

Margaret B. Downes, 76; mother of eight children

By Anne Roth Hueber
Staff Writer

Margaret Barrett Downes, who devoted her life to her husband, seven daughters and a son, died Sunday at University Hospital after a long struggle with cancer. She was 76 and lived at Onondaga Hill.

Mrs. Downes was a lifelong student. She didn't know Spanish, how to type or musical scales but thought her children should. She set about teaching them and in the process mastered the language, typing and music herself.

"By the time they knew it, she did," her husband, John, said today.

Mrs. Downes daughter Nancy, recalled her mother sitting at the kitchen table drinking tea and talking. "Even though she was busy she never seemed rushed or never said no when someone needed her."

The Downes family was featured in 1973 in the Franciscan magazine, "Friar." The story, titled "There's More of Everything," explained that in their home there was more laundry, cleaning, ironing, and dishes. "It also means more pleasure," Mrs. Downes said.

Friday night was family night, a time spent popping corn and playing games. When the Herald-Journal reported their activities, Mrs. Downes said, "We always stressed religious values and togetherness."



MARGARET DOWNES

in criminal justice.

All seven children have advanced degrees. Four daughters graduated from Le Moyne College and Mrs. Downes had a close affinity with the school. She was a charter member of its President's Association.

The devotion that she extended to her children was returned by them during her illness. "Although all but one lived away from Syracuse, on their own they drew up a schedule so that someone would always be with her to give her the loving care and attention she deserved," her husband said.

The family appreciated their Irish heritage. Mrs. Downes traveled to Ireland seven times and on two of those occasions the entire family traveled together. She also traveled to India as the guest of a cousin who was a Jesuit priest, an experience that developed into further study about the country and its customs.

Mrs. Downes was a native Syracusan, the daughter of Emma Herbert and Dr. Joseph Barrett, a dentist. When she was 16 the family traveled to Europe by ship. Also aboard was the English author, Rudyard Kipling. According to family lore, he took a shine to her and they became great companions during the crossing. His autograph, on the ship's menu, is a reminder of those days.

On her 21st birthday, Mrs. Downes was feted with a party at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. Guy Lombardo himself led the birthday song.

Mrs. Downes was a graduate of Georgian Court College in New Jersey. She taught English at Porter School before her children were born and after they were grown returned to teaching on a part time basis.

After her husband's retirement in 1978 as executive director of the Gifford Foundation, the couple took courses at Onondaga Community College, earning enough credits to receive associate's degrees

Mrs. Downes was 5 foot 7 inches tall with a trim figure. With brown eyes and auburn hair that had streaks of gray as she aged, she was an easy going placid person with a subtle sense of humor. She had the ability to keep friendships, some lasting more than 70 years.

Mrs. Downes was a member of Our Lady of Solace Church and St. Michael's Church, Onondaga Hill. A woman of deep faith, she formed a neighborhood Bible study group that lasted more than 10 years.

Surviving is her husband, John F.; seven daughters, Mary Seebach of Rochester, Peggy Downes of Asheville, N.C., Joanne Downes of Syracuse, Elizabeth Doyle of Bethesda, Md., Catherine Veltri of Danbury, Conn., Dorothy Downes of West Bethesda, Md., and Nancy Downes of Pittsburgh, Pa.; a son, Edward of Arlington, Va.; a sister, Mary Kane of Syracuse; 11 grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews.

Services will be at 9:15 a.m. Wednesday at John C. Tindall Funeral Home and 10 a.m. in St. Michael's Church where a funeral mass will be celebrated. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery, DeWitt.

Calling hours will be 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday at the funeral home, 1921 W. Genee St.

Contributions may be made to the Caring Coalition Hospice in Syracuse.