

From Industrialist's Summer Home to the Fulfillment of the Dreams of Many Women

By Geraldine Burchell Dwyer-Riveiro



- In 1850, Robert E. Dietz, President of the Dietz, Brother & Company manufacturers of lamps and lanterns bought a large tract of land in Hempstead Plains. He built a 20 room summer home, an 11 room guest house and many outbuildings and barns. Mr. Dietz' youngest son Howard who had the title to a small plot of land on the south side of his father's land, built a house and lived there until he died in 1922
- The descendants of Mr. Dietz sold the land at auction on March 17, 1912. The property was bought by the Congregation of the Infant Jesus, Nursing Sisters of the Sick Poor. The large house was the first convent. Eventually, the land became the site of Mercy Hospital which was run by the Sisters, fulfilling the dream of a small group of Sisters who emigrated from France to minister to the sick. Whether the small plot of land that Howard Dietz owned was part of the auction is not clear. Some maps show the property as owned by Howard Dietz, and other maps show the owners as The Nursing Sisters. Maps after the auction and Howard Dietz' death show the owner as M. Jewett. The records of the transfers of ownership of this property were not found in multiple searches of Nassau County records.
- In 1942, the Dominican Sisters of Amityville purchased half of the property to build a Catholic college for women. The plan was to open the college in 1955, but the first building could not be completed in time. The Dominican Sisters looked for a property to lease and a house at 915 North Village Ave., Rockville Centre was available. This was the house originally owned by Howard Dietz.
- In 1943, the house was bought by Mr. & Mrs. Frank Ripp who had three children, Stanley, Frances and Kathryn. Frances and Kathryn became harpists at a very young age and performed at Carnegie Hall as children. In 1954, the house was sold to a builder, who in turn leased it to the Dominican Sisters. This was the start of the fulfillment of their dream.
- In September of 1955 43 young women arrived at this house to start their first day as college students. They were the Pioneer class of Molloy Catholic College for Women. They did not know it but they followed two very talented young women who as very young girls lived in that house and in the late 1940s were the subjects of a movie short sponsored by Woman, with the Woman's Digest which showed the girls running up the driveway to the house and playing their harps in the foyer. The title of the clip was "A Woman Speaks". The forward of this movie short conveys the spirit of all the Pioneers: the Sisters of St. Dominic, the Congregation of the Infant Jesus, the Ripp sisters, and the first class of Molloy Catholic College for Women---

“In every progressive activity often in fields once strange to her,
Today, Woman Speaks.”

- Unfortunately the house was demolished in 1957. But its spirit remains in the hearts of the original 43 women and all who followed them.

A different perspective

To the first class of Molloy Catholic College for Women, the address 915 North Village Avenue, Rockville Centre, NY conjures up many pictures that are deeply engraved in the minds of those 43 young women who dared to enroll in a college that was new with a campus still under construction. So, we attended that first year in a lovely old house. which was the original home of Robert Dietz, of the Dietz langern family, until it was auctioned off on March 17, 1912. The piece of land that Howard Dietz owned was not included in the auction. The Congregation of the Infant Jesus-the Nursing Sisters of the Poor, bought the land at that auction. They used the Dietz mansion as the original convent and eventually moved Mercy Hospital from Hempstead to this new site. The foresight of these women was amazing.

At the same time, the Amityville Dominican Sisters were planning to build a college for women, but did not have enough money and did not know where they would build it. After raising the money, they bought half of the Dietz land from the Congregation of the Infant Jesus in 1942 in hopes of building the college on that land. However, one more time they had to wait to raise enough money to complete their dream. That happened in 1954 and they wanted to open the school in September 1955. But the building which would become Quealy Hall would not be ready in time. They leased the house from the owner for one year. The owner was A. C. Jacobs construction co. They would eventually tear down the house and build 10 houses on that property.

The house and land has a wonderful history and is a testament to the courage and dreams of a large group of women, who made so much possible. Mercy Hospital and Molloy College, as they stand today would not be there if these women had not the strength to follow their dreams. We know that they had help from the local bankers, businessmen, families who could see their dream and a host of others. But the seed was theirs.

The house was the beginning of that dream, but the influence of girls and women went deeper than Molloy. The previous owners had two young girls that became accomplished harpists at very young ages. They were the subjects of a movie short sponsored by Woman, the Woman's Digest which showed the girls running up the driveway to the house and playing their harps in the foyer. The title of the clip was “A Woman Speaks”. The forward of this movie short conveys the spirit of the all the Pioneers, faculty and students alike.

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915 North Village Avenue was shown at the opening credits of this movie short *A Women Speaks*; a 20 second clip of the Ripp girls running up the driveway to the house can be seen by clicking here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/142675308@N04/48743907851/in/dateposted-public/>

If the link doesn't work then copy and paste it into a browser. Wait until the 15 second mark to see the girls running to the original home of Molloy at 915 North Village Avenue.

