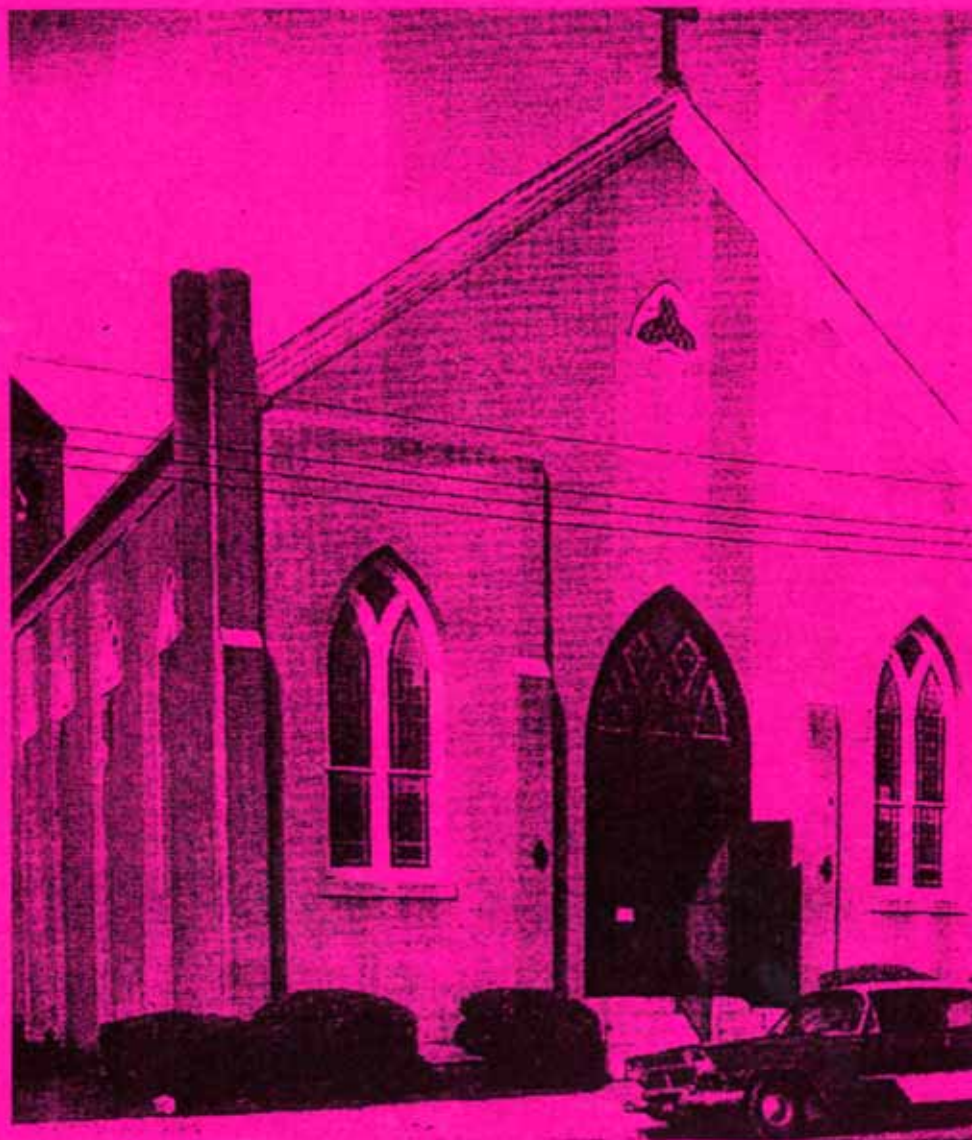


MEMORIES OF ST. MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH
1858-1970



OLD SITE: 706 PRINCESS ANNE STREET
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA 22401

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF MEMORIES

Preface	Page 2
N. Richard Mountjoy	Page 3
Bobby Barrett Crisp	Page 6
Marie Savage	Page 10
Josephine Silver	Page 11
William F. Kennedy	Page 13
Bette Kennedy	Page 14
Nancy DeBruyn Burton	Page 16
Mildred DeBruyn Haynes	
Margaret Staples Moore	
Bettina McWhirt	Page 17
Virginia Rose	Page 18
Nancy Carneal Dickinson	Page 19
John F. Carneal, Jr.	
Rose Stefaniga Mergenthal	Page 21
Sheila Wickouski	Page 22
Mary Davia	Page 23
Bonny Davia	
Margaret Barrett Hein	Page 24
Mary L. Sprow Preston	Page 26
Roger Bourdon	Page 28.
Shirley Bozicevic	Page 28
Kay Janis	Page 29
Mary Janis Kassock	
Joseph O'Connor	Page 30
Lillian Kendall	Page 30
Sara Fartro	Page 31
Francis Volante	Page 31
Mike Larose	Page 31
Peggy Danahy	Page 32
Janet Kulesz Martin	Page 33
Hugh Graninger	Page 35
Virginia Havasy	Page 36
Eleanor Mitchell	Page 37
Elizabeth Terry	Page 38
Gladys Bowen	Page 39
Kathleen McCabe Mahoney	Page 40
Kathleen McCabe Mahoney: Treasures	Page 42

PREFACE

This collection of reminiscences is comprised of both first person accounts and interviews with parishioners who worshipped at the original site of the Church of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception at 706 Princess Anne Street in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The Right Reverend John McGill, Bishop of Richmond, laid the cornerstone there on June 27, 1858. The new site on the corner of William Street and Stafford Avenue was dedicated on June 20, 1971.

The impetus for gathering these memories is the planned homecoming and reunion picnic which will be held at Holy Cross Academy on June 11, 2006. With the realization that many of the parish's leaders and stalwart activists from the mid-Twentieth Century are approaching the twilight of their years, the committee solicited memories and recollections of parish life during our residence in downtown Fredericksburg.

The publication does not purport to be a history. The editor regrets any inadvertent errors in fact or in the actual recollections. God willing, this modest publication will act as a precursor to a more formal document for St. Mary's sesquicentennial, which will occur in 2008. The collection is not an official parish publication and was not paid for with parish funds but through private donations. The book may be copied.

The collection is dedicated to the long line of clergymen, both living and dead, who have selflessly served the people of St. Mary: from the early missionary priests whose vast territory included Fredericksburg to Kilmarnock, for example, to the priests of the Civil War era who saw their sacred building taken over for a hospital and later a stable. The concerns and tribulations of those priests who followed and of our current priestly team are vastly different but no less worthy of our prayers and support for them: Fr. Donald Rooney, Pastor; Parochial Vicars: Fr. Ronald Escalante, Fr. Edwin Perez, and Fr. Michael Weston.

The editor wishes to acknowledge the following for their considerable assistance: Bernard Mahoney, Jr., Douglas Craig, Ellen Gracik, Mari Lucey, Anna Klimek, William Smithdeal, J. William Mann, Craig Schulin of *The Free Lance-Star*, Michael Flach of *Arlington Catholic Herald*, Vincent Sassone, Archivist of Diocese of Richmond. Finally, deepest gratitude goes to all those individuals listed in the table of contents who were willing to share their wonderful memories either in writing or in conversations.

Kathleen McCabe Mahoney, Editor
June 1, 2006

When doing research on Fredericksburg's Catholic history, the Mountjoy name keeps popping up both in conversations and in print. The matriarch of the family was Anna Choma Mountjoy Baker of the Slavic community of Dunmore, Pennsylvania. She kept meticulous records not only for own family but also for dozens of other Catholic families in the area. Her oldest son, N. Richard "Dick" Mountjoy, now carefully guards these important materials but generously shares them.

The fact that Dick Mountjoy, the oldest of three sons of Richard and Anna Mountjoy, was baptized in 1921 as Norbert Richard Mountjoy tells a lot about the strong Catholic faith and will of his mother. Rather than getting his father's name up front, Dick was named for a favorite nun that his mother had in school, Sister Mary Norbert. He is the last surviving son whose brothers were also both active in St. Mary's: Wesley M. Mountjoy and Charles D. Mountjoy. Dick was a familiar face as an usher at the 7 PM Saturday Mass and became head usher upon the death of Lewis Gracik. Dick made too many important contributions to the growth of the parish, Montfort Academy, and Council 4034 of the Knights of Columbus to list here, but one is historically significant. Right after Vatican II in the mid Sixties under the pastorate of Fr. Ross Muir, Dick became the first elected chairman of the parish advisory council which was a totally new concept in the Church.

Dick was born in Mount Virginia (near Boswell's Corner) where his grandfather was the postmaster. The family moved in 1925 to the Widewater area of Stafford County. Because of the difficulty of getting to the church on Princess Anne Street, a forty-mile roundtrip, priests like Father Joseph Brennan would try to get to Widewater to conduct Mass. Then Anna Mountjoy began in 1936 to teach children and adults in what she noted as "Immaculate Conception Sunday School." According to her records, they used one of the old buildings for Mass and classes at the Widewater-Midway Island complex near the Mountjoy Store.

An entry dated April 18, 1938, by the fervent teacher and evangelizer gave the details of a Catholic Mass said in her home. "All children went to confession and received Holy Communion except [name omitted---Ed.] who had broken her fast and thus could not receive." Her records are full of roll calls, lists of adult converts, and special feast day celebrations like one for "Feast of St. John the Baptist" on June 25, 1938. In a photo from that feast day gathering are about 30 young people, a few adults, and two seminarians: Justin D. McClunn and John T. Tucker. [Twenty years later in 1958 that first seminarian would return to Fredericksburg as Monsignor Justin D. McClunn, chancellor of the Diocese of Richmond and principal homilist at the centennial Mass. Msgr. McClunn, who died June 15, 1990, went on to high posts in both the Richmond and Arlington dioceses. According to the Arlington Catholic Herald, shortly before his death he was named a Protonotary Apostolic by Pope John Paul II, one of the highest honors a priest can receive without being named a bishop.---Ed.]

It is not surprising, given their early history and dedication to Catholic education and evangelism, that the Mountjoy Family would be associated with the commencement of the first Catholic school in the area, Montfort Academy. From the number of preserved thank-you notes from the school's first principal, Mother Alexander of the Daughters of Wisdom, to Mrs. Mountjoy, it

is very clear that she and her sons were generous benefactors for the fledgling school that opened in 1948. Theresa Mountjoy, Dick's daughter, was the first student registered at the school.

In addition to getting a huge amount of well-deserved recognition for the origins of Montfort, the Mountjoy family is also credited by church historians for the beginnings of St. William of York in the Aquia area of Stafford County, which was dedicated on May 8, 1956. Philip V. Brennan, Jr., in *The Story of a Church, 1858-1958*, wrote: "The nucleus of St. William's Church was laid in 1925...when the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Mountjoy in Widewater was made available and used by the priests of Fredericksburg to say Mass and to give instructions to the Catholics in Stafford County."

Dick's parents' house was not only the scene of religious services; they often entertained the priests of the parish for dinner; Dick and his late wife Jen continued the enjoyable practice and hospitality which they felt was important in supporting the clergy. The retired businessman was in beer distribution and an officer with the Beer Wholesalers, retiring for good in 1997.

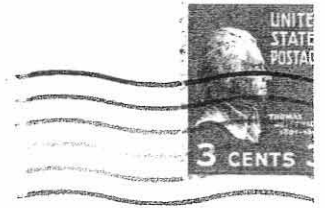


Young Richard and Therese Mountjoy, children of Jen and N. Richard "Dick" Mountjoy, present a check to Mother Alexander, Daughters of Wisdom, at the fledgling Montfort Academy. Helping is Fr. James Widmer, pastor of St. Mary and ardent supporter of the new Catholic school. Mother Alexander was the first superior at the school which was opened in 1948. She was transferred to another post in June of 1952. In a farewell letter to Anna Mountjoy, she wrote in part:

"God, through my superiors, calls me to another community. Before leaving, I wish to thank you for your kindness towards us during the past four years. These years have been very happy for me. I will always remember those who have helped in making them so and will never forget them in my prayers. Please do not forget me in yours.

It is a big sacrifice for me to leave Fredericksburg, especially our children, but with Our Blessed Mother, sacrifices are made easier. I feel that She is helping me."

Montfort Academy
SUNKEN ROAD
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA



Mrs. Richard Mountjoy
Wide Water, Va.

Montfort Academy
SUNKEN ROAD
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

Will you kindly express our gratitude to your
sons also for their generous contribution. In
return we ask God to bless them and grant
them success in all their undertakings.

Very sincerely and gratefully yours,
Mother Alexander D. W.

BB
M

Montfort Acad.
Fredericksburg, Va. Dec. 20, 1948.

Dear Mrs. Mountjoy,

How can we thank you enough for your kindness
towards us? The mangle is a present that is
appreciated by us. We know that you played your
part there again and we thank you very sincerely.
At midnight Mass in our little chapel where the
are so many remembrances of you, we shall ask the
divine child to shower upon you and yours, His choicest
blessings. We are confident that He will hear our
prayers and reward you for your charity. We are also
very thankful to your son for his trouble.
Very sincerely and gratefully yours in Jesus and
Mother Alexander.

