the parish purchased, for use as a rectory, the old mansion built in 1617 by Jonathan Dunham, the first gristmill in New Jersey. A millstone from Dunham's Mill adorns the median strip in the rectory driveway. A framed building to serve as a parish house and residents called a sexton was erected on Trinity Lane in 1874. No additional building construction was undertaken until 1956 when the new parish home was built. A cloister connecting the parish house to the church was added in 1917. Meanwhile all mortgages have been amortized and the parish is free and clear of indebtedness. Trinity Church is growing and the future looks very bright indeed. The first burial in the churchyard took place in 1714 although the oldest headstone still standing bears the date of 1750. The churchyard is still a hallowed burial place for members of the parish.

Female Interviewer: Can you tell me anything about Woodbridge and the community and the changes that you've seen since you've been here?

Reverend W.H. Schmaus: When I first came to Woodbridge, Woodbridge Proper was a community with ten thousand residents with much vacant land available. Today the community is completely built up as are also the outlying districts of Avenel, Colonia and Iselin which are still included within our parish limits. The other sections of Woodbridge Township are served by St. John's of Fords and St. John's of Sewaren respectively. As the township grew to its present population of one hundred thousand residents, we've received many new parishioners from New York City and the largest

cities in New Jersey. They have become active and now occupied positions of leadership. They I've known many wonderful persons in both the parish and community at large who have now departed this life, many others have taken their places who are equally memorable and I firmly believe that Woodbridge still deserves to bear the designation of being a typical American community.

Female Interviewer: Getting back to the parish Reverend Schmaus, I understand there are treasures the church has held on to all these years.

Reverend W.H. Schmaus: The parish still has in its possession many treasures from the past including a bible printed in 1751, a first edition of the 1795 Book of Common Prayer and the original Charter granted by King George III in 1769. Trinity Church also possesses some very fine communion vessels, the oldest being a chalice presented by the widow Mary Dennis on December 25, 1760. That is addressed to the Diocese and Convention of 1849. Bishop George Washington Dunn remarked concerning this chalice, I often thought as it struck my eye at my annual commemoration of the Holy Communion in that simple little sanctuary how many hearts have been refreshed and strengthened through God's blessing on that pious gift and he only lasted eighty years. And what a beautiful propriety the festival of the nativity was made the day of his donation and how peculiarly touching that the one remembrance that has been preserved of her who gave it is her widowhood. Happy are they who, in the bereavement of the ties on earth are drawn more closely to the holy altar and give their hearts to God.

Female Interviewer: Thank you so much Reverend Schmaus.

Reverend W.H. Schmaus: Thank you.