

The History of St. Mark's

Part 1

By Charles C. Guthrie

At 8 A.M. on Sunday morning November 11th, 1923 thirty-four people gathered in a store front at 104 Polk Avenue (now 37th Avenue) for a service of the Holy Communion celebrated by the Venerable Roy Ferral Duffield, Archdeacon of Queens and Nassau. At 11 A.M. that same day approximately seventy people were present for Morning Prayer. These were the first services of the Mission congregation which was to become St. Mark's Church. We had formerly begun to exist, but those two opening services did not happen overnight or in a vacuum.

Jackson Heights was created by the Queensboro Corporation as a self-sufficient suburb within the city. Everything had been thought of to make it a comfortable and gracious community. There were apartments and houses, stores and gardens, schools, tennis courts, even a small golf course.

There was a Community Clubhouse, of course, but something else is needed to really weld a group of people into a community—a place of Worship. The Roman Catholic Church was given the plot on which St. Joan of Arc now stands. The Community Church, originally non-denominational, was the choice and decision of the majority of the Protestants in the new community and the Queensboro Corporation also gave them the property on which the Community Methodist Church stands.

There were, however a few Episcopalians who preferred their own service to the extent that they attended St. James Church, Elmhurst, or continued to go back to Manhattan to Church. They wanted their own Church and its services, but even more, they wanted an Episcopal Sunday School in Jackson Heights for their children. They were regarded by some as being disloyal to the community concept, but they persisted.

Sometime early in 1923 (no one knows the exact date), a small group of concerned Episcopalians met in the home of Mr. Edward A. Macdougall, President of the Queensboro Corporation, to discuss the formation of an Episcopal Church. By this time, there was no longer any property available to be donated for a church site,

but this proved to be no deterrent. Spurred on by 80 year old Mrs. Mary Dick Sayer, mother of our late Senior Warden Arnold Sayer, and grandmother of Jane Sayer, the group went to the Bishop of Long Island, at the time the Right Reverend Frederick W. Burgess, to seek his guidance and assistance in founding a church. With the Diocese guaranteeing the rent (which they never had to pay) this little group of loyal Episcopalians rented a store on Polk Avenue (37th Avenue) on approximately the site of what is now the Kentucky Fried Chicken place. They were now St. Mark's Mission and Archdeacon Duffield agreed to conduct Sunday services. (there had been a slight contretemps just before this over an Episcopal Communion Service scheduled to take place in the Community Church, which for a combination of reasons didn't take place there.)

So, on November 11th, 49 years ago, we began. And that beginning would never have taken place except for the loyalty of a small group of lay people.

Our first Baptism took place on December 23rd, 1923, when Archdeacon Duffield baptized Janet Macdougall. The Archdeacon also presented the first confirmation class of the Mission to Bishop Burgess on June 25th, 1924. Included among the thirteen persons confirmed on that date was Miss Elizabeth Bradley, Barber, who is still active in the Parish.

The Executive Committee of the Mission, appointed by Bishop Burgess found that the response to the beginning of the Mission was good, both in numbers and financially, and on October 9th 1924 petitioned Bishop Burgess to appoint the Reverend Raymond L. Scofield to the new Mission. Very shortly after this the Scofields arrived and moved into Apartment #1 in Elm Court, which thus became the first Rectory. Now St. Mark's Mission acquired not only a full time Priest, but also the first clergy salary, since Archdeacon Duffield's services to the new Mission were a part of his duties as Archdeacon.

When Mr. Scofield arrived, he found a small group of people already identified with the new Mission, a rented storefront church and not too much else. The first annual financial report had shown only fifteen capital items, but if it was short in goods, it was rich in goodwill. The altar was the gift of the Church of St. Joan of Arc, the organ had been given by St. James Church Elmhurst, and the Sayer family had given the Communion silver. In addition they were rich in devoted and hard working people.

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In October of 1924, the Executive Committee of St. Mark's Mission asked Bishop Stires to appoint Raymond Leeds Scoffield as its Priest. Bishop Stires was fond of Mr. Scoffield and he was a logical man for the choice, but he said, "You'll break your heart there. My advice is against it." Nevertheless Raymond Scoffield took the job.

The Scoffields first Sunday in Jackson Heights didn't start off entirely well either. Dr. Knowlton, a member of the Executive Committee, had invited them to dinner. Mrs. Knowlton hadn't made it to church that day, and when she heard the door open, called out cheerily "That you, Will? How did you like that one?" The new Priest and his wife stood frozen in embarrassment. The Doctor recovered quickly with "I liked him fine, and they are right here."

The first Priest of the Parish was still in his thirties, he was married and had two children. He had the opportunity to build a parish and he poured into it all his energy. He was determined to have a choir of men and boys, feeling that this was the proper vocal accompaniment for the Episcopal service and that it was good training for boys. In addition he felt it would be a cohesive factor in the church. And here he met one of his first problems.

