

East Falls Past--Mae Mohr

The Fallser, April 2011, by Wendy Moody

Mae Mohr was “temporary” custodian at Old Academy for 40 years. We’re lucky to have this 1983 interview with her which includes some absorbing local history. Some excerpts:

When were you born?

1902 in Fishtown. We moved here in 1912 and lived at Labby Hill, 3632 Calumet, then Indian Queen Lane.

Were your parents born here?

No, Ireland. But they were married in East Falls at Grace Church.

What did they do?

My mother worked in Dobson Mills. In the olden days my father was a conductor in horsecars. Then he took up gardening, and worked for Percy Clark in Bala Cynwyd. Their daughter married Nelson Rockefeller and my father was invited to the wedding.

To Nelson Rockefeller’s?

Oh yeah, he was there. She was married at their place in Bala.

What did Warden Drive look like back then?

There were no houses, just ground. Except there was one place called the duck pond, where my brothers swam. Once they were caught by a park guard on a horse and they all ran through the woods. From Warden Drive to Henry, there was a spring that ran right down.

What would kids do for fun or mischief?

There was a man on Calumet who would walk on a back road that led to a tap room on Midvale. He carried a kettle, got it filled with beer, and brought it home around the back road. He did it every night, I guess he had it for supper, so the boys got a string and tied it from the post to the other post and when he’d reach it, he would trip and his beer went flying, but he just got up and walked right back to the saloon to get his kettle filled again!

Were there any disasters in Falls?

In 1952, Old Academy was on fire and the roof burned right out. Ten firemen tried to pull down the dome and the women around here said “Don’t tear that down! It’s a landmark!” So they took care nothing would happen to it.



Mae Mohr (center) acting

How did you start working at Old Academy?

My father worked there doing maintenance, making coffee and puddling around. He'd come home at noon to listen to Kate Smith and go back again. When he died at age 86, I took over until they found someone.

How old were you?

47. I've spent 33 years there.

That's quite a temporary job! What do you do?

I paint most all the sets and I've made several slipcovers for that red sofa. I do a little bit of everything. I keep saying I'm going to quit.

And you're how old?

81. (Note: Mae stayed almost until her death in 1996 at age 94).

Do any shows stand out?

They had me in one show. I said two words: "My daughter." They didn't put my name in the program; they wanted it to be a surprise. When I came out everyone hollered, "Miss. Mae, Miss Mae!" I don't even think they heard my line!

What would Old Academy do without you; you're an institution!

But I enjoy it.