

## Mount Marty High School

## 'A Dream Come True'

The All-Girl Mount Marty High School Provided Educational Opportunities

EDITOR'S NOTE: Author Linda Wuebben is a graduate of Mount Marty High School in Yankton.

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Educational opportunities in Yankton have always been strong, but over the years some of the early opportunities have slowly faded away. Still, they are missed like Mount Marty High School (MMHS), an all-girl high school on the campus of today's vibrant Mount Marty College.

In the late 1800s, five Sisters of the order of St. Benedict from the Maria-Rickenbach Monastery in Switzerland traveled to the lonely prairies beyond the Mississippi where the buffalo still roamed. They carved a home for the Sacred Heart Monastery on the bluffs of the Missouri River where the order remains today.

The early nuns assisted Bishop Martin Marty whose mission was to work with the Native Americans living in the area. In essence, they were teachers and the natural progression followed in 1922 when the Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart Monastery opened Mount Marty Academy. The first year it offered classes to 36 girls and five boys but it was the only year the boys would attend the academy.

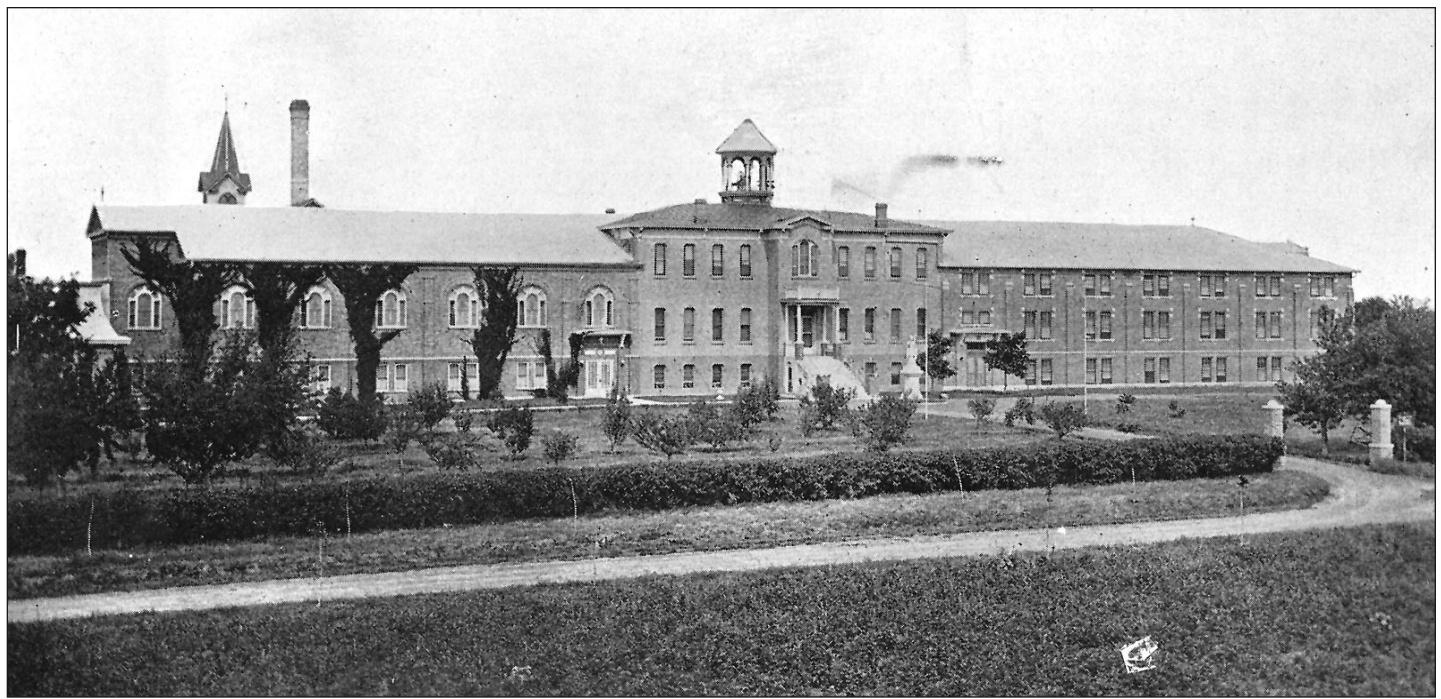
The five Sisters who formed the first teaching staff along with one lay woman, whose names may still be recognized like Jerome, Thomasine and Stanislaus, had only graduated from college themselves. To their credit, the excellence of the new school was immediately recognized and accredited by the State just two months after it opened its doors.

