

The Way We Were
(A Herstory of Trinity College of Vermont)
By Peggy McCluskey '60
and Carol Lyons Muller '68

The 1940s

Let's jump right in with a photo of the happy graduating class of 1940. Here they are with their game faces on. Standing front: Marion Campbell, Rose Rowan, Jan Ketcham, and Alice Mongeon. Standing back row: Frances Mullarkey, Blanche Caron, Rachel Wursthorne, Mary Clark, Pauline Provost, Marie Archambault, and Mary Agnes Fitzgerald. The 1930s had been busy, uncertain, nerve-racking and challenging: these ladies survived it all. You are looking at true grit.



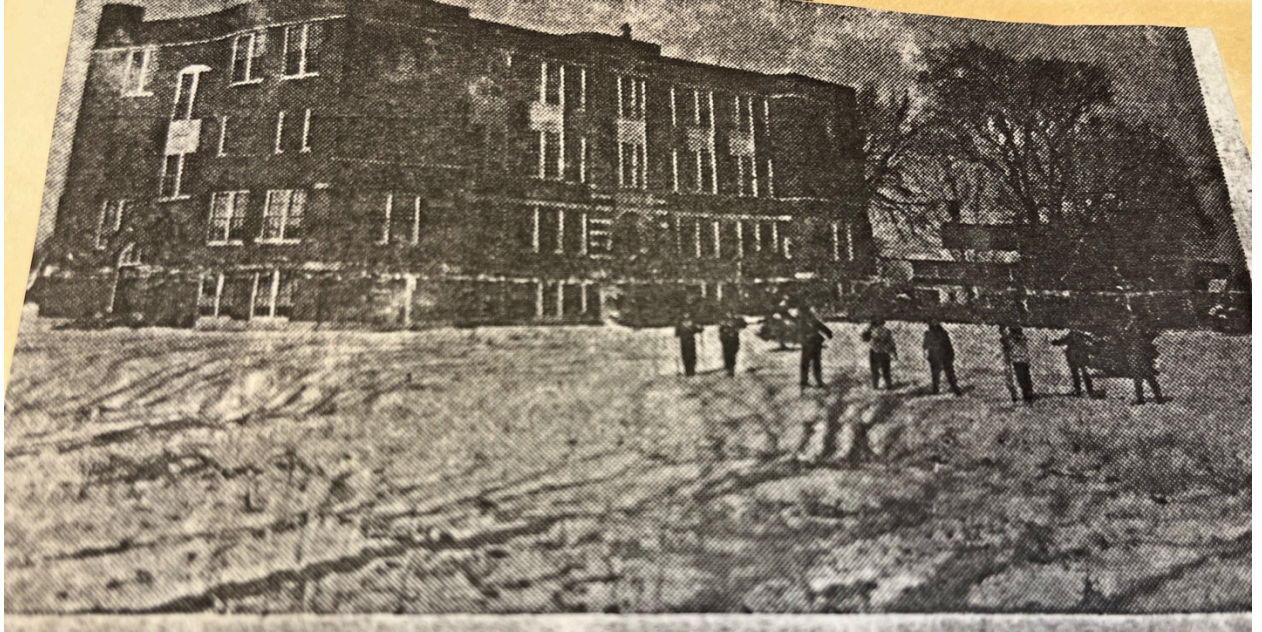
The war in Europe and the Pacific disturbed all corners of the globe. Vermont was not exempt. A college education for a daughter started to take a back burner to a military enlistment for a son. Women could take a job and help support a household when the son left

the workforce for parts unknown courtesy of Uncle Sam. Daughters were safely home, thank God, and to put household money towards her education was far-sighted and required additional sacrifice. In fact, of the twenty women who enrolled in Trinity in the 1940-41 school year only ten of them graduated. Canadian student applications stopped altogether. Canada was involved in the war effort, too. Other needs took precedence. When the Depression of the 1930s was in full swing, a man couldn't find a job. There were none to be had. Now with war on the doorstep, there were plenty of jobs to be had but most men were needed as soldiers. Everything from machine shops to tire manufacturers to truckers to farmers were needed for the war effort. The United States entered World War II in 1941. Women took jobs that never would have been available to them under different conditions. Trinity women were no different. To be able to attend college instead of working ten hours a day at, for example, McKenzie Meats in Burlington, made that girl a lucky lady indeed. Not only was she learning something, but she was also not dead on her feet each night.

