SAINT MARY'S IN TRANSITION 1992-9

ACADEMY TO COLLEGE

1895-1905

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Saint Mary's Academy, Notre Dame, Indiana, an institution for the higher education of "young ladies" conferred its first baccalaureate degree in 1898, more than forty years after it was empowered to do so by its charter from the State of Indiana. The second article of this document reads, "The purpose of the Association . . . is to establish an Academy of learning for the education of young ladies in the various branches of the arts and sciences usually taught in female academies of the highest standing; and to confer such degrees upon scholars as are usual in such institutions."[1] This graduation seems auspicious to the historian, but at the time it was considered the normal course of events as is indicated by a brief reference to it in a three-page article on the commencement which appeared in the July issue of the Academy students' monthly publication, Saint Mary's Chimes: "Next followed the part of the programme most important to the students--the conferring of honors; and first on the list was Miss Agnes Ewing Brown, who amid a storm of applause, received at the hands of Right Reverend Bishop Rademacher, the Degree of Bachelor of Letters."[2] To the Saint Mary's of 1898 the event was not unusual or unique, but it was, in fact, the acceptance of a larger role in the higher education of women which had been planned by the Sisters of the Holy Cross who founded the Academy. Their growth as a religious congregation parallels, in those early years, the growth of this, their first educational establishment in the United States.

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[1]Charter of St. Mary's Academy, Congregational Archives, Sisters of the Holy Cross.

[2]"Forty-Third Annual Commencement," St. Mary's Chimes, VI (July 1898), p. 167.

It would take us far afield to trace in detail the beginnings of Saint Mary's Academy, set early upon a firm academic foundation by Mother M. Angela Gillespie (1824-1887) who directed its progress from her entrance into the Congregation in 1853 until her death thirty-four years later. In her capacity as provincial superior she traveled extensively throughout the United States coordinating the work of the various educational institutions of the Congregation in California, Utah, Texas, and Washington, D.C., as well as Indiana and Illinois. Administrative business necessitated several voyages to LeMans, France, where at that time the Motherhouse was located.

Mother Angela was a woman well-fitted for challenging tasks. She was reared in a political and intellectual atmosphere in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, and Lancaster, Ohio. There were professional men on both sides of the family--doctors, lawyers, judges, and even Civil War Generals Hugh Ewing and William T. Sherman. James G. Blaine, presidential candidate, was a first cousin and companion of her childhood days. Upon her graduation from Georgetown Visitation Academy in Washington, D.C., she organized, administered, and trained teachers for a parochial school at the request of her pastor. After a year of teaching at St. Mary's Seminary (Episcopalian), in Maryland, so successful that she was offered the principalship to induce her to remain, Mother Angela applied for admission to the Sisters of the Holy Crsss, was accepted, and a year later became the Congregation's first American-born superior.

Mother's accomplishments during her community life indicate the scope of her interests and abilities. She founded thirty-six institutions--schools, academies, and hospitals. During the Civil War she directed nursing services at four military hospitals in the border states. She

was the author of the Metropolitan and the Excelsior series of readers, and the editor of the Ave Maria, a weekly magazine published at Notre Dame. A leaflet printed for the dedication of St. Angela Hall at St. Mary's in 1892 speaks of her as an educator. "To the end of her days Mother Angela remained a student. Her extensive acquaintance with the various departments of arts, science, history, and literature excited the admiration of those even who knew her most intimately. . . . She began her life work at a period when genuine apostles of female education were few and much needed. Like the Saint of Merici, Mother Angela had lofty ideals, and inspired those around her with a desire of attaining the highest excellence. Her ambition was to accomplish for the higher education of women what others had achieved for elementary instruction--to make it thoroughly Christian in character and purpose."[3] Eliza Allen Starr, a close friend of Mother Angela and head of the art department at St. Mary's, referred to Angela's aspirations for St. Mary's: ". . . the so-much-talked-of 'higher education' of today was always in the mind and marked out on the chart of the future by Mother Angela."[4] This same idea in expressed by Angela's biographer. "From the first it had been Sister Angela's intention to provide for the higher education of women as soon as means would permit. Accordingly, in the charter issued February 28, 1855, Saint Mary's Academy was authorized to grant degrees."[5]

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[3]Archives, Sisters of the Holy Cross.

[4]"A Western Educational Centre," Catholic World, LIX (April 1894), 31.

[5]Anna Shannon McAllister, Flame in the Wilderness (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1944), p. 126.

And so they did, but not until 1898, four years after Mother M. Pauline O"Neill (1854-1935) had been elected Directress of Studies. This brings us to the point of this study: What were the conditions that brought about the transition of St. Mary's from an academy to a collegiate status? In seeking an answer to this question I have concentrated on the decade ending in 1905, the year that St. Mary's assumed the title "College" in its official publications. For the purpose of this study I have assumed that the development of any educational institution is determined: first, by its long-range objectives; second, by the calibre of its faculty; third, by the value of its curriculum; and fourth, by the vision, foresight and effectiveness of its administrators.