Choir practice was set for Saturday mornings-and due to strenuous parental efforts it stayed that way for a while. Suddenly a road-block appeared. The Community Church was well established and their youth activities were headed by a woman of dominating personality. She had a Boys' Group which met on Saturday mornings, and she had lost a few members. Forthrightly she called the head of this new sect that had appeared in Jackson Heights and told him that he'd have to stop this Saturday morning diversion.

Luckily the neighborhood friend (not then a member of the church) offered the use of a truck and driver for Saturdays. Choir practice thereafter began at 9 a.m. on Saturdays and lasted until 10. Then everyone piled into the truck and headed for the country (College Point in those days). Roasted potatoes, hot dogs, and ball games filled out the day and the boys choir continued its life.

There was only one key to the new Priest's program. "We are going to build a church!" – he kept drumming it into the ears of the Parish, and, after a while, the Church had enough money to buy a building site.

The Prince of Peace might must have raised his eyebrows at the argument that ensued, presumably on his behalf. The Diocese and a sizable portion of the Vestry wanted to buy the the plot they were already occupying on Polk Avenue (37th Ave.) on the theory that a Church ought to be close to a school. The Rector had his eye on our present grounds, on the theory that it was going to be closer to the heart of mature Jackson Heights. The temperature of the discussions rose. At one point the Treasurer told the Rector he was crazy and quit. When you realize that the purchase price of the building site was \$45,000.00 and that there is almost never unanimity in church business, one can understand the tension.

Eventually our present property was bought and the Mission began to move to Parish status. That brought on the new argument. What was to be the name of the new Church and congregation Bishop Burgess had named the Mission "St. Mark's" because there was no church of that name in the area and because of the importance of St. Mark. However some of the parish decoded that they wanted a name to include "of the" or "in the" in its form. An article in one of the Church papers of the period suggested that "St. Vitus in the Vale" be considered did much to settle that question.

The ground-breaking ceremony was held in September 1926 and the parish pitched in to work hard and raise the needed money. There were big fund-raising dinners, theatre benefits, minstrel shows. There were box luncheon Parties and Salad Bridges, Strawberry Festivals and Song and Dance Reviews. So hard and fast did these people work that they were able to start building within months. It took courage- at one time, before collections started coming in on pledges, St. Mark's owed \$124,000.00.

The cornerstone ceremony was held on Sunday June 17, 1927. Sealed in a lead box in the cornerstone was the names of the architect, contractor and all the artisans who worked on the Church. There are also copies of the New York Times and the Herald Tribune and \$1.01 in coins.

Ingenuity went hand in hand with all the hard work. The only stone that had been bought was the cut stone required for edging the windows and doors. The rest was cast-off material hauled from the East River stone yards in the trucks of Lewis M. Stevenson and the Nelson brothers. The timbers in the church had been fashioned from shoring used in the construction of subway tunnels. This Church is the work of many hands and minds, the sum of many individual efforts.

The first Service in the building was held Christmas Eve, 1927 and it was a joyful one for it marked the accomplishment of many dreams, much hard work, and it was the beginning of a new life for the Parish. Incidentally, I have been told that a full pound of incense was burned in the Church that day to cover the smell of the creosote on the beams. It was to be the last of that for many years.

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Not many of you may know that the organ loft was also originally the choir loft, for at first the organ was small. Then in 1929 we acquired a notable organ. There was a little luck involved, but it was also a good deal more than that. The organ, an Aeolian player house organ built in 1906, was the property of Harrison Williams and when our Rector, Mr. Scoffield, first heard of it, had been all but promised to a church in New Jersey. There was also the matter of raising \$6,000.00 in a hurry to pay for moving, alteration and installation.

A teapot crisis occurred a little later, the preparatory construction on the organ loft and Nave had been completed and we were ready for installation. But we couldn't find the organ! Harrison Williams was away on his yacht and no one knew where the organ was stored. However, this was only a temporary obstacle and soon the organ was installed to serve us well for many years.

We owe Mr. Scoffield another great debt in the garden and grounds of the Church. The planting of the ornamental trees and ivy and bulbs began with him and in the early years he paid for many of them. Some of the old trees have succumbed to the years, but they have been replaced and the basic pattern and plans of the planting around the church are his - a lasting gift of beauty to the whole community.

Still another debt of beauty we owe him, is the building itself. Its simplicity, honesty of line and construction and our great stained windows owe a great deal to his taste and his determination to build the best.

These pleasant years of accomplishment and growth however came to a sudden end. "Black Friday" late in the Fall of 1929 brought terrible financial and human loss. Not too long after we find in a Sunday bulletin:

"I ask you personally, to pledge to the limit, your support to the work of this Parish. We have lost one-third of our people by removal."

The first blow fell on the many people who had been piling up paper profits in the Stock Market. The jobs dried up. Young people moved back to their parents when they could and others were moved through foreclosure proceedings. Jackson

Heights became a community dotted with empty homes and apartments. It was a dark picture—a church loaded with debt and one-third of its members gone.

