

Part III The story of the Maryhill Academy

Traveling down Memory Lane at Maryhill Academy

by **CONNIE PETERSEN,**
freelance writer

The prominent Patrick and Emma Casey family built a grand home at the southeast edge of Aitkin at the turn of the twentieth century. This estate was donated to the Benedictine Sisters of Duluth around the fall of 1938, after Emma Casey's death.

The nuns re-named the home Maryhill Academy and it was opened in September 1939.

Here are a few memories compiled from area residents who experienced Maryhill Academy first hand.

Mary Therese (Hassman) Schoepf:

I was one of the first students in 1939 when the academy opened. I remember Sister Marie's music and the plays at the high school auditorium, the skating rink and sliding across the highway. By the time Pearl Harbor happened, I was at the public school.

I became good friends with Colleen Casey, but then the Casey building burned the year I was a freshman and Colleen moved to St. Paul.

I also remember one of my girlfriends cried and cried when I went to Maryhill to school and she couldn't.

Linda Braynard:

I attended Maryhill Academy from 1957-1959, first and second grade.

Linda Braynard



When in first grade, I was an angel in the Christmas play. I participated in two ceremonies for crowning "Queen of May" at St. James. I had Sr. Aquinas in first grade and Sr. Nora in second. I started with Sr. Genevieve in third, but moved to Crosby.

My mother Marie Urbinati was one of the first students at Maryhill Academy attending eighth and ninth grades from September 1939 through May of 1941. Mother's ninth grade had only four students: Marie Urbinati, Colleen Casey, Barbara Hassling, and Mary Therese Hassman.

Marie Urbinati took piano lessons from Sr. Marie. Mother told me in the spring, Sister Marie picked peonies from yard bushes and decorated the parlor for piano recitals. She remembered the whole place looked beautiful and smelled so good!

Louise (Arens) Hasskamp:

I lived about two blocks from Maryhill. My sister and I walked home every noon. In second grade by Christmas, I couldn't read like my class. Sister Paula called my mother up to school saying, "What are we going to do with Louise, she can't read!" I didn't get recess and had to go home for a fast bowl of soup over noon to return early, because Sister insisted that I learn.

We had to be really quiet

on the stairway because Sister Marie gave piano lessons where the two doors went together and we couldn't bother the lessons.

Once when my parents went on vacation, my sister and I stayed at Maryhill in two tiny rooms instead of going home.

I remember fundraising with community paper drives for Maryhill and dad had a poker club every Wednesday with Dick Hassman, Joe Ryan, and Chuck Froehle with a 'pot' designated for the academy.

Sometimes on Hwy. 169 or Hwy. 47 the bus driver stopped near the academy and opened the door and the kids would pile out for Maryhill.

But then he'd catch it, if someone from town complained about letting the kids off early because they were supposed to ride all the way to the high school and walk up to Maryhill.

Helen Mary Wagner: All but one of my kids went to the academy in the 50's and 60's: Diane, Debbie, Janet, Ross and

Todd. By the time Paul was ready, it had closed.

My kids walked home for lunch. Maybe once a month you could buy hot dogs for noon lunch for a dime and they just begged to stay at school for Sister Cook's hot dogs and potato chips.

I taught as a substitute at the academy several times. I was paid in homemade bread and cookies, my kids thought that was great.

Steve Hogan:

I attended Maryhill Academy seven years. I remember the stately rooms and grand stairway, the large porch and long exterior three-story stairs. About a quarter of the block had deep, dense woods that we walked through.

There were several nuns at school. I can only recall two names . . . Sister Gretta, a regular teacher and a Sister Mary Peter, the music/piano teacher, and quite athletic.

The nuns were pretty strict and knew of more than one way of using a ruler. I think all who attended

there met the ruler and all are better for it!

If we were really good, we got to study in pairs at various positions on the staircase, top and middle landings, and bottom of the steps.

We wore no uniforms,

but Levi's were not allowed because rivets in the back pockets scratched the desks.

I really enjoyed my years there. My dad is John L. Hogan and my sister is Diane Kellerman.

Diane (Hogan) Kellerman:

There were only four kids in my class, three boys and myself. We used to take turns asking Sister a question so the other three could listen to the answer!



Diane (Hogan) Kellerman

Under the steps was a closet used as a store for candy, school supplies, etc.

If we were naughty, we had to go to the chapel and pray—O'd get close to the window so I could look out.

I remember ice-skating and sliding near Chuck Froehle's farm and tobogganing down Bunker Hill with Sr. Mary Peter. That was when I discovered nuns really did have hair under their habits. Until then we only guessed. We were going down the hill on a toboggan and her headpiece flew off. We were horrified that something like that could happen but she just laughed and put it back on.

For graduations from eighth grade we wore

caps and gowns just like the high school after the twelfth grade. Made us feel really grown up to wear them.

Tom Gravelle:

I mostly remember the long walk from the high school to downtown and past the Radcliffe house up to the academy and back again after school. It was awfully cold in the wintertime.

I still can't eat peanut butter or jam yet today after all those lunches carried to school as a kid.