The philosophy of the all-girl teaching institution was simple: the Sisters recognized the need and opportunity to serve young women and their growing desire to pursue higher education. By 1926, eight young women had entered Sacred Heart Monastery after graduating from Mount Marty Academy and that influx of young women pursuing religious life continued through the 1950s.

The next step for continuing education was to provide still another level of higher learning to area women and the growing number of young sisters. Although the Sacred Heart School of Nursing had also been open since 1905 in cooperation with Sacred Heart Hospital, the Sisters established a junior college and the Bede building was built in 1936. The first class taught was physics.

By then the Academy had outgrown the convent and it joined the junior college in Bede where it located to the third floor. It became known as Mount Marty High School (MMHS) when its name was officially changed in 1945. The third and fourth years for the college were also added during the time up to 1950 and in 1951, the first baccalaureate degrees in arts and sciences were granted. In 1964, the nursing school was closed and young women enrolled in the four-year baccalaureate nursing program at Mount Marty College.

For the families of the 1,192 young women who graduated from Mount Marty High School



COURTESY PHOTO

An archival photo of Mount Marty Academy, which opened in 1922 in Yankton. In its first year of operation, the school educated 36 girls and five boys — the only year that boys were ever educated at the school.

during the 47 years it was open, it was affectionately called "The Mount." By 1963, there were 213 girls enrolled at MMHS including students from South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Wyoming, Montana and Kansas as well as Kenya, Mexico and South America.

By this time the Sisters could no longer ignore the growing pains of their educational institution and hired a consultant to consider potential growth and options for satisfying the expanding enrollment at both the high school and college. A five-year plan would designate a new college residence hall to be built along with a separate building for MMHS. With much support from the Yankton community, a campaign for capital funds was successful. It was the first time in its history, Sacred Heart Convent had asked for support outside of its small community of sisters.

In the fall of 1966, the doors of MMHS were opened and for the students, it was like Camelot. New lockers, new classrooms, a sweet little gym, new locker rooms and showers — it was a dream come true. The students thrived enjoying government days, science experiments in the new lab, retreats and eventually a new computer-generated class schedule for a new teaching tradition. It was another first for MMHS — using computers to plan student class schedules.

Modular scheduling was introduced to the students with 25-minute classes, longer lab periods, group collaborations and much independent study. The students were being groomed to be self-starters, curious learners and encouraged to explore all levels of learning. Gone were hour-lectures and boring study halls.

It truly did seem like Camelot — a dream come true.

But during the long, blizzardy winter of 1968-1969, the Benedictine Sisters struggled with bal-

ancing the funding for both the high school and college institutions. When the MMHS students returned to classes in January 1969, they were gathered in the new gym, which still was shiny new, and listened to the grim announcement. MMHS would close at the end of the current term in May. A flood of tears, questions, demands and even letters from the community and outlying areas could do nothing to sway the Sisters.

In a newspaper clipping from the *Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan*, an official explanation from Mother Julia Hunhoff, prioress of the Convent, stated: "The high school has been one of our most cherished educational commitments since its opening in 1922 and its program is outstanding. However, in the face of the decreasing enrollments and the rapid rise in operating costs which Mount Marty High School has found increasingly difficult to meet, the decision to close represents a reasoned and realistic consideration of what we can and cannot do in providing educational opportunities."

The emphasis would be on education at a college level and not a private high school for girls. In the fall of 1969, Mount Marty College would be a co-educational institution occupying all the campus buildings including the new high school building.

When it closed, there were 158 students including 39 students who resided on campus. They were taught by a faculty of 16 Sisters and lay people and it was a quality experience for all who attended. The spirit and compassion which

was fostered and taught by the Sisters left a mark on every young girl who studied there. When they returned to their families and communities, they never forgot the many different ways they were touched by the Benedictine Sisters who carved their existence on a bluff overlooking the Mighty Mo.

When MMHS closed it, was at a height of educational expertise. The school was the first in South Dakota to win an all-expense paid trip to Valley Forge; the first to use computers for scheduling. The staff created community leaders, women who attained professional success and most of all, mothers who nurtured loving families and relationships like the Sisters did for them. Many women still remember fondly with great pride their high school years at "the Mount" and the lessons learned there.