The Scoffields were living in Elm Court in 1930 in an apartment that the Church had purchased but on which \$12,000.00 was still owed. Mr. MacDougall of the Queensboro Corporation suggested to the Rector that he move into the Towers on a rental basis. He would cancel the Elm Court debt, which would relieve St. Mark's of a heavy obligation. On the other hand it would help him to Towers' apartments; the presence of the Rector and his family would add prestige to the buildings.

The Scoffields weren't too happy about the prospect of moving. They were comfortable in Elm Court and it was home to their children. But Mr. Scoffield didn't see how the Church could possibly complete the purchase. He explained the situation to the Vestry and they unanimously approved the move.

But when the Vestrymen got home and told their wives about it, a great muttering arose. The Scoffields were getting fancy ideas. Elm Court wasn't good enough for them. They had to move into The Towers now.

The thing grew into a tremendous conflict and in the emotional tangle the issues became highly confused. At least once Raymond Scoffield did some roaring himself. In the Program of February 1, 1931 he wrote:

One Rector, many correctors. The group of correctors in any Parish anywhere is a very small proportion of the entire congregation, but they are very noisy.

“No Rector can please everyone. If he wears a green necktie, some will think it awful that he does not wear a blue one. And others will insist on black. He must wear one of his own choice, and that is frequently dictated by his supply. There are stock criticisms in all Parishes the world over.”

Before this storm blew itself out a number of Vestrymen resigned. But loyal gathered around Raymond Scoffield. Both he and the Parish needed them badly because at one point the bank holding the mortgage on the property went so far as to serve foreclosure papers on the men who had signed the mortgage. These were years when all the Parish could manage to do was to pay the interest on the mortgage and sometimes pay nothing on the principal at all.

Holding the Parish together took real doing. There is always a certain amount of bickering in any Church and it is understandable that the economic tension of the day produced ragged tempers. To the Vestrymen the Church debt represented a very real personal problem; each had signed a bond guaranteeing the mortgage. No wonder this was a time of many divergent and positive views on how the Church should be run.

This was to be the story of the early thirties. They were rough years, but they were weathered. However, many of the old dreams had to be postponed. The Church was unfinished, the west end has never been built; the Parish House was very small-it would have to wait until after the Second World War. But the work of the Church went on and the Parish held on to what it had gained.- a lovely building, fine grounds, and most important of all—a core of devoted people.

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After the slow hard years of the thirties and the pain of the Second World War, St. Mark's again found itself in a position to look concretely towards a move forward. The west wall of the Church is a "temporary" wall. The original design calls for the building to go out to 81st Street and to have a bell tower. In addition, in the thirties and forties, the Parish was much smaller and many things happen simply because of lack of space. So, as the War came to an end and it began to look as though we could plan again towards growth, it was the need for Parish House space that spoke loudest.

So, once again, St. Mark's started out on a building campaign and the theme was a logical one. "There is a need ...building for youth is costly but not so costly as losing youth." Gil Blackford, who prepared the mailing brochure, took the words from one of Mr. Scoffield's sermons, and they were words that were heard. Committees were formed, mailings started and a dinner was planned. St. Mark's set out to raise \$75,000.00. Once again Mr. Scoffield was coping with blueprints and architects drawings. By 1949 the expansion was finished and the Parish House reached almost to 82nd Street. We didn't build all we had planned, but what we did build was well and solidly built. As an earlier article in this series puts it, there was a bonus in the fact that some of the terrified canvassers who set out to raise the money even came back to Church!

Somebody has said that the key to success is to recognize opportunity, coupled with the decisiveness to grab it before it disappears. Does the following fit this formula? In the block north of St. Mark's (where the Donner Apartments are now), the Jackson Heights Garden Club was making a last stand. It was a bucolic paradise. Corn waved in the breeze, tomatoes ripened on the vine, (before the blight), fresh tender lettuce was there for succulent salads, flowers brightened the borders. Hardly ever did dissension arise -- except about who stole

Raymond Scoffield had his eye on this peaceful scene—and knew that it didn't have long to last. And while he noted that many of the male parents of his Sunday School children were spending part of Sunday mornings on their knees, he didn't think thinning carrots and beets was the most productive form of activity.

Not when the Church grounds needed attention. Ragweed was in every corner; bindweed had killed almost all of the fragrant old mock orange. Just to the north, superphosphate 5-10-5 and all the newest plant nutrients were being lavished on the plots—and the Church grounds hadn't so much as a taste of fertilizer in who knows when.

It's a bit of a mystery how St. Mark's Garden Club started. A chain reaction began -- men started slapping each other on the back with "congratulations, you've been elected to membership in St. Mark's Garden Club. You do have a child in the Sunday School, don't you?" And the electees sought out other victims.

Before it had become quite adjusted to the new activity, the Vestry began to get requisitions for such items as mattocks, axes, wheelbarrows. Then such piles of ripped-out old shrubs accumulated that a carting company had to be hired to take them away periodically.

