

An Interview

with Troy Hill Resident **Mary Wholeber**

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A photo of Fr. Suitbert Mollinger sits in Mary Wohleber's bookcase, a remnant of the past lifestyle of Troy Hill. Fr. Mollinger was the first pastor of Most Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Troy Hill during the late 1800s and founder of St. Anthony's Chapel. According to Mary, at one time, every Catholic household on Troy Hill had a photo of Fr. Mollinger gracing their home. Mary very willingly provided me with an oral history interview focusing on the Catholic community during her life.

Mary, age 91, is a fourth generation resident of Troy Hill. When she talks about her early years, she paints a picture of a community where "religion was their life." According to Mary, Troy Hill is a ridge, 600 yards wide and a tad over one mile long, with no through streets, and by virtue of these geographical constraints, the community was very clannish. Mary is considered to be the historian of Troy Hill, full of information about the past, even history from before her time. When asked about her early years within the Catholic community, Mary naturally began with a history of Most Holy Name School, providing extensive details on the establishment of the school by Fr. Mollinger's act of giving up one room of his two rooms in the back of the church for the purpose of the school, which started in 1868. He oversaw the building of the rectory and St. Anthony's Chapel with his own money in 1875. The public school was built in the 1880s.

"Religion was their life."

Mary's father worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad at the 28th Street yards over the 30th street bridge (a wooden bridge) during the night so

that he could go to baseball games during the day. When her father went to school, the students went to 6th grade and the age was 12 years old to get a work permit. Her mother was a real estate agent, notary public, and insurance agent; she worked in the heart of the community. Mary would hang around while her mother worked, and learned about every aspect of Troy Hill life and the office.

Mary attended Most Holy Name of Jesus grade school and then went on to attend the Divine Providence Academy, which was a boarding school established by the Sisters of Divine Providence. She characterizes her high school education as unusual for the period. She was the only one at the Academy in 1930 from the North Side. As soon as she was 16, she learned how to drive. According to Mary, the norm was that upon completion of 8th grade, the girls joined the Young Ladies Sodality and the boys joined the Most Holy Name Society. Mary did join the Sodality but she also lived a somewhat different life, stemming from her mother's career in real estate, so her life encompassed a greater geographical area than that of Troy Hill.

Church was a prominent part of life in Troy Hill and Catholicism was a constant factor in Mary's life. Mary grew up across the street from the Home of the Good Shepherd; often, she would lay in her bed, listening to the nun's singing and chanting. The Catholic church permeated her life. She relates how Troy Hill was sectionalized on the basis of a family's religion, to the extent that each religious group was isolated from the others. To her, this was merely a fact of life. Troy Hill was made up of Catholics, Protestants, and Bohemians Presbyterians. The business section goes through the middle, carving up Troy Hill.

Looking back on her life, Mary views her role both within the Catholic church and the community as being a voice for what she feels is right, whether that is saving St. Anthony's chapel or challenging the Northside Carnegie Library's move. When she speaks up, she is doing so not only for herself but for others who do not vocalize publicly their views. With her lively spirit, she gains friends and is integral to the community. "Nobody does anything alone. Every time I put out my hand, someone was there to take it." Mary Wohleber embodies the spirit of Troy Hill.

The tape has been placed in the Archives of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.