


Flora Wertheim Scholarship

If I Were A Churchmouse

Thin light seeps through the colored glass, casting a bubbly translucent spotlight on the blue carpeted floor. Intricate paintings, though chipped in small spots, remain majestic overall. The high spiraling arches reach toward the heavens, as if they too were praising God's glory. The dark pews, once glossy, have lost some of their sheen over the years due to the steady wear of time. The statues of various saints and angels look serenely down upon the pews, their expressions one of peaceful devotion. I couldn't help but think that if I were a churchmouse, I would want to be one right here in St. Mary's Catholic Church.

St. Mary's is more than just a sacred space—it is a symbol of the faith, resilience, and identity of Fredericksburg. While today it stands as a majestic, towering structure, the church's origins are humble, reflecting the growth and transformation of the town itself. The first St. Mary's, built in 1848, was a log cabin-style church constructed by the Adelsverein, a German society of noblemen who had settled in the area. This small church was the center of the early Catholic community in Fredericksburg, an area founded by German immigrants seeking a place to establish their faith and culture.

As the town grew, particularly after the Civil War, so too did the need for a larger place of worship. The "new" St. Mary's was built in 1906 from native stone quarried nearby. This grander church was the result of the hard work and generosity of a growing Catholic population, many of whom had arrived from Germany to start anew. The church's construction was costly, totaling around \$40,000, a significant sum at the time. But this investment in faith and culture would become a lasting symbol of the town's values.

~~St. Mary's~~ The church's architectural design is a reflection of its German heritage. St. Mary's features high, spiraling arches and intricate detailing that evoke the gothic style, with each element seeming to point toward the heavens. The craftsmanship in the stonework and woodwork is a testament to the skill of the artisans and the dedication of the community. Yet, it's not just the physical structure that makes St. Mary's so special. The stained-glass windows, added in 1914-1915, are among the most cherished aspects of the church. These windows, created from actual photographs of two children who had passed away at an early age—James, the son of Robert Blum, and Erma, the daughter of contractor Jacob Wagner—serve as a poignant reminder of the church's role in the lives of the local community. The dedication of a window for young Erma, who passed away while her father was still working on the church, speaks volumes about the bonds between the church and the families it served.

One of the most beloved stories surrounding St. Mary's is a local legend that has been passed down through generations. During a particularly hot summer, workers were hauling stones to the construction site of the church. It is said that Christ himself appeared to one of the workers and asked, "Was tuest Du?" (What are you doing?). The worker, tired and weary, complained about the grueling task. Christ then asked a second worker, who responded in a similar fashion. But when Christ asked a third man, he replied, "I'm building a Cathedral for the glory of God!" Christ, pleased with the response, blessed the man and went away.

This story speaks to the enduring spirit of the people of Fredericksburg. It reflects the deep sense of purpose that has always guided the community—whether it's the hard work of building a church or the devotion to preserving its history. It is a tale that highlights the connection between the people and their faith, where even the smallest of tasks is done in the name of a higher calling.

Fredericksburg is a town with a story to tell, one that is woven together through the threads of its history, its people, and its commitment to faith and culture. Founded in 1846 by German immigrants, Fredericksburg quickly became a hub of German-American culture in Texas. The town's roots in both German traditions and Catholicism are evident in the many churches, festivals, and cultural institutions that continue to shape its identity today.

One of the town's most prominent features is its historic district, where buildings from the 19th century line the streets, each with its own story to tell. The Fredericksburg Historic District is home to a wide variety of architecture, from charming cottages to stately homes, and is a testament to the town's prosperity during the 1800s. Many of these buildings have been lovingly preserved, allowing visitors and residents alike to walk through the past as they explore the town today.

Beyond its architecture, Fredericksburg is known for its vibrant arts scene, which has flourished over the years. The town is home to a thriving community of artists, musicians, and craftspeople who draw inspiration from the natural beauty of the Hill Country and the rich history of the area. Fredericksburg is also famous for its wineries, a nod to the town's German heritage, as well as its lively festivals, including Oktoberfest, which celebrates the town's German roots with food, music, and dance.

The community of Fredericksburg is deeply connected to its past, and this connection is most evident in the way the town embraces its history. St. Mary's Catholic Church stands as a beacon of this heritage, a place where people of all denominations and faiths can come to admire the artistry and craftsmanship that went into its creation. It is a symbol of the enduring spirit of

the community, a place where the past and present come together to honor the sacrifices and faith of those who built the town.

As I sit in St. Mary's, surrounded by the soft glow of stained-glass windows and the peaceful presence of saints and angels, I am reminded of the powerful legacy that this church, and indeed Fredericksburg itself, holds. It is a legacy of faith, of devotion, and of a community that has always understood the importance of preserving its history and culture. Whether it's the legend of Christ visiting the workers or the ongoing dedication to maintaining the church and town's historic charm, Fredericksburg's heart beats in rhythm with the stories of those who have come before us.

In the end, Fredericksburg is more than just a town; it is a living, breathing testament to the power of art, culture, and faith. Every old building, every main street shop, and every local resident holds a piece of this town's soul. And St. Mary's Catholic Church, with its soaring arches and quiet serenity, stands as a testament to the enduring power of faith and community—a place where the past is honored, and the future is embraced with open arms.