Teen-agers were enlisted as auxiliaries and assigned to the muscle-cracking jobs such as digging out roots and distributing ten tons of top soil. The Saturday atmosphere of the Parish House began to resemble that of a country husking bee. The men and boys were working and the women and the girls were feeding them.

In a short time St. Mark's ground took on a new look. There were collateral results too. The Rector took for granted the pleasure of Parishioners for, after all, they are partners. He really beamed when he began to receive letters from people outside the Church who just wrote to say how much they enjoyed looking at our grounds.

We would also say that it was not a coincidence which led some of our neighboring congregations to do more about their grounds. Perhaps it was no coincidence, either, that some of those who first knelt in the garden of St. Mark's eventually knelt at the Altar. Mr. Scoffield would deny any proselytizing. At most he would grin and say, "Some people have called me insidious."

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The Parish House was built! The construction of the grounds completed. All this space should be put to maximum use!

St. Mark's School (Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten) was born. After thought and organization and the process of licensing, the School began on February 13, 1950. We were licensed by the Board of Health of the City of New York, Division of Day Care, after approval of the space by the Department of Buildings and Housing and the Fire Department. The Division of Day care also defines the qualifications of the Director and teachers. We are licensed for for twenty-five children based on the amount of class room space and the amount of bathroom space we have.

The first director of the School was Miss Greta Olsson. A solidly experienced and trained teacher she got things off to a good start. Early on in the life of the School the added Mrs. Robert D. (Faith) Williams to her staff. At one point we tried adding a first grade. That year it worked, but the next year we had a second grade without a first grade under it. Finally, we abandoned the plans to expand the School into the grades, partly as a result of reactions on the Parish from parishioners who had been or were involved with the Garden Country Day School, a Private School in the Community. During her time with the School, Miss Olsson became Mrs. William Shoemaker, marrying the then curate of the Parish. Shortly after their marriage, they left St. Mark's when Mr. Shoemaker became Rector of Grace Church, Windsor Connecticut, in 1955.

When Mrs. Shoemaker left the School she was succeeded by (Mrs.) Faith Williams who was shortly joined on the staff by Mrs. John (Estelle) Longshore. For the next ten years they were the heart of St. Mark's School. If we owe a debt of foundation to Greta Olsson Shoemaker we owe a debt of continuity and solid growth to Faith Williams, and we owe the debt of continuing life and growth to Mrs. Bruce (Eleanor) Small, who became Director in 1966. For now we have a morning kindergarten five days a week and and afternoon pre-kindergarten three days a week and a full school.

It would be most unfair in reviewing the history of the School if we did not acknowledge our debt to the various members of the Parish who have served as members of the Board of the School. Two in particular come to mind. First is Mr. John McKim Minton whose wise advice and counsel, both legal and otherwise, made such a contribution to the School from the beginnings until he retired as Warden of the Parish. Second is Mrs. Charles (Betsy) Guthrie who has served on the Board through most of the life of the School with grace, humor, and a hard business head which has served the school well.

Now, let's jump backwards a bit. Shortly after the School got started and in the middle of the post was baby boom, it became obvious that Mr. Scoffield needed help from another clergyman in the Parish. So, after due discussion the Rector went Curate hunting. The first Curate for the Parish was the Reverend E. Donald Hood who came to us as a Deacon when he finished Seminary in 1952 and stayed with the Parish until the following year, being ordained Priest in the meantime. He is now the Rector of Trinity Church, Hewlett, New York.

The second curate was the aforementioned Reverend William T. Shoemaker, Jr. (who stole our founding teacher). They stayed with us from 1953 until 1955, when they moved to Connecticut. Currently a non-Parochial Priest, Father Shoemaker assists Caroline Church, Setauket and Mrs. Shoemaker teaches in a school in Port Jefferson where they live.

Our third curate in the Parish was the Reverend Richard A. Norris who came to us in 1955 after he graduated from Seminary. The son of the Reverend Baxter Norris, Rector of the Church of the Redeemer, Astoria, Father Norris, his wife and growing family stayed with us for three happy years, until he became the Rector of St. Paul's Church, Great Neck. He is now the Rector of St. Paul's Church, Lewiston, New York up on the Niagara River.

The next Priest to assist Mr. Scoffield was Canon Samuel H. Lowther, who was also to bridge part of the gap after Mr. Scoffield retired. We will come back to this later on.

But, let's go back a bit. The Parish was finished. It was not as big as we had dreamed, but bigger by far than what we had had, and it was put to work, not only with the School and its activities but with all of the activities of the Church School

and Choir and young people made possible by the joint work of the Rector, his curates, and the lay people of the parish. One of the casualties of time, construction and activities was the hedge that bordered St. Mark's for so long. It was past repair or renewing. The only practical thing to replace it was an iron fence. But the cost! Well, luckily some stock that had been given to St. Mark's in Raymond Scoffield's honor had done very well. Then the Evening Guild raised \$1000 and individual gifts began to come in another of Raymond Scoffield's "pipe dreams" came to be. So today the Church property is bounded on all but one section with a handsome, sturdy iron fence. (We know it's handsome and sturdy-some of us just finished repainting it!)

