

Greystone Hospital and Trinity Lutheran Church

In 1886 John Edward Larson and a group of Swedish immigrants living in the Dover, New Jersey area met to discuss organizing a Swedish Lutheran church service and Sunday school. Later that year, the first service was held with Pastor J. A. Rodell of Brooklyn, New York officiating. Subsequently, the Rev. Axel Bernhard Lilja, an emigrant missionary, became the full-time pastor of "The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church of Dover," incorporated in March 1889. The cornerstone of the present church building was laid on 1894 and dedicated in 1895. After World War I, in 1918, the church merged with a German Lutheran congregation and transitioned to English-language services.

In 1974, Pastor Bob Schmeelke and members of Trinity met with administrators from Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital to discuss potential community support of the hospital. Thus began a long-lasting relationship between the "little yellow church on Blackwell Street" and the residents of Greystone. Every year from 1974 until 2002, members of Trinity would host two or three ward parties with music, dances and snacks. The evenings were filled with music provided by accordionist June Johnson and guitarist Dick Sheridan, who played residents' requests for their favorite tunes. The folk choir led our sing-a-long. Everyone danced their hearts out. We did "The Hokey Pokey," sometimes with a loose shoe coming off and flying across the dance floor, followed by a conga line of people waving in the air the bananas that had been brought as snacks. The special joy of the evenings came when June and Dick would play an old hymn, like *Amazing Grace* or *Rock of Ages*, and expressions of recognition came over residents' faces. They would start to sing as loudly as they could, bringing back long-lost memories of their youth and a different time. It was pure joy.

A second ministry blossomed from the parties: Trinity's congregation continues to collect monthly donations to purchase fruit for Greystone's residents in memory of our member, Joan Frick, who was a champion of the ministry. In 1984, when the collections began, we donated about \$200, and now more than \$1,000 is raised annually. Our love continues to grow.

Trinity Lutheran Church
123 East Blackwell Street
Dover, NJ 07801
www.TLCNJ.org
Reverend Fred E. Becker



1895



1984 - Present

To learn more about the Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital Oral History Project, follow this link.

<https://www.greystoneoralhistory.com/additional-information/>