Growing up in the midst of a large Catholic family around the midpoint of the 20th Century, Bobby Barrett Crisp (Mrs. Harry E.) takes us on a marvelous sentimental journey through the ensuing decades where she shares her vivid memories of Catholic life and culture.

The Barrett family and St. Mary are somehow synonymous. John F. Barrett, a 6' 4" Irish American Catholic and a pharmacist by profession, was a Pennsylvania native and a Pitt graduate. He landed in Fredericksburg in 1942 with Florence Jones, his devout Episcopal wife, and with a big Catholic family emerging. They had a dream, too.

Florence, John, Teddy, Mary Ellen, and Lewis, all born in Winchester, were on the scene, and Margaret was on the way. Margaret was the first of us born here in Fredericksburg in 1942. I, Bobby, was born in 1944, and then Grace and Judy came along. Linda and Tina were baby sisters just before and right after Judy who died shortly after birth and is buried at the farm. They were always a big part of our family of eleven children, nine to survive to adulthood. All life is precious.

Dr. Lloyd Busch delivered all of us born here. He grew up with my dad in Pennsylvania and they became great friends here. He was like our godfather, and being a widower at that time, his little girl, Bobbie Busch (Sullivan), became a part of our family, too. She and Mary Ellen were good pals and she kept her pony "Stareyes" from Chincoteague at our farm. Dr. Busch helped us to get that farm and he helped so many people in this town. He also delivered my first child, Teresa Crisp; Bobbie was godmother to my son Joseph. Dr. Busch was a great example of a living Catholic saint.

My mother, Florence, became a Catholic before she died of a stroke at age 45, leaving dad to complete the great job she had done in imparting to us her great love of and faith in God. Being Episcopal with a grandfather who was a minister at Christ Church in Millwood, Virginia, and with having Aunt Grace, a deaconess who worked in the 20's and 30's with the Navajos out west as a missionary, my mom was full of faith and the greatest example of a Christian and Catholic convert. We were strong in our Faith, and life was simply Family, Church, and School.

Dad was so well known in town. A pharmacist was like a doctor in those days, and everyone called him Dr. Barrett. He loved people and was very gregarious. He helped establish Montfort Academy, the Mental Health Association, Council 4034 Knights of Columbus as a charter member, and was a Democrat, active in politics and in the Church. Mom died in 1958 and Dad in 1979.

Now that you know there were nine kids in the Barrett family, you can guess Dad always owned a big vehicle to get us to Church. We attended 7:30 AM Mass since we had to fast from midnight until Communion back then. Even attending early Mass, people fainted of hunger and heat. The Barretts were no exception. I remember fainting only once, and Mr. Musante, the florist, caught me and carried me out of church and he was my hero. He just died recently. He provided flowers for our church, and his family grew up with us.

We didn't call it "CCD" back then, just "catechism," and it was only on Saturdays. Father Widmer would go around and pick up all the kids for class. No one had cars and most moms did not drive back then. Marie Harandiuk (Flewellen), a little Polish girl whose father Meeko, and mom, Eva, worked on a farm next to ours, became a part of our family too from second grade until now. Marie, Penny Weaver, Gracie, and I had to prepare for First Communion and Mrs. Weaver would drive us over to Montfort on Saturdays for the nuns, Sister Henrietta of the Daughters of Wisdom in particular, to teach us. All the nuns were curious about this enthusiastic group of little country girls so eager to be taught. They had fun with us, and we enjoyed all the attention from precious nuns all dressed in habits. We loved to watch them march into church and sit as a group right up front, so mysterious and pious in those grey and white habits. You had to peek around to see their faces they were so concealed.

I did not get to attend Montfort, or "pokey school," my name for *parochial* school. Mom did not drive, and the others had to ride the public school bus to the Tylerton subdivision, and try to catch the Montfort bus. So many times they missed it and had to walk all the way into town across the Chatham Bridge and up to Montfort, which scared them. So most of what I learned of the Faith was from my siblings and parents. What good teachers they all were for me! When I made First Communion, I was so well-prepared and so full of the Holy Spirit, I can remember truly feeling as if I would be consumed into heaven on that very most special day of my young life.

Confirmation was the completion of our choice to become "Soldiers of God" and true members of the Catholic Church. We always had to go before the priest to be quizzed and then with his blessing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. It was serious and it was fun. We loved being Catholic and being holy. Some of the priests that formed my faith were Fr. Widmer, Fr. McLean, Fr. Heye, Fr. Twohig, Fr. Meehan and Fr. Tobin down on Princess Anne St. at old St. Mary.

There was a fine devout active member of the church, George Stickney, who served as a sacristan like Sharon McKenna does today, and like Roy Schmidt did in past years. They serve so fervently and so faithfully! They're always there for you, serving at the altar to be sure all is as it should be for the Mass. [According to an obituary in *The Free Lance-Star*, George Stickney was an "active layman" who was killed in an automobile accident at the intersection of Rt. 206 and 301 on Jan. 11, 1969. ---Ed.]

It was Fr. McLean who decided to start the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) and he told the parents right from the altar, that under pain of mortal sin, they had better get their teenagers to this youth group on Sunday night. Well, it was about the time of my ninth grade year, and so much had happened. I had skipped from seventh to ninth grade, and my mom had died that year, and I had seen this handsome altar boy that I really wanted to meet. Remember, we always went to 7:30 Mass due to fasting, but now the Church had allowed us to just fast for an hour before Mass, so now we could attend later Masses and eat breakfast before we went. This was about 1957. This altar boy, Harry Crisp, and his brother Gene, two of ten kids, served at the 11AM Mass and when Dad took us to that Mass, and I saw that altar boy,

I decided we were going to that CYO so I could meet him. Oh, how I connived to find transportation and to get there! Well, that CYO was so wonderful --- of the kids, by the kids and for the kids---and all the parents and priest were involved with us. It truly takes a village to raise a child. We got to know each other from all the area high schools, like James Monroe, Stafford, and Spotsylvania, and even some from Caroline and King George.

We formed our own basketball teams, had dances, rummage sales, spring follies, developed youth leaders and had fine times. We convinced our eldest sister, Florence, who was a great leader and Mary Washington College (MWC) day student to become one of our youth advisors, and we enticed her by telling her about this young Auburn U grad, David Hall, who was working at the Avis co Plant and was volunteering to help. The happy ending to all of that was that Flow and Dave married, and Harry and I married from our CYO and many other couples met that way. It was so important in those days to marry a Catholic or convert one. Father Tobin was great with our CYO and supported and encouraged us. Father Widmer was a great matchmaker and a great friend. My parents had all the priests out to Sunday dinner on a regular basis, especially birthdays. They were such good men and such good friends to all of us, and they were truly on call 24/7. They knew us and we knew them personally and really.

There were so many great families involved over the years like the Frank Hanzel family. Mr. Hanzel coached our state winning one act play. David and Florence Barrett Hall were awarded the "Ad Altare Dei" Medal for their youth work. Other families that come to mind: Davias, Browns, Silvers, Druietts, Keelers, Powells, Roses, Mitchells, Amhreins, Crisps, Painters, Mackays, Mergenthals, Carneals, Kennedys, Brinkman, Howard, Wickouski, Resio, Mountjoy, Gracik, Stefaniga, Michaliga, Pasi, Rockacharlie, Havasy, Danahy, Street, Brennen, Kulez, Torrice, Treblic, Oeters, Trants, Page, Vida, Pruiett, Jones, Owens, Carpenters, DeBruyns, Barretts, Russlers, Venturas, Snellings, Farraras and so many more. Think of the CCD teachers and leaders and volunteers, and the KofC and the Women's Club and Altar Society and Choir. Old St. Mary was new and invigorated and had its ups and downs, but the people and the priests and nuns were devout and all one in Christ. Think of all the leaders and helpers at Montfort. I remember Mrs. Normand and Mrs. Agnes Brown as two wonderful women in our lives. Josie Silver and Agnes Brown and so many others were in the choir over the years but Josie was truly "the voice of St. Mary." She raised ten kids with her beloved Rupert and yet, she was always there singing. Also providing wonderful music were Frances Butler, Mary Preston, Mary Lou Davia, Rochelle Gray and Grandma Driscoll was at that organ filling the church with music. All of us Barrett girls sang in the choir, especially during our college years as day students at MWC now UMW. We also taught CCD and helped with so many projects over the years.

The late Derval Brown and Kathy Mahoney were brides back when the Barrett girls were at MWC. We still hold the record with all six of us girls attending the then all-girl school. Anyway, Derval and Kathy were dutiful MWC professors' wives and active in sponsoring the Newman Club and then active in all phases of St. Mary work.

Father Meehan was there for me the day I wanted to quit college and he directed me exactly as he should have. He saved me that day. He counseled Harry and me and prepared us for our marriage in 1965. We were the very first couple in the diocese to receive communion under both species and to have the altar facing forward. An assistant priest, Fr. Twohig, was the youngest priest to serve here, so young he could not hear adult confessions. Josie Silver named her only son of ten after this young and good priest. He later left the priesthood to marry, and still is a faithful and good Catholic, and yes, he probably was too young. Another assistant, Fr. Tobin imparted such joy and faith to us, really now, how can we possibly thank all of them as they watch over us from heaven? I guess they know! All those parents who loved us all, too. All the good people of St. Mary! All of us, one in the Faith! How did we do it? How do we all do it now? It is as simple now as it was then: it is God doing His work through each of us... His gift to us.

Confessions were such fun back then. We really went regularly but were scared to death too. Oh, the jokes and the tales like the time Fr. McLean was impatient for the next penitent and reached out of the curtains and pulled the poor victim into the confessional! We really perked up then and tried to hastily get in and out of there, stifling nervous giggles. Father Widmer was my favorite confessor, for he always stated a simple fact: "Always be a good example to others."

Oh, another wonderful memory: the family rosary night! Yes, we actually all sat around the living room, and all had our rosaries and we prayed with fervent hope we would not forget a prayer or a bead. Dad would lead us and we would take turns leading each decade. Remember the old saying: the family that prays together stays together.

My brother John was an altar boy. Oh, how we looked up to the altar boys all dressed in their cassocks and so serious. Yes, the Barrett family owes so much to our St. Mary, and we are thankful to still be active and happy in our faith here at St. Mary. Now, of course, we are the Crisp, Hein, Spitler, Dahmke, Poulin, Hall, and Barrett family. Harry and I grew up here and participated in all ways, and our four children grew up here and are all grown and gone but full of faith and love thanks to St. Mary. So much is left out of this remembrance, but all you have to do is ask, and I have the gift of gab and will tell you all about it. See you at the Coffee Shop after Mass! Love and gratitude to my family, friends and community of St. Mary. I would like to thank all those I mentioned and all those whom I forgot for they are all truly the saints of St. Mary. There are more stories to tell of our life in the new St. Mary and bet you have your story to tell too. We'd love to hear it next time.

The Spring Follies

PRESENTED BY

St. Mary's Catholic Youth Organization

Friday, June 2, 1961

Fredericksburg Community Center

8:00 - 10:00 p.m.

Admission 50¢

DONATED BY O'TOOLE TIRE SERVICE

Volunteering must be in Marie Savage's blood because our writer has been serving our church community from the 1940's to the present day. She was recently honored by Holy Cross Academy (HCA) for serving in the school office five days a week since the school opened its doors in August of 1998. The administration and faculty called her "a saint, a sage, and an inspiration to all..." In addition to raising her family with her husband, Judge Joseph Savage, Jr., Marie was a longtime educator for Stafford County Schools.

In the Forties I helped Father James Widmer with his office work. Often the doorbell would ring and a downtrodden individual would be at the door. Princess Anne Street was our main route then, Route 1. The person would be asking for money to buy food. Father would go back and bring out a very plain sandwich for him. Before the individual got to the street, he would often throw the sandwich away. Father would say to me, "You can't do too much. Otherwise the transient will leave a mark on the street for others to come begging." Father was very generous, but he wasn't easily duped.

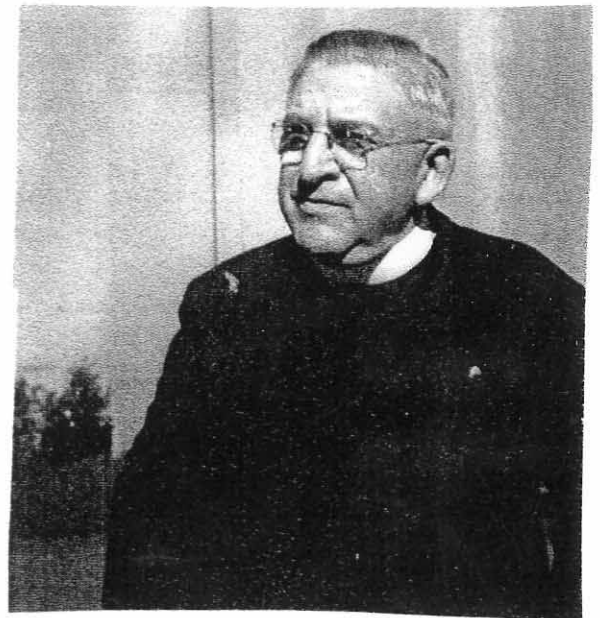
I remember being in the office when the phone rang, and I heard Father say, "They must be dead to have their bodies leave their shoes." He had just received news that the Brown children, who attended Montfort Academy, had been struck by a car as they left the school bus on Route 1 in Stafford. That brought great sadness to us all. [For more on this tragedy, read M. B. Hein's account elsewhere in this publication. ---Ed.]