Other things came along with the years; more windows for the Church, the handsome Dossal, Baldachino and Riddle curtain, the list goes on. Not all of them easily or comfortably. When the property to the north where the gardens had been came up for sale, Mr. Scoffield did his best to persuade the Vestry to buy it. But having had such a hard time in the early Depression (remember that they served foreclosure papers on Arnold Sayer along with some others who were still on the Vestry) the Vestry decided that they could only afford to buy the lot that is now the back garden and yard (about 60' X 100'). It's easy, after the fact, to say that they should have bought more, since Raymond Scoffield knew it before. It was one of the dreams that didn't make it into reality. There weren't too many of those when you came right down to it.

Other people and needs came with the years, too. One of these was a small group of White Russians, members of the Russian Orthodox Church who wanted to start a Parish In Jackson Heights, but needed a place to begin. For a number of years on Sunday mornings while one service was going on in Church another was also going on in the little chapel dedicated to St. Alexander Nevsky on the second floor of the Parish House. It took time, but in the summer of 1960 they were able to get a building on Roosevelt Avenue in the 90's where they could have not only a Church but a place for their Priest and his family to live.

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So thirty-five years came to an end. The first Rector of St. Mark's, indeed the first full time Priest, reached retirement age. A special issue of the "St. Mark's Newsletter," dated June 21, 1959 was issued for the date of the reception given by the Parish for Raymond and Anne Scoffield. With various other words and acts the members of the Parish did what they could to express thanks and identify the debt owed by St. Mark's to the Priest whose good taste had given them a gem of a building, whose outreach to people had led to many of them to St. Mark's in the first place, and whose "insidious" nature had had so much to do with the building of both congregation and plant.

Thus for the first time the Vestry of St. Mark's found itself in the position of looking for a Rector. The Reverend Canon Samuel Lowther, who had been Mr. Scoffield's last assistant continued on as Priest-in charge. Unfortunately his health was not good and after the announcement of the election of the new Rector in March of 1960. He had to leave. April April, 1960 until the end of August the Reverend Paul Jacoby, Jr. was Priest-in-charge of the Parish.

Then on the first of September 1960 the second Rector of St. Mark's arrived. The Reverend L. Roper Shamhart came to St. Mark's from the Church of the Heavenly Rest where he had been a curate for three years. Father Shamhart had been born in Tennessee and raised in New York. His college education at Washington and Lee University was interrupted by service in the U.S. Army Air Corps at the end of the Second World War. After graduating from College in 1948 he went on to the Virginia Theological Seminary at Alexandria from which he graduated in 1951. His first assignment was as Deacon-in-charge and then Rector of St. Thomas' Church, Christianburg, Virginia from June of 1951 to August 1953. In September of 1953 he became assistant at St. John's Church, Wytheville, Virginia in order to allow the Rector, for whom he had worked as a college student, to continue until normal retirement age. The academic year 1955-56 was spent as a graduate student at the General Theological Seminary on New York and the following academic year as a Fellow and Tutor. During those two years, Father Shamhart also worked at Grace Church, Madison New Jersey part time and later at St. Stephen's Church, West 69th Street, Manhattan part time. In addition he assisted at various other Churches

in the New York Area on occasion. It was from the General Theological Seminary that Father Shamhart went to the Church of the Heavenly Rest.

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(Beginning with this chapter of the History of St. Mark's Church the reader may notice a difference in style. Up to now our Rector has performed the task of relating the history of this church- a project that Raymond Scoffield has always hoped that would be done. For obvious reasons he did not do it himself, for during the period of his ministry the history of St. Mark's was too much his own. Similarly, Father Shamhart decided to conclude his portion with his own entry into the scene. The present writer approaches the subject from the point of view of a member of the parish.)

Raymond Scoffield's retirement, while of course anticipated, caught the parish emotionally unprepared. The vestry faced a responsibility for which it has no precedent, no experience. Even though the procedure for searching out and calling a new rector is outlined in the canons of the Episcopal Church. The actual carrying out of these instructions left us feeling something less than self-confident.

The canons states that you wardens are to notify the bishop that the parish is vacant and arrange with him for someone to conduct services in your rector's absence. The canon also says that, when you have selected a new rector, you must notify the bishop. If he does not object to your choice within thirty days, you are free to elect as rector the man you have chosen. A written notice of election, signed by your wardens, must then be sent to the bishop to be entered in the official records of the diocese.

Perhaps a simple statement that we complied with the necessary steps would be enough to satisfy the record but actually it wasn't all that simple. In retrospect one could wish that selection of a new rector for St. Mark's had been handed with somewhat greater suavity.