Those lucky ladies who both returned and stayed were in for some upgrades. Mann Hall had been built. Judge James Delehanty from New York City contributed \$25,000; a king's ransom! Judge Delahanty was the brother of Mother Mary Magdalene, the first President of Trinity (in her role as Superior of the Sisters of Mercy). Sister Emmanuel Mann served as Dean and oversaw much of the "building" initiatives that are Trinity. Sister Mann and Sister Cephas (Agnes McCann) were responsible for working toward and attaining accreditation by the New York State Board of Regents. We can now begin to place the names that are in common usage, Mann Hall, Delahanty Science Building, and McCann Hall.

Bishop Rice passed away in 1938. He donated \$25,000 from the Diocese to Trinity. Even more significant was the bequeath of his library to Trinity, minus the theology books which presumably stayed with the Diocese of Burlington. It was a timely gift. One of the hurdles for the College to gain accreditation was the need for a substantial college library. His gift was instrumental in making it possible to meet and exceed that requirement.

Mann Hall was a reality as of 1939. Below is a photo from the former Vermont Catholic Tribune. The Villa, to the right of Mann Hall, was an old age home run by The Sisters of Mercy prior to becoming a residence for students.



The College was finally approved and accredited by the Board of Regents in 1942. This was most important. Otherwise, any graduate in any major needed to work in an area of the country (i.e. mostly New England) that recognized Trinity as an accredited school. Also in 1942 Trinity was approved and affiliated with the Universities of America. We had arrived! The Trinity management was always walking on a tightrope and pushing the time envelope. Their efforts were rewarded as far as we could find in the records, but it was always just in the nick of time. Lots of sleepless nights.

Miss Rose Roberta Rowan was ultra-active in her Trinity years. She was Class President for four straight years and was voted "Campus Queen." She was from a large family; her father and brother were both named "Edmond" which is probably why she chose that name when she entered the religious life. She did not enter the Sisters of Mercy right after graduation. She returned to New York during the summer breaks and worked as a cigarette girl in a restaurant lounge. After graduation she worked as a contract analyst for Western Electric in New York. Who knows what brought her to the religious life. She certainly was worldly. Is it any wonder that those of us who had to look her in the face and answer the question "Where were you tonight?" simply blurted out the truth? I asked her a few years before she passed away how she managed to ferret out the truth. She simply said that she knew how life was for young women, she never wanted to entrap anyone, and if a girl could just get up those stairs to her bedroom, then everything would be fine. Her intention was never to 'bust' someone; but she was Dean and took her responsibility seriously. We've got to love her for that. We have put so much emphasis of this portion of this Episode 4 on Sister Edmond simply because she was so well-rounded. Not only was she well educated, sincere in her teaching and devoted to a Catholic education for young women, but she had the attitude of 'been there/done that.' Peggy McCluskey's dad, also a New Yorker and a teacher, had a wonderful relationship with her when he came to visit Peggy. They would laugh over 'the old days.' Sister Mary Edmond was

joyful; she loved life. It's possible that she loved her religious life all the more for having navigated a couple of years living as a single woman in the big city.