There was another, much happier phone call that I remember. Father was so elated: "They are coming, the Sisters are coming, and we will have a school here." It was hard for me to believe that our little parish would receive such a blessing.

In August of 1948 Fr. Widmer joined Joe and me in marriage. He also baptized our first son, Jim in 1949.

Our organist, Grandma Driscoll, led our little choir. Often the organ would break down and we would struggle through the hymns. The building inspector condemned our choir loft as being unsafe, but we said our prayers and continued using it. We did avoid sitting under it for Mass!

This was one of the last photos of Pastor James Widmer who died right before Christmas, Dec. 19, 1959. Photo courtesy of Ellen Gracik.



Canon Hayes, Josephine Woods' priest in her hometown of Chester, England, warned her not to wed Rupert Silver of Stafford County, Virginia, USA, but she married him anyway. Despite crosses and tribulations, they have been happy "ever aftering" since.

Josie and Rupert Silver met during the height of World War II in Chester, about 18 miles due east of Liverpool, England. They courted and married on January 1, 1944, at 2 PM, with Josie being ten minutes late, according to Rupert. He must have figured she was worth the wait because they celebrated 62 years together on New Year's Day this year.

Rupert, one of five sons from Stafford County, brought his young wife and first baby back to Fredericksburg in April of 1947. They believe Josie was the first war bride in the area. It was a rough transition for Josie who encountered her first "miserably hot" weather and great difficulty in finding a place to live. There were very few apartments available after the war. At first they had to move in with a Silver brother, and then a Mrs. Pepper, hearing of their plight, took them in for 8 months and treated Josie like a daughter.

Eventually, they got a house on Bunker Hill Street in town and became friendly with their neighbors, Dr. Marty and Mrs. Lil Blatt, a friendship that would last a lifetime. Ironically, it was through Dr. Blatt, a Jew, that the Silvers got to know very well Fr. James Widmer and his associates. Long before people talked about the importance of ecumenism, Dr. Blatt, an optometrist, and Fr. Widmer had a close personal relationship and a mutual respect. It was a natural alliance since they were both from the Brooklyn section of New York City. The Blatts often had the priests for dinner and often included the Silvers. Josie remembered that Fr. Widmer was about 5'5" tall and about the same dimension wide. "He loved to eat!" she said. Like so many other contributors to this publication, the Silvers thought the world of him. His long list of admirers coincides with his long years of service, probably more than any other pastor before or after him. [He arrived in 1942 and died on December 19, 1959.]

Dr. Blatt's generosity went far beyond social occasions. According to the Silvers, he was a philanthropist and great humanitarian who was well known in the Catholic community. He treated the nuns and priests at no charge and provided eyeglasses for them. Dr. Blatt died in 1961. They remain good friends with Mrs. Blatt and regularly keep in touch.

The Silvers went on to have ten children: Sandra, Janet, Karen, Terry, Donna, Anne, Maureen, Andrea, and Suzanne. Kevin Wade Silver, better known as "Rusty," came in the middle of his nine sisters. He was named for a favorite priest, Fr. W. Henry Wade, who was killed at 32 years of age in an automobile accident near Shadwell. All the children are in the area except for Karen who lives in Denver. The Silver kids all went to Montfort Academy which was well worth the sacrifice, Rupert and Josie said. And the uniforms made dressing all those girls for school much easier! Among Montfort faculty, they remember fondly Sister Lucille who is still alive.

Blessed with a fantastic singing voice, Josie spent most of her time at the old St. Mary in the choir loft. The gorgeous round window up there is a strong memory for her as well as are the blood stains on the wooden floor,

reminders of the tragedies of the Civil War when the church was used as a hospital.

She would love to be still singing at St. Mary, but unfortunately Josie has been confined to bed, totally disabled for the past five years or so. She watches Mass on television and is very thankful for Nicolina Corey, part of the Eucharistic Ministry, who visits her weekly. Diagnosed in 1991 with syringomyelia, she started coming to church with a cane, then progressed to a walker, and finally to a wheelchair. She has been left a quadriplegic with Rupert acting as care giver. Regarding this heavy cross, Josie said, with resignation, "The Lord gave me this cross, and I have accepted it."

While more than one priest has joked that Rupert Silver knows a ton more about the Church than many "cradle Catholics," he remains a non-Catholic. However, the misgivings of Josie's priest in Chester, England, way back in 1944, were baseless. It's clear that Rupert is a prince of a man, and their loving devotion has remained steadfast in good times and in bad.

A MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY GATHERING
OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
COUNCIL 4034



Among the most valuable recollections gathered here are those of William F. "Nick" Kennedy who was given the task of locating suitable land on which to build the "new" St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church. Read his fascinating account of how we all came to worship on the corner of William Street and Stafford Avenue.

Father Meehan was the pastor of St. Mary Church in 1963 at which time he appointed Edward Carroll and me to locate and purchase a property to build a new church. Mr. Carroll, a civil engineer, became severely ill soon after this appointment and so the task fell to me with Fr. Meehan's oversight.

After reviewing several properties of sufficient size, I settled on the present William Street location. It was located near the junction of the two main roads of the area, Kings Highway/Route 3 and US Route 1 By Pass. These roads were the main east-west and north-south roads at the time, making the property accessible to the far-flung parishioners.

The owners of the property, Mr. and Mrs. Dowling, initially were resistant to selling their land for a new Catholic church complex. Helping to change their minds, possibly, were rumblings from the City of Fredericksburg that it was going to require the Dowlings to install sidewalks at their own expense, the custom of the city at the time, from College Avenue up to William Street and to Stafford Avenue as deep as she owned land.

Fr. Meehan liked the property and agreed that the time was ripe to start negotiations. So, he and I called on Mrs. Dowling and she proved receptive to the idea. The residence at 1211 William Street, which looks quite the same today from the exterior, was a fascinating place. The rooms were filled almost to the ceilings with various materials. (I remember seeing a sign welcoming visitors to the opening of the Panama Canal! I believe Mrs. Dowling's father had been an admiral.) Mrs. Dowling was a very entertaining conversationalist, sharing many interesting stories about the property. She said it had once been a farm covering a large part of what is now western Fredericksburg. She recounted that, after the Second Battle of Fredericksburg, many Confederate dead had been unceremoniously dumped into the pit of the icehouse right behind her house.

The pastor and Mrs. Dowling had pleasant negotiations and had a friendly relationship. I believe she developed an affection for St. Mary, and I remember that she mentioned that, if her son should not want the William Street house and property, she would like St. Mary's to have first refusal to purchase all or part of it. She and Fr. Meehan agreed on the size of the parcel and the price, but I do not remember the figure.

After the details of the purchase were settled, Fr. Meehan contacted Bishop Russell of Richmond whose jurisdiction covered the entire Commonwealth of Virginia. [The Arlington Diocese was created in 1974.--- Ed.] Soon after, I met the Bishop on the corner of William and Stafford Avenue so he could survey and approve the site. He later had a cordial meeting with Mrs. Dowling and the sale was completed. Long after the sale and after Fr. Meehan's transfer, the late Emily Dowling and I remained friends.

Another Nick Kennedy recollection, which predates the first person account above, will be especially intriguing for students of the American Civil War.

Father Widmer was in the Princess Anne Street rectory which, Nick remembers, had a large blue neon "St. Mary's Church" sign in the front window. It was around Thanksgiving time, and the interior of the residence was even more cluttered and packed with stuff because the annual clothing drive was in full swing. (More than a few old timers have alluded to the fact that the beloved Fr. Widmer was a packrat and definitely a soft touch for traveling salesmen and tinkers hawking their wares. One of whom might have been the source of the neon sign???---Ed.)

According to Nick who was there helping with the clothes drive, the pastor was thumbing through some important-looking papers and suddenly held one up and said, "Nick, since you're a history buff and a fan of the Confederates, you might like to look at this." The document was the baptismal record of the famous Civil War figure, Col. John S. Mosby, "the Grey Ghost of the Confederacy." It stated that Col. Mosby had been baptized a Catholic at St. Mary in 1878. Who knew? The record was a total surprise!

The pastor offered the document on the spot to Nick who would have been ecstatic to add it to his collection. His conscience and his sense of history, however, would not allow him to accept it, he recounted, but he does confess to having a lot of second thoughts down through the years. The legitimacy of the baptismal record and its current location are two questions Nick promises to investigate further. Mosby seems to be identified more with Warrenton (than with Fredericksburg) where he became the town postmaster.

Bette Kennedy of Clearview Heights in Stafford remembers how the family's jumpy reaction to a terrifying noise during Sunday Mass immediately branded them as newcomers to the parish. Over the years Bette was responsible for launching many successful academic careers as Montfort Academy's kindergarten teacher.

Nick and I moved to Fredericksburg in September of 1957. One of my first memories of old St. Mary occurred about two weeks after we moved here. We and our two small children went to Mass on a Sunday morning in late September. It was a very warm day so the windows were wide open as there was no air conditioning. All of a sudden the fire horn blasted off, and it was very loud. My eight month old son John was startled and screamed out, my two and half year old daughter started to cry, and I myself made a startled sound. Very embarrassing to say the least! After Mass, people came up and welcomed us to the parish and laughed with us about our reaction to the fire horn.



Father Edwin Tobin and the First Communion class of May 6, 1961, of St. Mary Catholic Church on Princess Anne Street: Karen Kennedy is the third from the left in the second row. Sixth from the left in the same row is Dianne Mergenthal Lewis. Also, in the same row, ninth from the left, is Jill Billingsley Scott. (Photo courtesy of Nick and Bette Kennedy)

Sisters Nancy DeBruyn Burton and Mildred DeBruyn Haynes recently sat down with their childhood friend and fellow member of St. Mary, Margaret Staples Moore, to take a spirited walk on Memory Lane.

Nancy, Mildred, and Margaret are lifelong friends who grew up in the White Oak Road-Chatham Heights area of Stafford County. They noted that, as a result of the recent road construction, a street in that section was named for the DeBruyn family although the spelling has been mangled. Their Grandfather DeBruyn was from the Netherlands, and his wife was Pennsylvania Dutch. Nancy and Mildred had two brothers, Richard and Robert, now both deceased.

Nancy was in the first graduating class from Montfort Academy, 1952. She shared pictures of her class picnic that year which was at Hazel Run behind the school. A big thrill was cooking popcorn over an open fire. Sister Bernard was a favorite teacher who had stayed with the group for three years straight. Among those students were a Porter, a Roesch, and Bobbie Busch Sullivan.

Fr. Widmer was their beloved pastor who "did it all," according to the three women. He would come over Saturdays to southern Stafford to pick them up as well as other kids like John and Florence Barrett. Then, back at the rectory, he taught them their lessons in Christian doctrine and would pile them all back in his car to transport them to their homes. After dropping off the Barretts, Fr. Widmer would often let the three pre-teen girls take turns driving and steering!

Later, as teenagers, they looked forward to CCD classes which were then held in the parish hall on Sunday nights. After the formal instruction, there was a social for the young people with dancing and games.

The memory of the kindly priest who had guided them spiritually and who had provided them with recreational opportunities has remained strong with the three women. He had conferred upon them their sacraments and had married both Nancy and Margaret in 1957. He died suddenly, they felt, and there was a great sadness in the parish. Margaret can still visualize the church's exterior draped in black bunting. [According to a front page article in *The Catholic Virginian*, the diocesan weekly newspaper, the pastor died on Dec. 19, 1959, at the age of 56 "after being treated for a heart ailment on Nov. 15." His death in the rectory was discovered by Rev. Edward L. Tobin, assistant pastor. "Bishop Offers Requiem for Fr. Widmer" detailed the service for the much beloved priest on Dec. 22, 1959. It must have been a very gloomy Christmas for the parishioners.---Ed.]

Nancy is married to Charles Burton who became a convert. Their children are Lee, Carolyn, Carleen, Jason, and the late Brian Burton. Mildred and her husband Ashby L. Haynes, now deceased, are the parents of Mary Ann, Linwood, Wendy, and April. Margaret Staples Moore and her husband Joe have a daughter, Lisa, and a son, Tim.