The Reverend Richard A. Norris was serving as curate when Raymond Scoffield announced that he would be retiring some months hence. Many remember Dick Norris with great affection, and courtesy might have suggested that we approach him to find out whether or not he wished to become rector. But we were under the impression that, with a young and growing family, the Norrises wished to move out

of Jackson Heights like so many young parents before and since. And then there was the matter of the survey...

Groaning at the prospect of interminable discussions in the vestry meetings there were 24 vestrymen and two wardens then), two vestrymen devised a brilliant plan for achieving a quick consensus on the primary characteristics and aptitudes desired in a rector. Being in the advertising business they were familiar with the survey method of defining objectives so they distributed a questionnaire among the vestrymen.

A copy of the questionnaire is not available but it listed such items as age, marital status the importance of the pastoral needs of the parish vs. preaching ability, 2etc. Scales were provided for each question, running from one to ten (ten the highest score) so that each vestryman could make his own assessment of the various factors.

The questionnaires were filled, tabulated and summarized. It was a very neat exercise in futility. Subsequent experience quickly showed that the priesthood of the Episcopal Church was not about to beat down our gates, so a more flexible approach was indicated. Furthermore clerical reaction, close at hand, made it quite apparent that the scientific method was not appreciated. "No man can be all these things," declared the appalled Raymond Scoffield. Dick Norris was even less enthusiastic. "It sounds like they were drawing up specifications for buying a cow," he commented. It is unlikely that the cause and effect are represented here, but a few months later Dick Norris accepted a call from St. Paul's in Great Neck. He was succeeded as curate by Canon Lowther.

In the meantime the vestry had established a search committee whose responsibility was to seek out candidates. Some names were suggested by the Diocese and these were dutifully checked out and reported on. Other names were suggested by members of the parish. Sunday after Sunday members of the Committee drove here and there to attend services at other churches. There was rather a cloak-and-dagger feeling about these missions. For all the nobility of purpose, the Search Committee was actually a raiding party, seeking someone whom they could snaffle from another parish. Its members, though they stopped short of establishing cover stories, strove to slink out after services without giving their names or church affiliation.

Obviously only a superficial judgment could be made of any pastor in any respect save one. "Churchmanship" was a fighting word in those days. Under Raymond Scoffield St. Mark's followed the middle road. This course was a practical necessity since sitting on the vestry were Presbyterians, Lutherans, Roman Catholic, as well as Episcopalians. Only the wardens were required to be communicants of the Episcopal Church.

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Canon Lowther's health, always precarious, continued to deteriorate and though he was assisted on Sundays by Father Baxter Norris (father of Dick Norris and longtime friend of St. Mark's and Raymond Scoffield) it became obvious that he could not carry on.

Having depended for so many years on Raymond Scoffield's hand at the helm, you can imagine the demoralized state of the vestry and the parish. It seemed that our very walls were crumbling. But the Bishop came to the rescue.

At the suggestion of Bishop DeWolfe, Father Paul Jacoby was installed as the priest in interim charge. Father Jacoby had entered the priesthood late in life after a banking career. He was a kindly man of great precision. Members of the parish during this period will recall that every Sunday he asked the Lord's blessing on "St. Mark's, Jackson Heights, N.Y."

Our search for a rector was, of course, continuing. We heard of a young curate at the Church of the Heavenly Rest, in Manhattan, who was highly thought of by the members of that parish. Having determined when the curate was due to preach, the Senior Warden and two vestrymen and their wives attended services at the Heavenly Rest on the Sunday. This Manhattan Church, as you know, is quite posh and Father Shamhart conducted the services with appropriate suavity and assurance. His sermon dealt with our obligation to the poor and was delivered clearly and crisply. (Our fleeting thought was that this was an obligation with which the parishioners of Heavenly Rest were well able to cope.) Our group agreed that this young man was most promising and that we would have to meet him.

In due course of time, on a Saturday afternoon, Father Shamhart appeared at the Parish House to meet the full committee including both Wardens, John McKim Minton and Arnold Sayer. Far from being overawed by this august assemblage, he was at ease and quickly demonstrated his professional expertise. He asked to see the Church and Parish House and moved briskly but attentively from second floor to basement with an occasional appropriate compliment about the Church's architecture.

Afterward, sitting at a table on the first floor of the Parish House, we engaged in dialogue. The conversation has largely passed from memory but one knows that Mr. Minton, to ease the occasion in his courteous way, informed us all that Mrs. Minton's family had known Father Shamhart's grandfather, a clergyman, in Spartanburg, S.C.

On his part, Father Shamhart informed us that he had grown up in Douglaston, that he had attended Washington and Lee Univ. and the Virginia Theological Seminary and had completed some additional study towards a Master's Degree. He spoke of his previous clerical experience and of his involvement in scouting. On his part, he asked highly pertinent questions regarding St. Mark's Parish, its size, the number of communicants, the financial condition.

Undoubtedly there was some discussion of churchmanship, for he told us that in formal discussion he preferred to be addressed as "Father." He was accustomed to the term and, in addition, had found it a distinct advantage in his frequent contact with employees of the city.