The last few months were busy as the students vowed to make lasting memories while learning reading, writing and arithmetic. The all-school play was "The Wizard of Oz" and the students dreamed of a reprieve, somewhere over the rainbow, til the better end.

Just like the big screen hit at the time, the movie "Camelot," MMHS students used the theme for Senior Prom and sang the songs in the halls of Mount Marty. For one brief shining moment, there was place called Mount Marty High School — Camelot in all the students' hearts. So for all the MMHS alumni out there, "Unfailing loyalty we pledge anew, to thee, O Loving Alma Mater."

## Pickstown

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the museum included pictures of graduating classes and school activities; a floor plan of the school; sports trophies and individual sports awards; letter jackets; and a series of wall panels listing every known Pickstown teacher and student.

"There are also many unique small items in display cases, such as eighth grade diplomas from the initial James Avenue school signed by General Pick (the town's namesake)," Rhoades said.

## FOND MEMORIES

Trautman and Rhoades spearheaded a three-year effort that led to this summer's dedication of the Pickstown and Fort Randall Dam Museum. The experience intensified their love for their boyhood hometown.

Pickstown welcomed the continual influx of newcomers, Trautman said.

"Living in Pickstown and attending school there were some of the best years of my life," he said. "Pickstown was a unique place to live. The residents were mostly traveling construction workers with some local area families. We became one big family of people that were so happy to live in a place where they were welcome."

The construction workers and their families were seen as newfound friends rather than outsiders, Trautman said.

"It is my opinion that is what made Pickstown such a great place to live and go to school. With the constantly changing population and student body, we were always meeting new and interesting people," he said.

"However, we often said goodbye to some very good friends and have not seen some of them since. I never miss an opportunity to visit Pickstown, even if there is no one there that I know. "While we had many stu-

dents that attended that did not graduate from Pickstown, we can boast of many that were very successful in the lives."

Rhoades also holds fond memories of growing up in Pickstown from summer 1952 until graduating in 1955.

"Pickstown was a great place to live in those early days. There were no slums, no ugly spots, not a single tumble-down shack, no traffic problems, no congestion," he said.

"The streets in the carefully planned community were all hard-surfaced and clean. Private lawns and public grounds were nearly trimmed. Business concessions, theater, hospital, interdenominational church, hotel, school, shopping center and other structures were in sites calculated to best serve the residents and enhance the community aesthetically."

Pickstown drew widespread interest, Rhoades said.

"There was a freshness to Pickstown. The mood was quiet, business-like, homey and sedate," he said. "Transportation around the town was no issue as you could walk anywhere to get most of what was needed. If you didn't have a car and wanted to go to Lake Andes, there was a private taxi service costing \$1.50."

Rhoades enjoyed the constant influx of new and usually high-achieving students.

"The school had everything a student could want with small classes that provided a lot of individual attention if wanted," he said.

"My classmates were mostly all above-average students, with the testament being the high number that went on to very successful careers. High school students were able to get good-paying summer construction jobs with long hours at the dam which provided an above-average amount of money for the school year."

A number of the newly-arriving families included newly-discharged World War II veterans seeking opportu-

nity, Rhoades said.

"They were glad to have a place to call home, have a good paying job and had a work ethic and great can-do attitude — the essence of what Tom Brokaw writes about in the 'Greatest Generation,'" he said.

"And the town had a very high number of highly technical trained people and engineers who came with Corps of Engineers and construction companies. This was a strong influence on me to pursue an engineering degree."

Rhoades counts his friendship with Brokaw as a special part of the Pickstown experience.

"Tom Brokaw was a freshman when I was a senior. Looking back to that time, it is now obvious that he displayed inherent talents that served him well in his outstanding career," Rhoades said.

Brokaw returned to Pickstown this summer for a town reunion and the dedication program for the Pickstown and Fort Randall Dam Museum. The dam construction came on the heels of World War II, and the returning veterans known as the "Greatest Generation" completed the dam in just 10 years.

At this summer's reunion and ceremony, Brokaw likened his boyhood to a "Tom Sawyer" experience. However, he also realized he was living in a very special time and place.

Brokaw said a part of him will always remain with his Pickstown home. He remains grateful for the sacrifices of the Greatest Generation of World War II that made his life possible. He credited those veterans with exemplifying the "big ideas" that have made the United States a great nation.

"(Pickstown) was a thrilling place to grow and see beyond the borders of South Dakota," he said. "I was one of the luckiest members of the Lucky Generation."

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