The prominent Gracik families of Stafford County are part of our church memory project thanks to the contributions and photos from Bettina McWhirt of Hartwood.

While still mourning the loss of her mother, Christine Gracik McWhirt, who died this year, Bettina McWhirt wanted to honor her memory. The Graciks originally lived on a family farm in Caroline County where Christine was No. 11 out of fourteen children. When the United States government needed to expand what is now Fort A. P. Hill, the Gracik clan moved to the Hartwood area of Stafford County. [Cross reference: See Rose Stefaniga Mergenthal]

The former Christine Gracik became a McWhirt on May 30, 1953, when she married George B. McWhirt, Jr. Father James Widmer officiated at the Princess Anne Street church. "Everyone loved Fr. Widmer!" Bettina remembers. He asked parishioners to invite soldiers stationed here to their homes for Sunday dinner. According to her daughter Bettina, Mrs. McWhirt would always tell the pastor: "You send as many boys for dinner as you like!" Apparently as one of fourteen children, a crowd around the dinner table did not intimidate her one bit.

In addition to Bettina, the McWhirts had one son. He died of a rare form of cancer in 1993.

Photo Caption: Christine Anne Gracik married George B. McWhirt, Jr., on May 30, 1953, at St. Mary Catholic Church. Maid of honor was Mary Gracik; bestman was Wilbert Balderson. The bridesmaids were Agatha Gracik and Loretta McWhirt. Ushers: Judson Beach and Lewis "Happy" Gracik.



Virginia Rose is a much admired figure in St. Mary's parish. Her sunny disposition and engaging, welcoming smile endear her to all. In an interview this spring, she recounted how she and her husband, the late Dr. John B. Rose, came to town and settled in the Ferry Farm area of Stafford.

Dr. John Rose finished medical school in 1950, and the Roses were off to South Hill, Virginia, to begin a practice. They stayed just a year, however, because there was no hospital there. So Virginia and John, along with their three little children, moved to Fredericksburg. A fourth child joined the clan, and the family prospered as Dr. Rose's practice grew.

Since she came from the large complex of St. Benedict Parish in Richmond, one might have assumed that St. Mary Church on Princess Anne Street might have been a letdown for Virginia. Not so! "I loved that church," she said, "and I just didn't compare them at all." In addition, she said that Fr. Widmer was so well liked that it was an easy transition. She recalled that all their family would drive up from Richmond for the children's special church occasions like First Communion. Then, she recalled, the entire clan would troop down to the General Washington Inn where the maitre d' hotel, the legendary "Griffin," would take excellent care of their large party.

Their children--- John Rose III, Richard P. Rose, Clifford Rose, and Kathy Rose---all went to Montfort Academy. The Roses' three sons were all altar servers. Naturally, the family was very involved in maintaining the school.

Virginia was also active and an officer in the Council of Catholic Women (CCW) as were many of her close friends who worked together on a multitude of projects like her first cousin, Eleanor Mitchell, as well as Jane Amhrein, Patsy Spratt, Anne Nere, Maizie Stefaniga, Lil Kendall, Peggy Danahy, Peggy Painter, the Graciks, and Clelia Hanzel, Marie Savage, Mrs. Gibson, and Mrs. Heitmeyer. Grace Low was another friend who "was always very enthusiastic about all church activities," according to Virginia.

The Free Lance-Star Feb. 25, 2006 2/25/06
Group seeks mementos of first St. Mary Church

History is important in the Fredericksburg area, so it's natural that the Catholic parish would have a keen interest in preserving memories of those who attended services at the original site of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception.

The present church on William Street in the College Heights area replaced the antebellum structure on Princess Anne Street in downtown Fredericksburg in 1971.

In connection with the annual Family Picnic and Reunion Day on June 11, a committee intends to compile a collection of reminis-

cences and oral histories from people who worshipped at the downtown St. Mary Church.

One can write down his or her memories or dictate them to a family member or friend. Another option is to schedule an interview with a member of the parish committee who would then write the recollections for inclusion in the proposed publication.

The committee is also seeking copies of photographs from the pre-1971 period.

The deadline for submissions is April 10. For more information or to schedule an interview, call

Kathleen Mahoney, 540/371-2073, or e-mail her at bmah761569@aol.com.

Sara Fartro, the chairwoman for the June reunion and homecoming, hopes for a large turnout of those families who helped to build the current church.

Special seating will be set aside for those honorees at the event, which will be held at Holy Cross Academy in Stafford County.

To request an invitation or to have one mailed to former parishioners now living out of town, call Fartro at 540/373-0237.

—Mary Lee Boutchyard

For deep roots and loyal service to St. Mary Catholic Church, the Mullen-Carneal-Dickinson line will be hard to beat. The grandchildren of John F. Carneal, Jr., and of his sister, Nancy Carneal Dickinson, are now the seventh generation to worship at the parish. These two siblings have contributed an outstanding account of their history.

My paternal great great grandparents, Patrick and Rosie Mullen, came to the United States from Ireland in 1844. Their son, John H., my great grandfather, was nine years old and came with them. There were three other children: Daniel, Mary, and Maggie. Their birthdates are unknown; therefore, it is not known if they came from Ireland or were born after the family settled in Delaware.

Around 1865, having read of good, cheap land being available in Virginia, John and Daniel moved to Spotsylvania, Virginia. Their father visited them sometime later and was said to be disappointed in their choice of "good, cheap land."

John and Daniel became members of St. Mary soon after that. John and his wife, the former Ricie Cropp, were parents of thirteen children, my grandmother, Margaret (Maggie) being one of them. She married James (Jim) Si Carneal and they raised eight children, one of whom was my father, John F. Carneal. My brother, John F. Carneal, Jr., has six children and seventeen grandchildren who attend St. Mary. My children and grandchildren live out of the area but attend St. Mary when they visit me. Since Patrick Mullen visited John and Daniel frequently (or relocated to Spotsylvania himself), my brother's and my grandchildren are the seventh generation to worship at St. Mary's.

Many thoughts come to mind as I recall my years at old St. Mary. In the 1940's, when I was in elementary school, we had a congregation that numbered in the 300's. Now as I approach my 70th birthday, our congregation numbers in the 15,000's. Nuns from Richmond came on Saturday mornings to teach us our religion classes. Later, after the Parish Hall was built, the associate pastor taught the high school students on Sunday night. My high school graduating class, James Monroe of 1955, had three girls and one boy who were Catholic.

The church had no restrooms. The girls used housekeeper Louise's facility. She always had prayer cards to give out. I recently asked a former altar boy how they managed. His answer was that your mother made darn sure you used the bathroom before you left home!

We did not have a car so family members---sometimes a few and sometimes a lot---walked the mile plus to church together. My paternal aunt, Annabelle, who was confined to a wheelchair from her early teens, was, of course, part of the group. My father carried her up the long flight of steps. There were no handicapped ramps back then.

After the Parish Hall was built, we had annual bazaars. Annabelle was gifted in craft-making and worked all year long on the projects she donated. For many years our priest, Father Widmer, transported Annabelle to Holiday

Home, a lovely place in a rural setting near Baltimore, Maryland. This summer vacation, almost resort-like, provided her with many friends that she enjoyed seeing in the summer and corresponded with the rest of the year. (My brother and I sometimes went along and were treated to lunch or ice cream on the return trip home.) After members of my generation reached adulthood, we were able to provide her transportation.

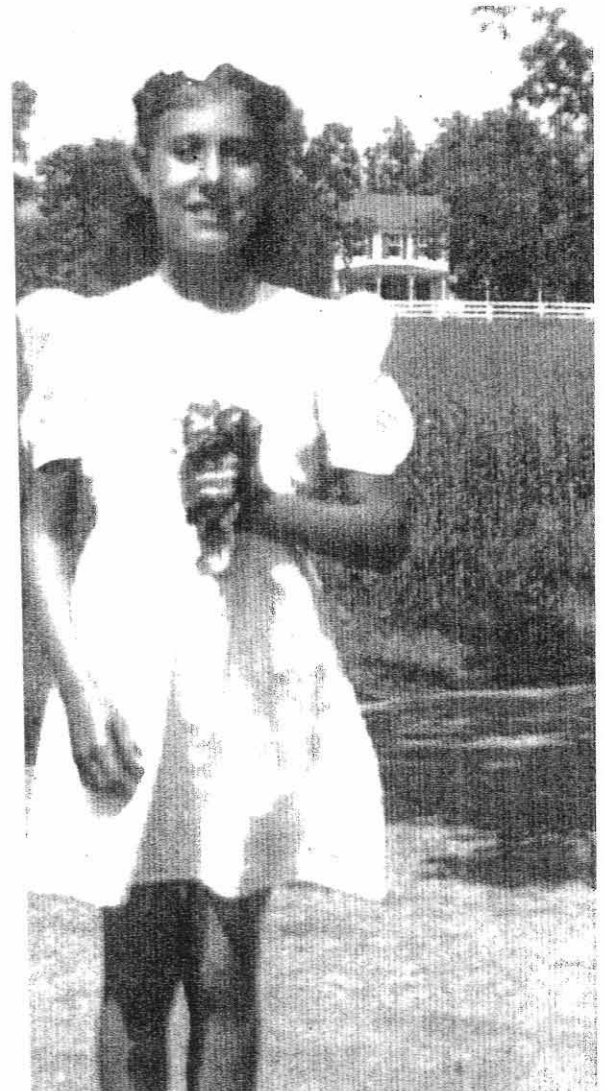
On Christmas Eve family members would attend the "late movie" at the Victoria Theater downtown (On Caroline Street and now part of the Fredericksburg Baptist Church) before attending Midnight Mass. I looked forward to the movie and Mass, but boy, did I dread that mile plus walk home!

There were no assigned pews, but families usually sat in the same spot each Sunday. If a pew was vacant, you knew who wasn't there. In order to receive Communion worthily, fasting from Saturday midnight was church policy, so our family went to the early (7:30 AM) Mass. Later Mass attendance wasn't advisable as "somebody" always grew faint by the end of the service!

The kneeler that extended across the front of the altar was used by communicants as they knelt to receive communion. The attitude of people before Mass started was totally different. We were taught that we were in God's House and that appropriate behavior started the moment you stepped over the threshold. You were expected to pray or be totally quiet so you didn't distract those who were praying. Ah, how wonderful it would be to see us return to that level of respect.

One of Nancy Carneal Dickinson's favorite church ceremonies was the annual May procession. All the little girls carried bouquets and placed them at the Virgin Mary's statue. Many of the children's parents could afford to buy flowers from the florist. Nancy's mother helped her to make her own bouquet from a beautiful pink wild rose bush that grew on the farm on Fall Hill Avenue where the family lived at the time. Over the years the family moved a few times, and the rose bush went with them! Nancy married Curtis Mason Dickinson in 1959, and they lived in several houses before moving to Clark Patton Road in Stafford County. Naturally, she moved a piece of the rose bush with them where it has flourished.

In June 2001 Nancy engaged a lady to make several rosaries from the dried flower petals of her rosebush, sharing them with relatives. She approached Father Hamilton about placing one over the hands of the Blessed Mother statue at St. Mary at the current church. After due consideration, Father accepted in a gracious note to Nancy and made a bulletin announcement about the donation.



A lifelong resident of the area, Rose Stefaniga Mergenthal had a wealth of information to share about her own prominent Catholic family as well as of another important clan in St. Mary's history, the Graciks.

Rose is the widow of Harry "Hank" Mergenthal and the mother of Kenneth and David Mergenthal, Dianne M. Lewis, and Jane M. Simonpietri. After meeting at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), she and Hank were married at St. Mary in 1949.

Her parents were immigrants from Czechoslovakia and farmed on their land in Caroline County. Rose was the last of nine children and the only one surviving today. She followed Veronica, Mary, Anne, Agnes, Joseph, Caroline, John, and Steve Stefaniga.

The Stefanigas' neighbors in Caroline, also farmers and devout Catholics, were the Gracik family which was even larger than Rose's. The Graciks had fourteen children. More than just neighbors, Mrs. Stefaniga and Mrs. Gracik, also from Czechoslovakia, were devoted friends who spoke the same language and who acted as midwives for each other. When the Stefaniga home burned to the ground as a result of a chimney fire, the Graciks took the family in.

When the United States government wanted to expand Caroline County's Camp A.P. Hill during the World War II period, both families agreed to give up their farms. After the government buyout, the two large clans settled in the Hartwood area of Stafford County. The Stefanigas began what would be a prosperous lumber business and pallet manufacturing.

Rose stayed active over the years at the downtown church. As a member of the Council of Catholic Women (CCW), there were regular duties like preparing the altar every Saturday. For example, there were usually flowers donated from the Musante family, who were church members and floral growers, to arrange. She remembered that, while Fr. Widmer never wanted any luxuries for himself or the rectory, he was very insistent that the church look topnotch. One time Rose, as president of the CCW, was asked to gather a few women to clean the rectory from top to bottom, for the Bishop was coming from Richmond, and the rectory was badly in need of some spiffing up.

