

MURTHA Adeline Regina

Adeline, the youngest daughter of John and Mary Ann Murtha, remembered her teenage years as being "rather uneventful." She recalled "much helping at home with cooking, etc." "Coming at the end of a big family, I never found it hard to put in time," she said. But she added, characteristically, that she had "no complaints, no regrets."

Adeline attended Mount Pleasant High, where she says she "learned easily but didn't study enough." Once when Adeline came home and told her mother proudly that she was sixth in her high school class, Mary Ann replied, disgustedly, "You could be first if you worked."

She started to date "on and off" at the age of 16. Once she scandalized her Catholic mother by dating a "preacher's son." Her uncle Felix told Adeline's mother not to be so hard on the girl.

She worked in a millinery store as a teenager, trimming hats. She often said that that had been her favorite job. Her first job, however, was playing piano during silent movies at the Grand Theater. This job seems to have lasted only one afternoon--until her parents found out about it. In those days, movie theaters were not places that respectable young ladies were seen in.

She graduated from high school in May 1917, at the age of 16. Her sister Nell--who by that point had become Sister Theodosia--encouraged her to go to college at Seton Hill, a nearby Catholic college. Mary Ann was reluctant to let her go because she was afraid that Adeline would become a nun as well. (She might have made a good nun, she once told her son Pat.)

But Adeline had to quit Seton Hill after two years "because it was too hard on my people financially." Like many second-generation Irish-American women, she took up education as a profession; she taught for one year in North Huntingdon Township, and seven years in Mount Pleasant Township. Catholics could not get jobs as teachers in the borough of Mount Pleasant in those days. (In later years, Adeline had a strong aversion to discussing anything political--including whom she voted for in elections--and this was thought to stem from the expectation that schoolteachers were to have no politics.)

Most of Adeline's teaching was done at a one-room schoolhouse called Oak Grove School. Teaching eight grades of kids in a rural mining community was not easy. Adeline recalled teaching the children of African-American strikebreakers whom the Frick Company had brought in from the South, many of whom had never been to school before.

Adeline made good use of her summers: Often she would take trips, sometimes with her grade school classmate and lifelong friend Mary Queer. One year she took a cruise on the St. Lawrence River through the Thousand Islands. Another summer she took classes at Columbia University in New York City.