Altogether, it was a pleasant interview (joint, because we too were being interviewed) and we were well pleased with the young man (he had told us that he was 34, and the average age of the committee must have been well over 50.) However, no commitment was made on either side.

Events might have proceeded in a straight line from this point to the installation of Father Shamhart at St. Mark's. But there was one more potential candidate to be checked out.

Early on a cold, rainy Sunday in late November members of the committee journeyed to northern Connecticut. The rector, whom we were to meet, was a man in his fifties. He was tall, florid, commanding in presence, and, from the way the choir boys snapped to, in personality as well. In many ways he seemed like the classic corporate president. His sermon, based on a topic in the news, might have been contested on point of view but at least he had taken a position and developed it ably.

After the service we met with him and his wife. The corporate impression lingered. We explained our problem, the purpose of our visit. He considered the matter gravely and agreed to visit us and look the situation over.

There was a great pitch of excitement the day of his visit. There was the showing of the Church and Parish House, all clean and with the floors waxed. Our faces were scrubbed and our shoes shined. There was a buffet-high-tea sort of affair. He asked us how long it would take us to raise \$20,000.00- not for anything in particular but just a test of the parish's vitality. We fell apart. We reckoned how we didn't know.

It was with some embarrassed relief that we received word that he preferred to remain in Connecticut.

The History of St. Mark's

Part 9

Now came a moment of acute embarrassment. The Committee had been pleased with the young man from the Church of the Heavenly Rest and our overzealousness in further exploration had simply wasted time. Even worse, months had gone by since that Saturday meeting in the Parish House and we had not been in touch with Father Shamhart since. We became acutely aware that, in letting him wait without word we had breached good manners most deplorably. We could only hope that the teachings of the Church, the discipline against taking offense too readily, the adjudication against false pride, would work in our favor. We were acutely aware that our gaucherie might have jeopardized our case.

(It may help to clarify the delay by noting that in the interim the Vestry interviewed and called as a Rector a somewhat older man that in the interim the Vestry interviewed down, looked us over and then turned us down.)

Who was to call hm? There were no volunteers in this diplomatic crisis; instead there was a great milling around for a place in the back row. Finally two vestrymen were bulldozed into accepting the assignment. Between them they settled, after strenuous negotiations, that Vestryman #1 would make the telephone call and, if things went well, both would take him to lunch.

Saturday morning came. Vestryman #1 called Vestryman #2. "look, I just can't do it. Every time I reach for the phone I realize I don't know what to say."

Vestryman #2 tried, without avail, to convince #1 that it would be easy, that the words would come once the conversation started. It was no use; #1 stuck firmly to his position. So #2 had the ball. In his encouragement to #1 he had convinced himself that it wouldn't be all that difficult. But suddenly, as he was dialing, the dismal conviction came that it was going to be awful, that he too didn't have the slightest idea of how he was going to open the conversation. If Father Shamhart himself hadn't answered the telephone on the second ring, our bold friend might have quietly hung up.

However there was no way to go except forward. The caller introduced himself, saying hopefully, "You may remember me," and, with frantic striving for a light note "#1 and I were designated to call you. We tossed a coin and I lost." Father Shamhart did indeed remember the caller, and the hint of frost in the response made our friend wonder if it might not have been better had he not remembered. The next few minutes were spent in apologies for not having called before, and a desperate searching for plausible reasons and finally an invitation to luncheon. Taking pity on our man's obvious discomfort Father Shamhart accepted the invitation n genially enough.

The luncheon proceeded well. We were honest, well meaning men completely frank about the problems of St. Mark's. In fact, in an extreme burst of honesty, we confided that we had heard that the vestry Of St. Mark's had the reputation of being a group of curmudgeons (a euphemism for the real label.) But we wanted him to know that we were really only run-of-the-mill curmudgeons, nothing extraordinary.

Whether it was our remarkable sales talk or a humane recognition of our need for help moved him, Father Shamhart agreed to give the matter his sympathetic consideration. Somehow in the next few weeks we got through the acceptance, the parish approval and the Bishop's approval, and on September 1, 1960 The Reverend L. Roper Shamhart became the second Rector of St. Mark's Church.

What followed must be a familiar story to all clergymen-particularly in the Episcopal Church whose stresses and strains must equal those of all of the rest of Christendom. There was the inevitable honeymoon period. There was the admiration for the polished delivery of the fresh new voice from the pulpit. The vitality of youth was refreshing. Everyone flocked around the new Rector to give him the benefit of their views. And there was the inevitable reaction. Those who felt slighted or rejected those who interpreted every change in services as a move toward high church, those who were comfortable in the accustomed ways of doing things- all these began to mutter and grumble.

Two things should be kept in mind.: First, the comment of Raymond Scoffield to the effect that no Rector could satisfy everyone-an observation based on first-hand experience. Second, the composition of the parish. Jackson Heights was aging and St. Mark's with it. A substantial proportion of the parishioners were St. Mark's

members of long standing; they were, in truth, the “old guard.” No one doubted their loyalty or fundamental good will. But, with mortality reducing their numbers, it was obvious that the survival of St. Mark’s depended on younger people and newcomers.