Rose Mergenthal keeps busy with her family, bowls twice a week, and usually attends Mass at Holy Cross Academy, very near to her Stafford home.

Blessed with a keen memory and excellent writing skills, Sheila Wickouski provides us with some wonderful images of belonging to the St. Mary community. Her parents are Mary and the late Edward Wickouski. Stephanie is her sister.

Saint Mary's was the first church that I belonged to. While I had visited other churches as a kid, St. Mary's would be the one my family went to every week, and one that indelibly imprinted in my mind what a church should be. First of all, it should be a parish, a community of souls who heard Mass (and listened to sermons). St. Mary's was where it would be recorded in the official church records that my sister and I received the sacraments for the first time, and it was where my family received them weekly.

A parish church should be led by a pastor, like Father Widmer, who would literally give the shirt off his back to help out anyone who came to the rectory (I can still picture him answering the door on a hot summer night in his undershirt, even though it would be years later that I heard the stories about his generosity.

Then it should look like a church, with a white marble altar and statues, decorated with fresh flowers and clean altar linens. (My mother would wash and iron those linens every week for years.) There should be hymns sung from a choir loft, and an organist like old Mrs. Driscoll who always wore a black wool coat and sensible shoes.

No matter how humble (Hadn't this building been a hospital or a stable in the Civil War?) it was nevertheless sacred space where people could go for asylum when escaping from persecution (another benefit of a church I learned at Montfort Academy).

There would also be activities, like a parish bazaar where my mother would work at the country store. (Once she bought back a very homely stuffed animal I had made in school.) My father would help count the collection money on Sunday evenings and go to the Knights of Columbus crab feasts in the summer.

It was, of course, a simpler time, with a rhythm to the order of rituals. The weekly ones merge in a single memory from how the children from Montfort would sit in the front pews (a spot now reserved for the handicapped) where a Daughter of Wisdom would supervise them during Mass...to the trip for glazed jelly donuts from Scottie's bakery after Sunday Mass.

I think the inside of the church was painted yellow, or maybe it was just old plaster, but in my memory it is like a glow of light, steady and sure about the way a church should be.

Mary Davia and daughter Bonny collaborated in a brainstorming session and were kind enough to share the results. Mary and David Davia, a cartographer and a Chief Warrant Officer in the US Army, were the parents of David, Jr., Elaine, Jeannette, Jackie, Danny, Bonny, Raymond, and Ronald.

We bought our home in Stafford in 1951. That's when we started to go to St. Mary's. But the Army transferred us to the Philippines that year and we didn't return until early 1954. I started playing the organ and directed the choir until 1956 when we were transferred to Germany. During our absence the church celebrated its 100th anniversary. In 1959, Fr. Widmer was waiting for me to return to take over the music program again.

The children went to Montfort. Fr. Widmer picked up children in the country and took them home until the school could pay for a bus.

We went through the changes in the church – altar moved, etc. Fr. Muir was the pastor. One Sunday we went to church and everything was the same. The next Sunday, the altars had been thrown along the side of the church. Broken votive stands, statues – all were outside. Thanks to the parishioners, these were all picked up and stored in a barn at St. William of York and bit by bit repaired. The statues, etc. were slowly put back up. I think the votive stands are still being used. The Madonna was repainted and when the new ones were ordered for the new church, was put in the crying room. I played and directed for the dedication of the new church before retiring in 1971.

In 1964, Elaine became the first young woman from St. Mary's parish to enter the convent. I don't know if any other women raised in St. Mary's ever entered. We were told that we were giving up our daughter "to be a bride of Christ." We were allowed to send letters only so many times a year and the number was reduced the longer she stayed in. We could visit only once or twice a year. At first she was Sr. Mary David, but with the later changes, she was allowed to use her own name. She made her final vows in 1974. Of the eighteen girls who entered with her, she is the only one who stayed. We will join her [May 2006] for the 125th anniversary of Bon Secours Hospital in Baltimore where Elaine is a nurse practitioner. She had been in the first nurse practitioner class at the University of Virginia.

Little short memories:

- Fr. Widmer bringing back things he was given in New York and selling them to raise money.
- Fr. Twohig and the handkerchief mouse.
- Josie Silver singing soprano descants in that pure voice of hers.
- May day processions with the children bringing flowers from their yards.
- Women wearing hats and veils in church; men putting their hats on the windowsills.
- Those little hand-held fans because we had no air conditioning.
- Missals with an English column and a Latin column.
- Trinity Episcopal Church letting us have services there while the new church was being built.

Margaret Barrett Hein, a member of the prominent Barrett family of St. Mary, writes with happiness of attending the brand new Montfort Academy in 1948. She also includes the very sad story of two Montfort students, a brother and a sister, who were tragically killed on Route 1 in Stafford.

My family became members of St. Mary's in 1942. We moved here from Winchester, Virginia, the year of "The Flood." We moved into a farmhouse at 5-Mile Fork in Spotsylvania. Because of gas rationing during World War II, my father had to ride his bike to Fredericksburg to work, a ten-mile round trip.

My father, who had grown up in Pittsburgh and had always attended Catholic school, worked very hard with Father Widmer to get a Catholic school in the area. Before Montfort, my older brothers and sisters rode to church with Father Widmer and lots of other kids to "Catechism." Some beautiful Benedictine sisters taught them in the church. Father Widmer was such a wonderful priest. He drove all over the countryside picking up children for Catechism classes. Parishioners often bought farm goods to Mass with them on Sunday, and Father shared them with his needy parishioners. He ran a mini food bank out of the rectory.

In 1948 when I had turned 6, Montfort Academy opened. We were first housed in the convent. We think the sisters moved their beds aside and moved our desks into their bedrooms for our classes. Before the end of the year, we had moved into our new school. We then lived in a part of Stafford, where we were the only Catholics. My parents sent us to Montfort to learn the most important things in life: the importance of God and His love for us, and our response to His love. Now they say all you need to know you learn in kindergarten. But I know now that what the sisters and Father taught us were the most important things you learn in life.

The classes at Montfort were filled with children from Triangle, Quantico, Prince William, King George and the farthest reaches of Stafford and Spotsylvania. I don't believe that a child was ever turned away from Montfort because of an inability to pay. There were many children of the military that had to transfer in and out of Montfort as their parents were transferred.

All the children loved Father Widmer. He often visited my family on the farm. His birthday and mine were one day apart. My mother always had him out to dinner on my birthday. Our church organist, his housekeeper, and the assistant pastor would also come. They were all very gracious in thanking my parents for dinner. My father would say, "Don't thank us! We have been blessed by your presence." We all agreed.

The organist [Mrs. William Driscoll], who everyone called Grandma Driscoll, played for all the Masses on Sunday. She was there at 7:00 a.m. and left at noon. She could really play that organ. We often were sitting up in the loft with her. Old St. Mary's was not air-conditioned. Many people fainted, and as children, we thought the ushers' job was to take out the fainters.

The housekeeper for Father Widmer was a precious little French woman named Louise Larson. She became my younger sister's godmother. She always had a little token of affection for my sister when she came to Mass. After Mass, we went to the rectory to see her and for my sister to get her present. We were all jealous of my sister's good fortune in having such a loving, generous godmother.

There were two very special children who attended Montfort with us. Their father had a fisherman's business. Eugene, the oldest boy, was confined to a wheel chair and was often transported by his grandparents. They carried his wheelchair in the back of their pick-up. Eugene was a great artist. He was usually surrounded by his classmates at recess watching him draw. His father would take him to the beach to draw while his dad went fishing. We would go to the beach and find him sitting along the shore and he painted beautiful nautical scenes.

His little sister Maria was in my class for first and second grade. She was a beautiful angelic child with curly dark brown hair and eyes. Perhaps growing up with a handicapped brother had made her such a loving, caring child at such a young age.

At some point, Eugene had become able to get around on crutches for short periods. This allowed him to catch the bus and ride with the other children. We all shared in his happiness. It seemed to be an answer to all our prayers for him.

His parents lived along busy Route 1 in Stafford. (There was no I-95 yet). One of his parents was always out in front of their house to greet him and Maria as they came home from school. Route 1 was an undivided highway and very dangerous. Unfortunately, a policeman was chasing a speeding vehicle. The bus had stopped and the children, Eugene and Maria, and the flag boy were crossing. The speeding driver hit Eugene and Maria and they were killed. The flag-boy escaped injury.

Our school was a very sad place after that. I believe Sister Pauline kept Maria's desk in her usual place. The day of the funeral, we all processed with our teachers and some parents down to the church. For many of us, it was our first funeral. It impressed on us that God could call us home at anytime. I have always felt, as I am sure many of their classmates felt, that God called the best of the Montfort children home on that day.

Years later when I visited Montfort, there was a beautiful statue in the hallway given in memory of those two children. Anyone that had the privilege of knowing them would never forget them and the wonderful example they set for us.

Mary L. Sprow Preston, a retired educator, describes her experiences as a key figure over many years and while working with a succession of pastors in the all-important music ministry. She and her husband Clarence, also a convert, are the parents of Tony Preston who has been in the US Army for 23 years. He and his wife have four children.

I came to St. Mary Church from a Baptist upbringing. I had been baptized as a youngster and served at Shiloh Baptist Church (New Site) as an organist and youth choir director since completing college. Five years out of college, I had begun to think of changing because of studying the Catholic faith in a Philosophy and Religion class there.

I spent two years after leaving Shiloh making up my mind and then decided to go down to the church in 1962 to begin to check it out. I met Father Twohig. He was one of the youngest ordained Irish priests serving in the country. We went through lessons for the allotted period and then I was baptized one Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1963. Mrs. Hamm, a Catholic lady from Stafford whom I knew, was my sponsor.

I was attending Mass and beginning to feel comfortable at the church when Father Meehan, the pastor, approached me about playing the organ. I promised to look at the organ and to attend the choir rehearsals. Mary Lou Davia was the choir director and organist at the time. I was able to begin playing for a Mass and rendering quiet music during various portions because the congregation did not sing. Then I began to play for the choir. I can still have happy memories of the volume of music we tackled. At that time, we would prepare a Mass in Latin for major feast days. A selection of a new Mass was done for Christmas and for Easter; then we would repeat it during the season.

Around 1967, we began to prepare to sing Masses in English and to be there for every Sunday. Father Twohig produced copies of a Mass using Southern Gospel Strains written by Father Rivers of Chicago. I remember Father Meehan coming to me and sharing his joy of being able to introduce it to the congregation. He felt it was a triumphal moment in the history of the church.

Father Twohig was transferred after serving three years at St. Mary which was customary. Eventually Father Meehan was transferred to St. Joseph in Petersburg, Virginia.

A parishioner named George Stickney would lead the singing and we would prepare the list of songs and teach them before the Mass began. He was a radio announcer on WFVA across the street from the old church. He served the church in many capacities. [According to an obituary in *The Free Lance-Star*, George Stickney, who was "an active layman," died as the result of an accident on January 11, 1969, at the intersection of Va. 206 and 301. The death notice said Rev. Albert Nobles, assistant pastor, was in the car also but was unhurt.---Ed.]