Bob Janzen:

Rural kids walked to Maryhill from the high school and many times we

caught a ride from Mike Zilberberg or other passersby's who offered a lift.

Every Friday if we had a good week in class, we'd get to have a dance lesson on the huge front porch and the nuns would teach us dance steps—mostly schottisches and polkas.

If we weren't very nice,



Tom Gravelle



Bob Janzen

Continued on
Page 9-KC

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Continued from Page 8-KC

we had to spend time in the cloakroom.

In nice weather, we'd eat lunch on the playground. Otherwise we ate lunch packed from home in the basement.

Wendy (Ritter) Bunnell:

One time in fifth grade, Sister Clement left the classroom. Tom Sullivan went out on the roof to get something and I locked the window. Then Sister



Wendy (Ritter) Bunnell

came back into class and after about forty-five minutes of Tom being gone, he came walking in. Sister thought he'd been in the bathroom, but he'd crawled around until he could climb back

inside through in the chapel window. He still holds that against me!

I have fond memories of the nuns in the spring. After recess and during lunch hours after they had eaten, they came out on the porch to teach us the rumba and fox trot and played records on their hi-fi. It was hard to believe that they could dance so well, being nuns.

Some of the younger nuns had bedrooms on the third floor. It was also the sickbay, where you were put on cots if you weren't feeling well. I can remember myself and another kid being on cots in second or third grade—but we weren't that sick, so we started trying on the nun's habits from one of their rooms!

Greg Paulbeck:

When I attended Maryhill, there'd be anywhere from five to twelve students per grade. First through third were in one room, fourth through sixth in a different



Greg Paulbeck

one, and seventh and eighth in another. By the time a student got to the third grade, the subject matter was pretty well hammered into their head—after hearing if for the

third time.

One day, sixty percent of my classmates were home with the Mumps. Tommy and I had already had the Mumps.

I never understood why six-year-old first graders went to class on the third floor. We had to enter and exit by the wobbly old fire escape that was poorly attached to the east side of Maryhill. The older boys took great pleasure in rattling the lower braces of stairs while we were descending the steps for recess.

Everyone says they can remember where they were when they got the news that President Kennedy was shot. I was in the fourth grade, on the second floor room, in the chair next to the pencil sharpener, drawing a design on the side of my Chuck Taylor tennis shoes with a blue ballpoint pen that I had just purchased at Ben Franklin the day before for nineteen cents.

One day a young student—who shall remain nameless—was found lying on his bed reading a magazine in the middle of a school morning by his mother who was hauling laundry to the upstairs bedrooms. His mother was startled to find him in his room and asked him why he was there.

He said the Sister said he could go home.

Maryhill Academy first students



(Left to right) Front row: Unknown, Darleen Dlouhy, Cora Riley, unknown, Phyllis Chatelle, unknown, unknown.

Second row: Ann Petrich, Marie Urbinati, unknown, Mickey Enright, unknown, unknown.

Third row: Unknown, unknown, Glendora Erlandson, Wilma ? , Colleen Casey, Vern Mushel, Barbara Hasling, Jim Paulsen

Back row: Adele Ackerman, Ben Chatelle, Mary Margaret Hanlon, Frank Chaika, Mary Therese Hassman, Jerome Bretz, Jack Hanlon, Melvin Young

Editor's Note: If you can help us identify any of the "unknown" students from 1939, please call the NewsHopper 218-927-6990, 800-927-4498 or email: hopper@emily.net. - Thank you!

His mother called the school to see why her son was allowed to go home. Sister told her that he was in class at this very moment. Sister went to check, only he wasn't in class. Then Sister remembered telling him earlier if he couldn't behave himself, he should go home—he did.

I had Sister Genevieve in second and third grade and was looking forward to fourth grade to get past Sister Genevieve, as she seemed to have it in for me for some reason. Imagine my surprise in finding she was transferred to teach fourth through sixth.

After five years with the same Sister, I opted to go to public school my seventh year.

Looking back, she was a major influence on my life. I recently learned that she is still working in the Hibbing-Virginia area and I plan to look her up to tell her of my appreciation in spite of how I felt at the time.

In those days, the public school system used the same textbooks for a very long time. Once they were considered old and outdated, they'd give them to Maryhill to be used until the end of time. Our history books were so

old—we didn't know who won WWII.

During the winters, the slope on the other side of Hwy. 47 was the place to be for tobogganing. It was a sheer drop of about 100 feet, or so it seemed thru the eyes of a third grader. There were two runs, a milder one for the younger kids and a death defying run for the bigger kids. Once a year the nuns said that if we behaved ourselves for an entire day, they'd go down the big kids' slope while we watched. It was well worth a day of good behavior to watch a nun on a toboggan.

Writers Note: This is the final piece in the Maryhill Academy/Casey House series. Thanks to everyone who shared pictures and memories of Maryhill Academy.

If you missed Part I - The origin of the Casey House in the March 19 issue of the NewsHopper or Part II - The story of the Maryhill Academy in the May 7 issue of the NewsHopper, electronic copies may be requested from the author at sonshine-girl56431@yahoo.com.

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