Recently the MMS Archives has received some questions about Sr. Eileen Niedfield, a.k.a. Sr. M. Frederic Niedfield, especially about her work in Bhutan. While doing research, I was so impressed by the richness of her long life that I wanted to share her story. - Lucy Hall (MMS Archivist)
Sr. Eileen Niedfield lived an extraordinary life full of faith and love for others. She was born on June 16, 1920, in New York City, and entered the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries (Medical Mission Sisters) in 1938. This was early enough in Society history that the Novices lived in one apartment building, and the sisters lived in another, separate apartment building. Sr. Eileen entered the Society at the age of 16.

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In 1941, she received her B.A. at Trinity College (now Trinity Washington University) in Washington, D.C., and her M.D. from Georgetown University Medical School in 1951. She was in the first class of women admitted to the medical school. She graduated as a Catholic. No great parental opposition to religious life. Nothing to fight really, except the old Ego, and that's a lifetime proposition. No moment when I had to get up guts enough to come to the point myself, and just get on with my life's work… No great struggle to become a Catholic. No great potential opposition to religious life. Nothing to fight really, except the old Ego, and that's a lifetime proposition. That's all. And I love Him all the more for it. I've found what I was looking for."

She declined as it was hard work, and lonely work. Originally, she had hoped other MMS would join her, but that did not happen.

Sr. Eileen spoke fondly of her time in Bhutan and the people she met there. The Bhutan government asked her to renew her contract, but she declined for it. "I've found what I was looking for."

"It certainly wasn't a vacation. It was the end result of the influence of my parents, teachers, and friends, operating all my life until the moment when I had to get up guts enough to come to the point myself, and just get on with my life's work… No great struggle to become a Catholic. No great potential opposition to religious life. Nothing to fight really, except the old Ego, and that's a lifetime proposition. That's all. And I love Him all the more for it. I've found what I was looking for."

He let the "tree grow in Brooklyn." Which is the way that God usually works in this business of a religious vocation. He gave me the desire and of an appreciation of their dignity."