Downtown Burlington had a fabulous department store called Abernathy's. It was at the head of Church Street. Everything that they sold was high quality and the city was better for having it. The building was so well built that it's still being used today for various businesses. Frank D. Abernathy had a home on South Willard Street. When he died in 1946, the Sisters of Mercy purchased his house and christened it "Mercy Hall." Twenty-two women lived there. Times must have been quieter then because there were only Sister Sebastian and Sister Mildred keeping the lid on twenty-two frisky ladies. Breakfast was served at Mercy on Willard. The main meal of the day was at noon, call it dinner. Dinner was cooked at The Villa by hired staff. The meals were called breakfast, dinner, and supper; evidently 'lunch' was not in the lexicon just yet. Supper was a small meal. Please appreciate that one actual menu item was creamed asparagus on toast, and you know that the asparagus came out of that big Green Giant can! This evening meal at the Willard Street Mercy residence was prepared by the house mothers. After teaching all day and with a very limited budget, no doubt the menu options were limited. Goodie bags from home of cheese in a jar and some crackers made for a very happy student; maybe some instant hot chocolate Ovaltine could round out the meal. It was about a mile walk door to door from Mercy to The Villa. A bus transported the students and Sisters to and from. Classes started at 8:30 a.m. so you had better be ready. And be organized: walking back to South Willard for a book that you forgot was a lesson that only needed to be learned once.

Be mindful that the noon time meal was somewhat formal with cloth napkins. To save on laundry each student was required to have her own personalized napkin ring. After eating, the student folded her napkin and placed it within her own napkin ring to ensure that she got her own used napkin the following day. Laundry was done on a weekly basis. This may sound crazy to us, but it is still very customary in Europe. When a family sits in the same seat at the dinner table it is common practice to fold one's own napkin and place it in one's own assigned seat. Our casual dining habits today make this seem just a bit too much but remember that food was not as abundant then as it is now. Back then, families sat, spoke to each other, enjoyed the meal, and were truly thankful for the food. Trinity students also wore navy blue uniforms. Again, sounds unacceptable to today's coed but, also like the food situation, clothing was not abundant. Today we have a glut of merchandise; it borders on obscene. Those women had one good uniform, and they took care of it. (*This is Carol talking now: My mother-in-law talked about her clothing as a young girl- "My new one, my blue one, or the one I wore last." All the very same outfit.*) Just for the record, Peggy McCluskey was required to have a napkin ring when she came to Trinity and it's in her uniquely curated stuff. If any of you have your napkin rings, please send a photo to us at tcvinfo@comcast.net and we will add it to one of our future editions.

It's probably a fact that most Trinity grads went into teaching but some pursued other areas of study. Miss Jane Ketcham graduated from Trinity then attended Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute in Troy, New York to pursue an engineering degree. She then went to work for the war effort at Curtiss-Wright, an aircraft manufacturer. She worked there until 1950 when she married a gentleman last named Corse. Mrs. Corse passed away in 2003.

Graciella Nemes, PhD., class of 1942, became a poet and taught at several universities. She was nominated in 1956 for the Nobel Prize in Poetry. She returned years later to Trinity to

give the commencement address. She was the lone enrollee from Puerto Rico back at the end of the 1930s.



World War II did not end until 1946. In the meantime, life at home went on. Girls had boyfriends to write to, hasty engagements while the man was 'on leave,' perhaps some hasty marriages, too, which might account for the attrition. Dance mixers were still held; basically, just fabulous 1940s music and some snacks. Most men were gone. The men that remained worked in "protected industries" like the armaments plants, farms, and healthcare (although physicians were obviously required).

Our Trinity gals managed to become active in the business world, even if that world returned to male dominated at the end of the war when men returned. Esther Hartigan, class of 1942, was president of the League of Women Voters. Her photo is here as Mrs. Thomas Sorrell.



Fourteen women graduated in 1946, a laudable accomplishment all things considered.



TRINITY PROCESSIONAL—Trinity College graduated 14 senior ceremonies in the college auditorium yesterday afternoon. Th

For our next edition, the 1950s, we'd like to introduce a potentially new word into your everyday conversation: pogonotomist. We've got one in the decade of the 1950s!