With perhaps more logic than tact Father Shamhart concentrated his attention on the latter. It would be natural, also, that he himself being a newcomer would have felt more comfortable in the company of other late arrivals and his social contacts were apt to be outside the parish rather than with old members. And since, following current practice, he did not routinely make parish calls, many felt neglected. His curates, first Father Raskopf and later Father DeChambeau, were unable to relieve what can best be described as social tensions.

A Rector’s relationship with the vestry is always a delicate balance. While the canons spell out the separate jurisdictions of each, they cannot foresee every possible situation and collisions of authority are apt to occur. Very much on the mind of the vestry was the financial condition of the church. Each year discussions of the forthcoming budget was faced with dread and during a number of years deficit budgets were passed in the hope that somewhere we would be able to cope, as in fact we did.

Suspicion that the new Rector going to bankrupt us developed quite early. In retrospect it appears to have been primarily based on the lack of communication. With commendable enthusiasm, Father Shamhart announced his program and objectives, probably thinking it unnecessary to mention that each project would be taken in turn when and if we could afford it. But as each item was followed by another, and all of them involved spending money we did not have, it is not surprising some of the vestry suffered an acute attack of the jitters.

The struggle for power spread in other directions. During most of its history up to this point, St. Mark’s had had a twenty-six man vestry, far larger than most churches and somewhat cumbersome meetings. It was proposed to reduce the size to twelve vestrymen and two wardens with a rotating systems for vestrymen, but not for wardens. In a vestry meeting the motion was passed by one vote, but the opposition was so determined that it was feared that there would be a floor fight in the Parish meeting when the move was brought up for ratification. Therefore, after some further discussion, the mover of the original motion brought it up again at the

next vestry meetings and proposed that vestry be 18 vestry members and two wardens. The motion was passed with one dissent and one abstention. The proposal was made to the following annual meeting and passed with no controversy on the floor. As you know, two years ago the Parish meeting authorized the reduction in the Vestry's size, to twelve vestrymen, thus clearly indicating a relaxation of tensions.

The Rector would have been less than human had he not rankled at the drumbeat of criticism, covert and overt. He must have recalled our assurances that the vestry was a run-of-the-mill curmudgeon, nothing exceptional and concluded that we had understated the situation at the very least. As for the parish, attendance at services dropped; some people began to attend other churches or simply quit going to church; and some even came back.

And yet there remained sufficient self-restraint to prevent a public brawl. To those who expressed their complaints directly, Father Shamhart listened courteously and bore no resentment toward them. He gave a little and the parish gave a little and though at times the movement was almost imperceptible the process of mutual accommodation was working. The Rector tacitly conceded that our financial condition was acute and voluntarily dispensed with a time curate, depending on Sunday assistance only. The parish grew accustomed to the increased emphasis on communion services and moved into the trial liturgy with quiet resignation, if not enthusiasm. And the decline in attendance and membership at St. Mark's did not differ a great deal from the national decline in church attendance.

More positive signs emerged indicating that the loyalty of the parish to St. Mark's continued undiminished. The iron fence around the church badly needed painting, and the lowest bid was \$1,100.00 which we didn't have. Somewhat to the astonishment of the neighborhood, two successive Saturdays saw over 60 parishioners out scraping, sandpapering and covering the fence (and themselves) with paint. Work, fun, solidarity and a total cost of little more than \$100.00 The Bazaar, too, took on a new life and year after year sets records. It was largely this event, plus all the other less spectacular fund raising events which enable St. Mark's to bridge the gaps between budget and anticipated income.

Clear evidence that the Rector and parish were now working together as a team was the successful drive for a new organ. It was sparked by the rector, in the

thought not only that the old organ was worn out but that the number of Episcopal churches in the area would inevitably reduce and that a new organ plus our central location, plus the physical nature of our building might well make St. Mark's the church of the future. \$40,000.00 seemed an incredible sum to raise, but it was raised and according to time schedule and, looking back, with apparent ease.

And now, reflecting the upward trend in the spirit of St. Mark's, came one of the major climatic events in the history of St. Mark's- the mortgage was paid off. Determination, frugality, quiet sober judgment all combined to confute the doom criers of a few years earlier. It is unfortunate only that the death of Raymond Scoffield prevented him from attending the consecration ceremony to be held in November. It would be the culmination of the work which he started, carried on for so many years and, in his heart, never really abandoned.

The article was not written to applaud- either the performance of two Rectors or the parish. It was simply to record events as one followed another, with some necessary interpretation of why things happened. It is, above all, a very human and quietly dramatic story. Much has been omitted for lack of space. As written, it fails to do justice to the hard and preserving work of Father Shamhart. Performed at times in what must have been a somber and discouraged mood it bears a quality of inevitability. Steadfastly he served his church, the diocese and the dictates of his own conscience.