

Member of Class of '28 still pushes power of pen

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GREECE — Marcella Reichenberger Ennis remembers an employee at the *Democrat and Chronicle* in Rochester telling her that every letter to the paper represented the opinion of at least 500 people.

If that's truly the case, then Ennis, an inveterate letter-writer, has represented the interests of legions of people during the last 65 years.

"It has an influence," Ennis said of her opinionated correspondence. "I think you do it because you feel strongly about a particular subject."

A member of Nazareth College's first graduating class, Ennis began articulating her strong feelings with a letter penned to the Rochester newspaper in February, 1928.

She noted that the letter was prompted by an anonymously written essay published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, denouncing Catholicism. Ennis saw the essay as a subtle attack on Al Smith, New York's Catholic governor who would be nominated by the Democrats to run for president later that year. To many non-Catholic Americans, Al Smith was Catholicism and Catholicism was Al Smith, she recalled, and the essay only served to stir up the country's anti-Catholic sentiments.

"Certainly, it would be a painless and likewise safe method of spreading a little anti-Smith propaganda," Ennis wrote of the *Atlantic* essay.

A parishioner at Holy Name of Jesus Church, 15 St. Martin's Way, Ennis, a self-described political independent, has not stopped writing since she first took on that anonymous anti-Catholic back in 1928. Her letters have regularly appeared on the pages of Rochester's newspapers, and she is currently working on an opinion piece concerning education, she said. Ennis insisted on keeping secret her latest letter's contents until publication.

"I don't want you stealing my thunder," Ennis said.

In between penning her opinions, En-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Marcella Ennis was a member of Nazareth College's first graduating class in 1928. A parishioner at Holy Name of Jesus Church in Greece, Ennis has been a consistent letter writer to Rochester newspapers over the years. She received an honorary degree at last spring's commencement.

nis has found time to raise a family of five, and has held numerous volunteer and paid positions over the years.

She worked as a public-school teacher in a small town in the Adirondacks after graduating from college, and later studied library science at Syracuse University. She then served as Nazareth College's librarian for 10 years when she left her job in the 1940s to marry and to raise her family.

In the 1950s, Ennis became active in the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, and edited the organization's monthly paper, *The Counselor*. Later, in the 1960s, she put her writing talents to use again as a staff writer for the *Catholic Courier*, where she also worked in the circulation, advertising and secretarial departments.

In addition to writing for Catholic publications, Ennis has contributed fea-

tures to the senior and religion pages of Rochester's two daily newspapers from time to time.

She may be capable of lightning opinionated attacks with her pen, but she can also write with a poetic eye for physical detail. For example, take this section from a piece she recently wrote for Nazareth College's *Connection* magazine, in which she described the Glass House, a private Rochester residence donated to the Sisters of St. Joseph to be used as Nazareth's first building:

"Only hardy souls ventured into the college at night, for then the abundant glass, unthreatening by day, gave off a

truly eerie glow, and on the upper floors, the narrow dimly-lit corridors seemed to stretch into a menacing infinity," she wrote.

Ennis also enjoys a capability for reflection, which was evidenced the same year her predilection for political commentary revealed itself. In 1928, she wrote an editorial in Nazareth College's *Gleaner* that predicted the future of her pioneer class.

"Some day when we're old and past the point of being ashamed of it, we'll come poking around the new Nazareth, received with due honor by the faculty as oldest alumni," she commented. "The students will be bored but too polite to show it."

Ennis was right in respect to being received with due honor someday, but she turned out to be wrong in thinking the students would be bored with her.

Last spring, at the college's commencement, Nazareth conferred an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree upon her. According to the college, Ennis earned the honor because of a life marked by service to her fellow men and women through teaching, writing and through volunteering at nursing homes and various organizations that serve the poor and the needy.

Ennis recalled that at the ceremony, the assembled graduates stood and heartily applauded their fellow alumna as she received her honorary degree. Although she had been somewhat reluctant to receive the honor in the first place, Ennis — after seeing the ovation — acknowledged being moved to gratitude by the students' display of affection.

"The first and last time I'd ever get a standing ovation, I'm sure," she said.

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