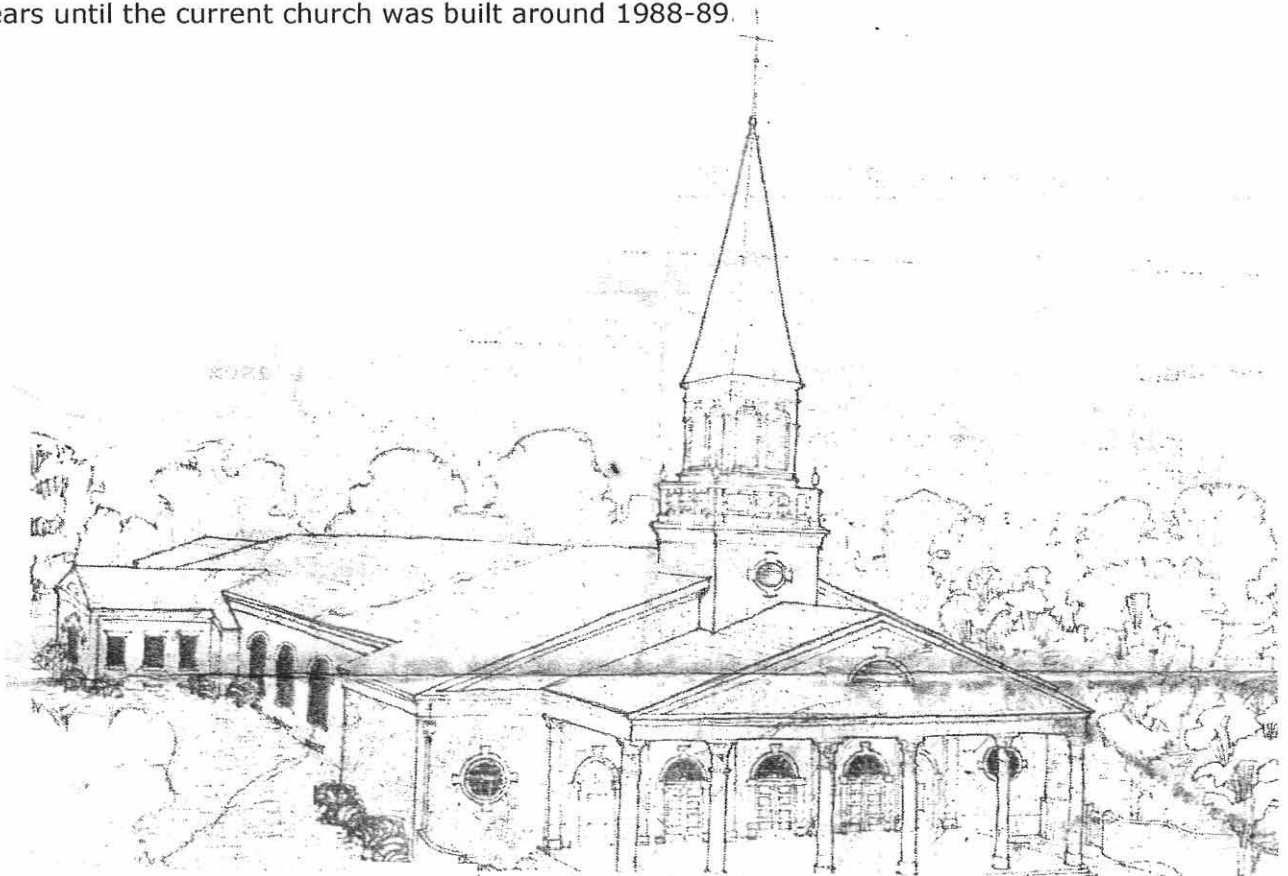
The music program was enhanced by training sessions held by the Diocese of Richmond at John Marshall Hotel in Richmond and at the Presbyterian Church in the North End of Richmond. Since there was an emphasis on folk music, actual recording artists were brought in to sing their songs and to direct us in how to play the organ for Masses.

Father Ross Muir, a very learned man, came to the church at this point in 1967. He asked me to serve on the Parish Advisory Board which I did until the new church was built. He later made me the head organist. Since I did not direct the choir, the nuns were helpful in leading us for feast days and actually playing the guitar for the Masses.

After Father Muir left, Father Vincent Sikora came to the church. At the first Parish Advisory Board meeting he brought the Architect Sheridan with new plans for a church. [Original approved church design is below.---Ed.] The board struggled with this change because they had voted upon the previously presented plans which were displayed at the church. Many questions arose over the size and seating capacity of this church which were never alleviated. I was serving as the secretary of the board at the time. I continued to play the organ here until 1988.

Through this time, I took the training and served on the CCD Board for a period. I never actually taught CCD classes.

St. Mary has had three pastors who were in the same divinity class and were ordained together for the Diocese of Richmond: Father Sikora, Father Leo Creamer and Father John Munley. Father Roy Cosby, founder of St. Patrick's and St. Matthew's who was a member of the same class, told me about this. At the time I was playing out at St. Matthews which I did for two years until the current church was built around 1988-89.



Roger Bourdon, professor emeritus of history at the University of Mary Washington, sent the following memories that "I've dredged from my antique gray cells."

My late wife Betty and I arrived in Fredericksburg early in August 1968. With us was our baby son, Jean-Paul, who was all of two months old. Of course our church was the old St. Mary's which seemed small, modestly adorned, but cozy after the large churches of Milwaukee where I had taught for two years at Marquette University.

The church building was in some need of paint and repair, but the congregation was friendly. The old building had no crying room for small children and no air conditioning so the summers were tough and hot at services. The choir loft was off limits from the rickety floor which some said had a hole or two in it besides weak rafters.

I remember our pastor, Father Muir, as a young man, quite spiritual and possessing a noteworthy social conscience. Father Muir's sermons were filled with spiritual enthusiasm and good sense. This, of course, was the 1960s and still within the decade of the Second Vatican Council. Some of the parishioners were still not completely acclimated to the liturgical changes that followed upon Vatican II. At the time Fredericksburg was under the Diocese of Richmond and its experienced and understanding bishop.

When Father Muir left, Father Vincent Sikora, noteworthy as a Pittsburgh Steelers fan and a builder who produced the current church on William Street, replaced him. Father Sikora preferred direct speech, did not approve of intellectual discussions about our faith, and vehemently denounced "egg head intellectuals" from the pulpit. But he built us a beautiful church building.

Mary Washington College brought Joseph, now retired from Modern Foreign Languages, and Shirley Bozicevic to Fredericksburg. Shirley taught at Montfort Academy and is retired from King George County Schools.

When we first came here in 1961, we were surprised to see the nuns from Montfort Academy (Daughters of Wisdom) often times strolling in a group of six or seven around town. This was quite a sight in very Protestant Fredericksburg not only because they were nuns but also because the habits were a la "The Flying Nun" with huge headdresses. Then, in the late Sixties, they "kicked the habit" and all of that was a thing of the past.

For just a couple of years in the early Sixties there was a free sitting service for babies and toddlers during Mass on Sunday morning. This was provided by the CYO (I think) under adult supervision in the activity building behind the church. It was a busy place with kids, toys, and games.

One of the honorees at the first annual St. Mary Volunteer Recognition Dinner this past October was Leocadia ("Kay") Janis.* She and her daughter, Mary Janis Kassock, mother of Zeke and Issac, spent an afternoon remembering their early days in town.

Leocadia ("Kay") Janis and her late husband Alvin Janis came to the Fredericksburg area from Chicago in 1965 with their seven children. Their Illinois church was quite grand, "more like a cathedral," so being in the "country" and viewing their new parish on Princess Anne Street came as quite a shock. The family quickly became accustomed to their new spiritual home, though, finding it very friendly and family-oriented.

A reference to the choir loft, which later came to be condemned as unsafe, usually elicits interesting recollections. Mary Janis Kassock, a young teenager at the time, told a tale about a bit of inadvertent mischief when the family was seated in the front row of the loft one Sunday. Mary was absentmindedly toying with a tiny plastic pumpkin, probably a remnant from a cupcake decoration, when she dropped it over the rail. The little pumpkin landed smartly in a lady's beehive hairdo where it remained for the rest of the Mass, even as the woman went up for communion, and as Mary looked on, horrified.

During the interview, Kay and Mary were transported back to summertime in the old church. With no air conditioning, it could be brutally hot, despite having the windows propped open. People generally didn't complain, though, and were usually always very quiet. If necessary, the ushers, who were accorded great respect, would shush people.

Mary remembered Fr. Vincent Sikora fondly. "He was always very kind and cheery and down to earth." She used to see him cutting his own grass. She got to know him very well since he was the sponsor/chaplain for the local Civil Air Patrol of which she was a member. Another strong church figure for Mary was Mr. Arthur Street who taught high school CCD for many years. "He was an excellent teacher and so patient!"

*A fitting close to these Janis reminiscences will be the following recommendation that nominated Kay Janis for the volunteer awards this past fall: "Despite being the busy mother of seven children, Kay found time to volunteer in a number of ways at St. Mary over the course of nearly forty years in town. Specifically, she has been a faithful money counter for the parish collections and was a dedicated staff member of the St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store over its many years of existence in the downtown Fredericksburg area."

Photo caption: First Communicant Neil Janis and Kay Janis at St. Mary, June 1970



Typical of the many "come heres" are Joseph and Julia O'Connor who have enriched the parish with long years of dedicated service to a succession of clergymen. One new pastor turned out to be a familiar face, proving that old adage about it being a small world.

Our family joined St. Mary's Parish around Labor Day in 1969 after driving across country from San Francisco to a new job site at Dahlgren. Julia and I had met Mother Catherine and Sister Lucille on a house-hunting trip the previous July. Other than the Holloway and Freiling families who also transferred here, we knew no one in Fredericksburg.

That particular Sunday was the one when new pastors assume their assignments and Father Vince Sikora said his first Mass as leader of St. Mary Parish. While his name may have been mentioned earlier, it did not ring any bells in my mind. Imagine my surprise after Mass to discover that the new pastor had been a classmate of mine 20 years earlier at Mount Saint Mary's College in Emmitsburg, MD.

In the "olden days" at the end of World War II at the "Mount," everyone took the same core-classes at the college during the first two years. In the third year, familiar faces were often missing until they were spotted in their black cassocks on the far side of campus revealing that they had entered the seminary. After our mutual surprise about meeting in Fredericksburg, we later spent some time comparing activities since our campus days and trading notes on our classmates.

One thing that all our family remembers was that if we were late for Mass and were directed up to the balcony, everyone seemed to turn to see who made the noise coming up that creaking set of stairs!

Lillian Kendall, a Fredericksburg native and graduate of James Monroe High School, is one of many converts to Catholicism who has enriched our parish.

Like so many others who were interviewed for this project, Lillian Kendall was a big fan of Father James Widmer. She remembers him very fondly: "He was a wonderful, real sweet man!" Lil recalled.

One of her strongest memories, naturally, is being married in 1948 by Fr. Widmer at the original Princess Anne site of St. Mary. Donald J. Kendall, Jr., was a career Marine, and so the couple exited the church under the traditional crossed swords ceremony.

The Korean War veteran and his family, including five children, were subject to many moves and were away from Fredericksburg for a number of years before returning in 1963. Lil remains an active member of the parish where she is a participant in the monthly book club discussions.

Busy Sara Fartro, who organized the June 2006 reunion of folks who attended church at the Princess Anne site, found time to brainstorm some memories that have stayed with her and husband John who is retired from Dahlgren.

- Don Wareing volunteering to call on parishioners to ask us to make a pledge for the new St. Mary Church. The amount would be \$360 and paid at \$10 a month for 36 months.

- Dr. William Daley, a parishioner, and Dr. John Painter (whose wife Peggy and family attended), who diagnosed my daughter Beth with spinal meningitis and successfully treated her illness and Agnes Brown for her prayers and concern for my 9 month old daughter Beth during that hospital stay.

- Mr. and Mrs. Carlton Carpenter who welcomed us as new members to St. Mary.

- Lou Hiers, an usher who always made sure everyone had a place to sit.

- My first face-to-face confession was with Father Sikora.

Now a parishioner at St. Anthony in King George, Francis Volante sketched a few memories about growing up in the late 40's and 50's.

When I was about 11 or 12 years old, I was the only child of four still living at home. Therefore, I had to go everywhere with my parents. My father, August Volante, was the comptroller at the Dahlgren Naval Base for many years during and following World War II. We lived in Fredericksburg, Dahlgren, and King George during that period.

Dad was the choir director for St. Mary's for quite a number of years. My mother, Marie Volante, sang in the choir. They had a great number of practices every year, and the majority of the choir showed up no matter what the weather was.

The pastor was Fr. Widmer. I haven't come across any priest after that time who stacked up with Fr. Widmer's personality, his priestly and bedside manner, or anything else. We all thought the world of Fr. Widmer! Later on, when we heard that the Church had been sold, it was hard to accept.

Because of Fredericksburg's proximity to several military installations, the Catholic community has been enriched over the years with the families of servicepeople who have always made significant contributions to parish life. We are sorry to see them move away because of reassignments. As often happens, however, they return! Mike and Peg Larose are examples.

In response to the note in the Sunday Bulletin, I lived here then between 1958 and 1964, partly in Fredericksburg and partly at Quantico. I was just being discharged from the Marine Corps. Fr. Widmer was pastor. All three of my children were baptized by him. I was a Knight of Columbus briefly. I taught at James Monroe High 1958-59, lived in Normandy Village, and then in College Heights. Afterwards, I taught at Quantico High School and lived in Base Housing as a civilian teacher until 1966. We moved back here for retirement in 1995 and joined the new St. Mary's. We hope to attend the reunion.

The St. Mary community over the years has been blessed and enriched by the presence and service of converts to our Catholic Church. Unlike the large RCIA classes of the present day, Peggy Ritchie Danahy had one- on- one instruction with the very energetic and charismatic pastor, Fr. Widmer.

Marie Ritchie of Fauquier County was attending Mary Washington College when she and her roommate met some soldiers who were stationed at Camp A.P. Hill. Among the men was a charming Boston Irishman, John J. Danahy. The young college student invited the Army buddies out to visit her parents' farm and to have dinner with her large family of eight children. One of the eight was her sister Peggy, who had just graduated from high school.

And so began a friendship and courtship which led to a marriage proposal. The couple eloped to Elizabeth City, North Carolina, where they were married in the church rectory. They moved back to Fredericksburg in 1948. Peggy decided she wanted to take instructions to join the church and in 1950 she began lessons in the parish hall. Little Stevie Danahy Larson, now a local educator, would accompany her mother who recollected, "Fr. Widmer always had some little treat for Stevie. He was just a very nice person and he gave everything away."

