

VARNHORN, Mary C. July 8, 1914–November 9, 1988.

COLLEGE OF NOTRE DAME OF MARYLAND (BA 1936), CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA (MA 1937, PhD 1939).

Mary Catherine Varnhorn was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the daughter of Eleanor (Levy) (b. 1889) and John Henry Varnhorn (1890–1978), natives of Maryland. At the time of the 1920 census, she, her parents, and her brother, John, two years younger than she, were living in Baltimore with her mother's family. At that time her father was a commercial traveler. Later they owned their own home in Baltimore, and her father was described as a solicitor for a food company.

Mary Varnhorn did her undergraduate work at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland in Baltimore, where she was a student of [Sister Mary Cordia Karl](#). After her graduation in 1936 she began her graduate studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. She received her master's degree in 1937 and her PhD in 1939, having written a dissertation under the direction of Edward J. Finan, an assistant professor at the time. It was read and approved by Aubrey E. Landry, soon to retire, and J. Nelson Rice.

Varnhorn returned to the College of Notre Dame of Maryland as instructor for the year 1939–40. She then joined the faculty at Trinity College in Washington, D.C., in 1940, six years after the death of [Sister Marie Cecilia Mangold](#), who had directed the department for most of its previous history. When Varnhorn arrived at Trinity College (now called Trinity Washington University), she joined Sister Thomas Marie (Catherine Maloney), an associate professor who was studying for a PhD at Catholic, and Sister Mary Robert (Grandfield), who had joined the faculty the year Sister Marie Cecilia died. Sister Mary Robert left in 1941, and Sister Thomas Marie died rather suddenly in the fall of 1943, leaving the twenty-nine-year-old Mary Varnhorn alone in the department. At first, some courses were taught by Otto Ramler, professor at Catholic University, and then by various others who filled in.

Varnhorn remained at Trinity for the rest of her career. She was instructor 1940–44, assistant professor 1944–45, associate professor 1945–58, and professor 1958–78. From 1945 until her retirement, she was chairman of the department, which usually consisted of at most three people. She initiated a number of curricular changes in the early 1960s and was recognized especially for her commitment to teaching when she received, in 1965, the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* Medal for twenty-five years of service at Trinity College.

Varnhorn maintained her residence in Baltimore throughout her life and commuted into Washington. After her formal retirement in 1978 she taught two courses at Trinity College as an adjunct in the fall of 1978–79, and she taught briefly at Loyola College in Baltimore and at the University of Baltimore. She was a member of the Duodecimal Society of America (Dozenal Society of America since 1980), an organization for the conduct of research and education in the use of the base twelve number system. Varnhorn was a Democrat and a Roman Catholic. She was at one time president of the Mother Seton Mission Crusade Unit, a group devoted to helping the needy.

Mary Varnhorn died at age seventy-four of a respiratory ailment at St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore in 1988. She was survived by her brother. A memorial liturgy was celebrated at Trinity College on November 28, 1988.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, AAUP.

Thesis and dissertation:

1937 Some applications of the theory of matrices to polynomial equations. MA thesis, Catholic University of America, directed by Edward Jerome Finan. Typescript.

1939 Some properties of quartic functions of one variable. PhD dissertation, Catholic University of America, directed by Edward Jerome Finan. Printed for The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, by J. H. Furst Co., Baltimore, MD.

References to: AmMSc 7–8, 9P–11P; AmMWSc 12P–13P, 14–18; WhoAmW 1–2.

“Mary C. Varnhorn, Mathematics Professor.” (Obituary) *Washington Post*, 19 Nov 1988.

Other sources: Owens questionnaire 1940; Trinity College Archives; communication with College of Notre Dame of Maryland Archives; Mullaly, *Trinity College, Washington, D.C.: The First Eighty Years 1897–1977*; US Census 1900, 1920, 1930 MD.

Last modified: March 9, 2009.