Both Jack and Peggy were very active in parish, Knights of Columbus, and Montfort activities where all five children attended. Jack did a stint as president of the Montfort PTA and was the Grand Knight for the K. of C. 1960-61. Peggy remembered that "it seemed we were trying to raise money all the time between the church building fund and school needs." It was a lot of fun and a great way to get to know people.

"The parish hall was a real meeting place," she recalled, where active families like the O'Tooles, the Amhreens, and the Mergenthals gathered. Everyone knew each other. The women were especially busy running large bazaars. Peggy, an excellent seamstress, recalled making fifty little ponies for sale one year. Kitty Jones McKann, Virginia Rose, Eleanor Mitchell, and Clelia Hanzel were also very hard workers. Peggy remembers those days when Fredericksburg had a definite "small town feel" very fondly.



Photo Caption: In June of 1958 John Peter Danahy made his First Communion. His proud big sister is Stephanie Danahy Larson. Also pictured his Pat Danahy Quann.

Janet Kulesz Martin says there "is something wonderful about the comfort one feels as a member of a small church." She writes movingly below about moving to Fredericksburg from New Jersey in 1946 when she was six years old.

Our pastor at that time was Father James Widmer. He was a kind, gentle priest and was instrumental in having the Daughters of Wisdom come to Fredericksburg to establish our first Catholic school. My family attended 7:30 AM Mass and we sat behind the nuns. One of the priests would go to the convent during the week to offer Mass. They were the ones who would distribute the report cards to us.

Every summer before school started, Fr. Widmer would host a picnic and games for the altar boys and the choir members on the grounds of Montfort. Fr. Widmer on many occasions would take a dollar bill out of his pocket. Whoever would guess the closest to certain numbers on the bill would win the dollar. I don't ever remember being that lucky. I do know that it was a lot of money fifty some years ago!

We had CYO meetings in the Parish Hall behind the church on Sunday evenings. I can picture Gladys Carneal and Josie Silver sitting up front with the children when one of the priests was conducting class. Of course, I made First Communion and received the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Mary. I am not certain about First Penance as the priests would go to Montfort to hear confessions. My brother Jim was an altar boy at St. Mary in the 1960's.

I remember attending Stations of the Cross. After Benediction the lights would be dimmed. When the Blessed Sacrament was placed in the tabernacle, the adults would sing "Good Night Sweet Jesus." What an awesome feeling! After St. Mary was sold, the Stations of the Cross were stored at St. William of York; but, lo and behold, these cherished treasures have been part of St. Matthew Church, Spotsylvania, for the past several years. The founding pastor, now Monsignor Roy Cosby was very good at scrounging. My father, John Kulesz, helped prepare the Stations for refurbishing and another member of St. Matthew, Mary Anna Stroud, who died this year, fixed them up.....How wonderful!

There are so many people who come to mind when thinking about the original St. Mary, so many of them now deceased. For many, many years George Stickney prepared the altar for the Mass and was the priest's right hand man. He died from injuries received in an automobile accident.

Several priests come to mind---Fathers Charles Ryan, John O'Connell, Edward McLean, Patrick Cassidy, Chester Michael, Edward Tobin, Joseph Heye, Henry Wade, John Meehan, Patrick Twohig, and Vincent Sikora.

The rectory was next door to the church. I believe the housekeeper's name was Louise. While she was a lovely woman, she wasn't a very good cook and the priests were fed a lot of cheese sandwiches. My parents had a restaurant nearby, and Fr. Widmer often ordered a dinner to go. Fr. Tobin would go there often to eat and to visit.

When I started to work, it was in the courthouse just a block from St. Mary---great for visiting the Blessed Sacrament at lunch time!

My husband Charles took religious instruction from Fr. Tobin who officiated at our marriage in 1961. Our reception was held in the Parish Hall. Fr. Tobin died a few years later of a massive heart attack---he was only in his early forties. Over the years we had many happy and fun-filled get-togethers in the Parish Hall. [The site of this hall was recently razed; the neighboring United Methodist Church, the present owners of the site, are erecting a new building to enlarge their complex. ---Ed.]

Our first two children were baptized at the original St. Mary. With growth, we needed a larger church which was understandable. The sad part was when St. Mary was sold---that beautiful church had been such a major part of my life for twenty-five years.



ST. MARY'S PARISH HALL

Built 1948

SENIOR SPOTLIGHT

Reliable Fredericksburg Usher Nears 70 Years of Service

By KATHLEEN MCCABE MAHONEY
Special to the HERALD

If the Diocese of Arlington should ever decide to publish a Guinness-style book of records, the Church of St. Mary in Fredericksburg has a sure winner for one category: longest serving church usher.

Hugh B. Granger, who turned 82 on June 23, has been at his usher's post at the first Mass on Sunday since he was 14 years old. Unfortunately, a stroke on Christmas morning this year forced an abrupt retirement from the ushering ministry after close to 70 years.

Both his father, Bernard H. Granger, and his uncle, Sebastian Granger, had been ushers for many years at the original ante-bellum St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church at 706 Princess Anne St. in historic downtown Fredericksburg. Young Hugh was eager to join them, but Father Joseph V. Brennan, pastor from 1929-1936, insisted that he be at least 14.

As a teenage usher, Hugh was continuing a long history of Church service by the Grangers, which has paralleled the phenomenal growth of the Fredericksburg parish. His grandfather emigrated from Germany in 1870 to the softly rolling hills of southern Stafford County. While the church cornerstone was laid in 1858, it was not until 1871 that the first resident priest was assigned to St. Mary, which had a Catholic population of 180.

Hugh, wife Anna, and two of his three children still live on the same bucolic 50 acres on Leeland Road in the midst of the explosive suburban

got Hugh reflecting on the fact that the original church site on Princess Anne Street, used as a hospital during the Civil War, had no bathroom.

"If there were an emergency, the usher would have to escort the person over to the parish hall which was behind the church building," he remembered.

The 7 a.m. Sunday Mass ushering team clearly misses their longtime associate who has made a remarkable recovery from his Christmas Day stroke. Arney Johnson, Michael Holmes, Patrick Murphy and Richard Zelenock all were effusive in their praise and admiration for Granger, calling him "a super guy who was quiet, capable, loyal and unassuming."

"You feel good being in his presence," said Murphy, "because he is one of those rare people you meet in life who doesn't seem to have a downside; he's always extremely pleasant and appreciative. In addition, he loves a good joke."

While no one has done any serious checking of diocesan records, St. Mary Church in Fredericksburg feels secure in claiming, in the person of Hugh B. Granger, the "Usher



DECADES OF SERVICE — Anna and Hugh Granger stand near a statue of the Blessed Mother on their Stafford County farm. Hugh is holding a cherished photo of his childhood pastor, Fr. Joseph V. Brennan, who was at St. Mary Parish in Fredericksburg from 1929-36.

Extraordinary" award. With more than 67 years in ministry, it will be a hard record to beat.

4123106
MAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Memories are for Sharing

If you were among those who worshipped at the downtown St. Mary on Princess Anne Street—please consider sharing your memories and reminiscences with our Reunion Day committee. Reunion Day will be held as part of the annual Family Picnic on June 11.

You can write down your memories or dictate them to a family member or friend or you can schedule an interview with a member of this parish committee who would then write your recollections for inclusion in the proposed publication. Photographs from the pre-1971 period are also welcome. **The deadline for submissions is April 30.** Please call Kathleen Mahoney, 540-371-2073 (bmah761569@aol.com) for more information or to schedule an interview.

Father James J. Widmer was born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1903 of German-Swiss convert parents, according to a church history by Philip V. Brennan. He became pastor of St. Mary in 1942 and celebrated the silver jubilee of his priesthood in May of 1954 . He died in 1959. Many parishioners, like Virginia Havasy, speak of him in heroic terms.

Father Widmer was a wonderful priest. I first met him when we moved to Garrisonville, January 1, 1948. We began going to Midway Island where he had a mission church. When we moved closer to Fredericksburg a year later, we began going to St. Mary's. We had four little boys at the time. Steve, Jr. began going to Montfort Academy in the first grade as soon as school started. Father Widmer was happy to welcome us to St. Mary's since he knew us from Midway. From the very beginning we had fallen in love with Father for he was so open, very happy, and caring.

Father Widmer worked so hard doing everything. I helped with the dinners and other activities to help raise money for St. Mary. My husband Steve and I also worked hard for many activities of Montfort Academy. Although Montfort was not a parochial school, he treated it like it was. He was there for confessions, arranged for confirmation, attended graduations, and did whatever and whenever he was needed.

When we were in our small church on Princess Anne Street, we knew almost everyone. We worked together on many projects. We had dinners, rummage sales (yard sales today), and many other ways to earn money for the church and to build and furnish the parish house. The more we worked together the closer we became.

When Steve and I had a girl after six boys, almost everyone in the church congratulated us. One of the boys' friends asked my husband at church the next Sunday, "Why did she have to do it?" He meant have a girl. I told my boys they had a basketball team, a substitute, and a mascot.

Father Widmer loved fried chicken. We lived on a farm and raised chickens. We would get fifty newborn chicks and raised the roosters to frying size. He especially liked the breast when the bone had not hardened. We enjoyed having him so much.

St. Mary's had a Boy Scout Troop. When our four boys were members, the troop planned a week of camping. We could not afford to send all four so we decided that no one would go. When Father Widmer and Mr. Carlton Carpenter heard our boys weren't able to go, they sent word that they would help with the expense. My husband was a very proud man, and he did not want to take charity. Father Widmer drove out one night and explained that there was money for camping, and without the Havasy boys, the small troop did not want to go without them. Steve changed his mind and the four went.

We usually sat in the balcony at the old church. There was one family in particular who often came late. Their two sons would stomp up the stairs. The parents were very pious and were not aware of the things their sons did.

We remember other priests, but my favorite was Father Widmer.

If there were a top award for longevity, loyal service, and steadfast devotion to the Faith, Eleanor "Ellie" Mitchell would be a strong contender. This octogenarian is a much loved and respected lady of the parish who was the first person to submit her memories after our request was made:

I came to St. Mary's on Princess Anne Street sixty years ago in 1946. There were 350 parishioners. My three sons---Tommy, Johnny, and Berkley--were baptized, made their First Communion, and were confirmed there. They were all altar boys and served on Sundays as well as on weekdays at the 7 AM Mass.

The Council of Catholic Women (CCW) was started in the 1940's. Over the years I was vice president, treasurer, and bazaar chairman. I was there for the church's 100th anniversary. [Centennial Mass: Dec. 10, 1958---Ed.]

Toward the end of the 60's I was called to be part of a group to talk about building a new church. We were asked if we knew Emily Reed Dowling so that we could ask her if she would sell the church the land she owned on William and Stafford Avenue. I did know her and the very next day I saw her in downtown Fredericksburg in the old Woolworth's store. So I asked her if she would be interested in selling the property to the church. I told Father about our conversation, and she later did agree to sell it to St. Mary's. Twenty years later, much to my surprise, she came to my office where I worked (Mitchell Office Supply) and handed me \$50 in appreciation for this sale.

It's hard to believe that in 1946 when I came to town there were 350 parishioners and now in 2006 there are close to 17,000 parishioners!



Eleanor Mitchell's son Berkley was baptized by Fr. James Widmer. Shown are his godparents, the late Joe Amrhein, and Virginia Rose, Ellie's first cousin.

Elizabeth Terry, the widow of John Terry, now resides at an assisted living facility in the Massaponax section of Spotsylvania County. Despite considerable infirmities from a very severe bout with rheumatoid arthritis and three knee replacements, she was happy to participate in an interview about “the old days.” She also would be happy to chat in person with visitors from those old days.

In her native Indiana, she was Elizabeth Grissom and a cousin to the famous Gus Grissom. She and her husband John Terry came to the area in 1946 where they bought a 200-acre farm in Stafford County. She was happy to follow the pastor, Fr. Widmer, who had been transferred to Fredericksburg from Manassas, where they too had lived previously. They knew him there and loved him. Elizabeth called him “Exceptional!”

The Terrys chose this area because her husband worked for the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac (RF&P) Railroad. They decided that the City would be ideal since it was midway between Washington and Richmond.

“We just loved Montfort Academy! The sisters were great!” she enthused. All three children went to school there: Bobby, who is now with John Deere; Betty, who is an office manager; and Barbara, a nurse in Chesapeake.

Elizabeth said she was “active in everything.” She and Art Street were in charge of the CYO for a period. She was a substitute teacher at Montfort and did a lot with the Cub Scouts who met in the parish hall. Among the parishioners here, she greatly admired the Mountjoy Family for their many contributions to the local church as well as to St. William of York Church where she attended the dedication.

While she said she never pushed him, her husband became a convert and was a faithful church-goer even when she had to stay home because of her crippling condition. He took his instructions from the Montfort nuns.



This current photo shows the old St. Mary Church building in downtown Fredericksburg. Two law offices occupy the first floor, and upstairs there are apartments.

Gladys and Jim Bowen were newlyweds when they came to Fredericksburg in 1961. Jim, a pharmacist, began work and the couple set up housekeeping in a home across from the current St. Mary Church. Advertisements in the church bulletin like this one on March 15, 1970, were common: "Bowen Liggett Drugs at 439 Jefferson Davis Boulevard: James Bowen, R. Ph and David Roulley, R. Ph. And the ad mentions "Top Value Stamps"!

Gladys remembered thinking, "How old is this church anyway?" when she first saw her new parish on Princess Anne Street. She had never been in such an old church. In an interview, she recalled how she felt like a minority for the first few years in town. At least Catholics were not such an oddity then in 1961 as they had been, apparently, thirty years or so before. Gladys shared a conversation the Bowens had with their friend and fellow pharmacist, Dr. John Barrett. He told them that when he had come to the area in the 1930's, "People would come out of their homes just to see what a Catholic looked like."

It wasn't until their son Jimmy began kindergarten at Montfort Academy in 1967 that they began to make the acquaintance of other Catholics in the area. Naming just a few of the many good friends, she recalled the Thomas Tharp family, Ray and Mooneyan Jones, the David Roulley family, the Murphys, the Kennedys, and the Elwells. Like most of the Montfort parents, Jim and Gladys kept busy with projects that helped the private Catholic school thrive like bingo games and family dinners. Their daughter Karan, born in 1965, joined the Montfort family. She was a member of the first First Communion class at the new church.

Photo 1: Jimmy Bowen and Jim Tharp on First Communion Day in late 60s.
 Photo 2: Montfort 8th Grade 1950-51 Picnic, courtesy of Nancy Burton
 Holy Card: Centennial souvenir, courtesy of Nancy Burton



1858 1958

Souvenir

of the Centennial of

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Fredericksburg, Va.

Pontifical Mass

DECEMBER 10, 1958

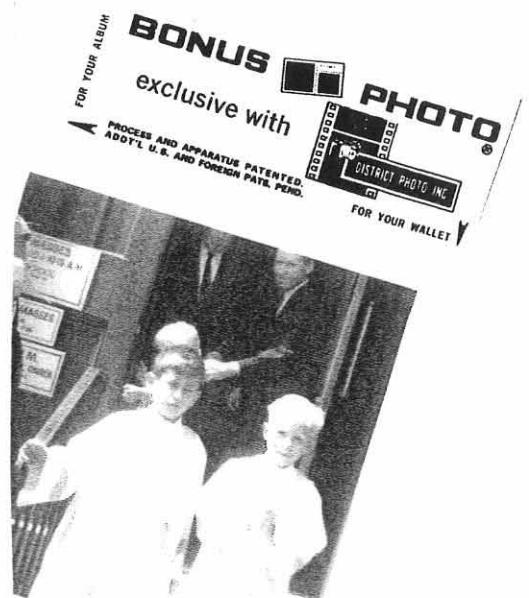
Celebrant

Most Rev. JOHN J. RUSSELL, D. D.
 Bishop of the Diocese
 of Richmond

Sermon

Msgr. JUSTIN D. McCLUNN, J.C.D.
 Chancellor — Diocese of
 Richmond

Rev. JAMES J. WIDMER, *Pastor*
 Rev. EDWARD J. McLEAN



THE EDITOR LOOKS BACK

When I first drove by the original St. Mary Church at 706 Princess Anne Street in late summer of 1965, I was close to tears. The antebellum structure looked past its prime, even a bit decrepit. Coloring that first impression probably was a considerable homesickness. Married just a week to Bernie Mahoney, an assistant professor of chemistry at Mary Washington College, it was my first experience living out of New Hampshire. Furthermore, my St. Pius X parish in Manchester was directly across the street from my home on land from the original McCabe family farm. That beautiful modern structure was not quite ten years old at the time, so the thought of worshipping in this old place with the condemned choir loft was sobering.

In the Fredericksburg area of 1965, there was no choice such as exists today with St. Patrick, St. Matthew, St. William of York, and St. Jude. It was "Take it or leave it!" Bernie and I certainly were not going to leave it. The welcoming attitude of the parish community made us quickly feel at home, and we experienced the great joys and stability of raising our children--- Brian, Karen, and Brendan--- in the church.

To spotlight just a single memory can be difficult, but I've chosen one April Sunday that illustrates some of the Catholic customs of the late Sixties. Karen was a newborn in 1968, sleeping in her bassinet, and I was preparing to go to the later Mass as soon as Bernie came home from the earlier one. Waiting and attired in high heels and hat, I was keeping an eye on little Brian, 22 months old, when I spotted some of the Janis family, friends and neighbors on Normandy Avenue at the time, walking purposefully up the street. Vehicle problems had forced the large clan to set off on foot for Mass. I offered them a ride, and Kay asked to use the phone to round up quickly the stragglers so they could pile into my car too. In the seconds it took me to show her the phone, little Brian had toddled off. My instincts told me to head to the nearby Rappahannock River, a favorite spot on our walks and stroller rides. Sure enough, I clomped down to the river (as fast as I could go in high heels!) and discovered he had crossed busy Fall Hill Avenue and was happily teetering at the water's edge. It was the first time, but definitely not the last, that his Guardian Angel would be working overtime.

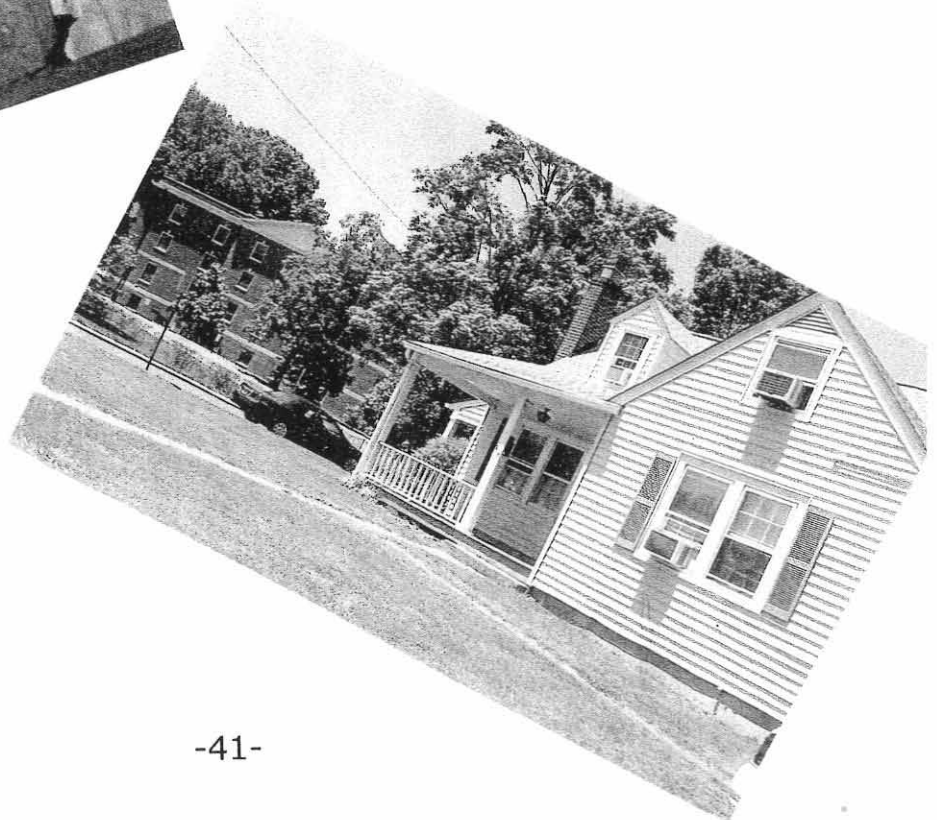
Modern parents might be wondering "Why all the business with the separate Mass attendance?" At the time, young families generally felt Sunday Mass was not the place for infants and toddlers and that the natural cranky crying of this young set was not conducive to a respectful and prayerful attendance at Mass either for fellow worshippers or for the parents themselves. And so, if the distance was not too great, many parents customarily went to separate services. But what about "Suffer the little children..."? Young parents would introduce their little ones to the solemnity of church via quiet "visits" at other times during the week. And oh, should we go back to those hats and high heels? Few indeed would vote for that attire, but even a casual observer today often notices Mass attendees who are badly in need of a dress code.

Because of church, community, and the College, Bernie and I are grateful for forty years of great living in Fredericksburg. We feel we came during an exciting period in our local history which was marked by religious

tolerance and a wonderful ecumenical spirit. The ecumenism was most evident during the months that we were "church-less." That was the period when we had sold the 1858 Princess Anne Street complex to the Church of the Nazarene to get the funds to build the William Street site. (The dedication was June 1971.) Through the kindness of other denominations, we had a place for weekly Mass and worshipped at St. George Episcopal, Trinity Episcopal, and Arwood Church of God on Stafford Avenue. (The auditorium at James Monroe High School was another scene of our Sunday Masses.)

The photo at left shows Fr. John Meehan baptizing our first son, Brian B. Mahoney, in June of 1966. Godparents are Gerry McCabe Landry, the editor's sister, and Ray J. Landry now of South Carolina.

The other photo is current and shows the Fredericksburg house at 917 William Street on the corner of Sunken Road below the University. This building served as a temporary rectory and office for Rev. Vincent Sikora. Our second son, Brendan M. Mahoney, was baptized there in March of 1971.



A TREASURE HUNT:

Tracking down sacred items from old St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church, Princess Anne Street, Fredericksburg, Virginia

Through chance conversations, submitted recollections, and hot tips, the editor was able to hunt down several sacred items, both large and small, that were associated with the old site of St. Mary. The circumstances surrounding their current locations are not all known completely, but thankfully the items, with one exception, are being used in a reverential manner and in accord with Catholic tradition.

The exception is the church altar which is now located at the Ingleside Winery in the Oak Grove section of Westmoreland County. Acting on a kind tip from Bill and Nancy Smithdeal, the editor found the cherished piece there and, by comparing photos, confirmed that it was the old altar. It still bore the small identification brass plate at its bottom: "josephinum Church Furniture Co., Columbus, Ohio."

Doug Flemer, the owner of Ingleside Vineyards on the historic Northern Neck, was extremely cordial and cooperative when first contacted but was unable to provide much background. He wrote: "I have asked about the altar that we now have in our wine shop. It seems no one knows the origin except that we purchased it from an antique dealer in Fredericksburg some time in the late 80's or early 90's." The editor accepted his invitation to come down and photograph the piece. Surprisingly, it was made to look like marble, but it was not which this writer had always assumed. At some point the all-white original had been painted with some blue trim on the front and with some red trim on each end. It is used as a counter and for wine tastings.

Many of the actual linens for that altar are much farther away than Westmoreland County---they went to Alaska! When Mary Janis Kassoock was leaving to serve in a Jesuit mission as a lay volunteer there around 1975, Father Vincent Sikora, pastor, asked if she would like to take along some of the extra altar cloths. Needless to say, the missionary priests were delighted to have the collection.

The Janis home on Dandridge Street has some treasures also associated with the altar: candelabra that were most probably used for benediction at the old church. While Kay Janis cannot pinpoint the exact year, she remembered getting a call from someone at the rectory asking if she would be interested in making a donation and purchasing these items from a group of things which had been stored in the rectory garage. Other longtime parishioners also received inquiries about purchasing items.

The Stations of the Cross from the Princess Anne site can be now found at St. Matthew Catholic Church in Spotsylvania County. Part of the recollection from Janet Kulesz Martin (as found elsewhere in this publication) gives some background.

The statue of the Infant of Prague that was in the old church has had a place of honor in the home of Josie and Rupert Silver for about 40 years. In the mid 1960s after Vatican II, a spirit of modernization became common in

the Church and the devotion to the Infant of Prague was a casualty, according to some observers. According to the Silvers' recollections, Fr. Ross Muir, the pastor at the time, was making some changes in the church building which did not include this particular statue. He offered it to Josie and she gladly accepted.

Finally, a very large item that just has to be labeled a first-class survivor is the church bell. The bell's story has been told by J. William Mann, author of *Bells and Belfries and Some of Neither* (1993), in which he uses the literary device of personification to relate in charming fashion the perilous story of the St. Mary bell. The editor gratefully acknowledges Mr. Mann for his permission to cite the Cinderella story of the 2600 pound bell that is inscribed with its origins: McShane Bell Foundry, Baltimore, Maryland, July 3, 1903. It stayed downtown with the Nazarenes who bought the St. Mary complex. The bell did eventually find its way home to the Catholics when the complex was sold to Beaclair Restorations Partnership. Mike Huie, one of the partners at the time and a St. Mary parishioner, proved to be the bell's charming prince, according to the author, in seeing that the church bell was moved to the William Street site. For more on the bell's history, read Mr. Mann's book. Copies are still available for sale.