We have already indicated the broad objectives Mother Angela had in mind in the formative years of St. Mary's. By 1872 several outstanding academic students were enrolled in postgraduate courses in art and classical studies. There is no indication of a structured program for such students until 1897 when the Forty-Third Annual Catalog contained the following information: "All candidates for degrees must arrange their course of study with the Directress of the Academy, give evidence of their ability to follow such a course, and an assurance of their willingness to comply with all the established rules and regulations of the Institution. . . .The first year's work constitutes minor courses; the second year completes them, forming studies into major courses, which, variously joined, are taken as groups which may be followed as elected."[6] Here we see the hand of Mother Pauline instituting such changes as were necessary to bring to fruition the plans for a four-year collegiate program at St. Mary's.

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[6]P. 11.

Mother Pauline, who directed the destiny of St. Mary's from 1895 until 1931, had a clear objective in mind. Like Mother Angela and Mother M. Annunciata (1836-1900) who preceded her, she was a member of the governing board of the Congregation, and thereby in a position to provide the means for the implementation of her plans. Early in her term of office the following statement of purpose appeared in the Catalog under her signature: "St. Mary's takes as a working basis Most Reverend John Lancaster Spalding's definition of education, namely, 'the soul's response to God's appeal to make itself like unto Himself: active, knowing, wise, strong, loving and fair.' It stands for the highest development of mind and heart, and aims to make its students women of ideas rather than women of mere accomplishments, to bring them into personal relations with wider worlds, larger life, by placing before them truth as far as it may be apprehended, truth in its various aspects--literature, history, science and art."[7]

Pauline's inclusion of Bishop Spalding's definition of education is indicative of the chief source of her philosophy of education. She became a life-long friend of this eminent churchman and educator who had been a frequent visitor at the O'Neill home in Peoria, Illinois. At Mother Pauline's invitation he often came to St. Mary's to give lectures, address the Alumnae Association, preside at special exercises, or visit informally. A close friend of Mother Pauline's has said, "Another influence telling greatly on the decisions of her life and labors was exerted by the Most Reverend John Lancaster Spalding, Bishop

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[7] Fifty-Eighth Yearbook of St. Mary's College and Academy, p.7.

of Peoria, whose friendship accompanied her through life."[8] The same writer states that it was at Spalding's instigation that Mother undertook the venture of expanding St. Mary's curriculum to include a full four-year college program.[9] Since Bishop Spalding's ideas had so strong an influence on the development of St. Mary's, some discussion of them is necessary in order to substantiate this assertion.

John Lancaster Spalding was an outspoken proponent of higher education for women, and he lost no opportunity to make his ideas on this subject well understood. "Women not less than men need strong and open minds, the capacity to form definite ideas and sound judgments, to deduce conclusions logically from premises, to weigh evidence and to estimate the value of proof. . . .The more thoroughly educated a woman is the more able she is to fulfill in a noble way the duties of wife and mother. The primary aim, however, is not to make a good wife and mother any more than it is to make a good husband and father. The educational ideal is human perfection. . . .Woman's sphere lies wherever she can live nobly and do useful work.[10] An editorial in The Independent which quoted largely from Bishop Spalding's sermon in Rome on Americanism included this statement: "We must give to woman the best education it is possible for her to receive. She has the same right as man to become all that she may be, to know whatever may be known, to do whatever is fair and just and good. In souls

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[8]Sister M. Francis Jerome O'Laughlin, Pioneers and Builders (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1941), p. 100.

[9]Ibid., p. 105.

[10]John Lancaster Spalding, Opportunity and Other Essays (Chicago, 1903), pp. 55, 58.

there is no sex."[11]

While he spoke on the importance of higher education for women, the Bishop realized that such opportunities had not yet been developed within the Catholic educational system. As the result of its losing battle for the retention of religious training according to the choice of the parents in the public schools, the Catholic Church expended its energies in the struggle to erect parochial elementary schools. The development of secondary and higher education was left, for the most part, to religious congregations of men and women, such as the Jesuits, the Christian Brothers, and the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

Bishop Spalding's evaluation of the intellectual fare in most academies for young ladies was not high. He was of the opinion that these institutions put a disproportionate emphasis upon the social virtues. Extolling the secular college and university education available for women, he said, "These higher schools for women . . . are not all equally good, and in some of them doubtless grave defects are found; but the best of them afford facilities for thorough intellectual training or special research not existing in similar institutions elsewhere, even in Europe, and certainly not in our Catholic academies for young ladies."[12] He placed his hope in the continued development of the academies along intellectual lines, but at the same time he used his influence to establish a Catholic college for women in the nation's capital to complement the achievements of the newly-founded Catholic University which admitted only male students. The fact that

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[11]"Bishop Spalding on Americanism," The Independent, LII (Sept. 20, 1900) 2285.

[12]Spalding, op. cit., p. 59.

Bishop Spalding asked the Sisters of the Holy Cross to cooperate in this venture seems to indicate his approval of the quality of education at St. Mary's.

The Congregation at this time believed that the needs of its existing institutions did not permit the assuming of added responsibilities. Its immediate project was the staffing of an adequate faculty in an expanding St. Mary's which had awarded its first baccalaureate degree to Agnes Ewing Brown at the June 1898 commencement, the fiftieth anniversary of the first commencement at St. Mary's Academy in Bertrand, Michigan. The Council Minutes for June 9, 1898 state: "The special object under discussion was the expediency of conferring degrees upon those graduates of the Academy who shall have satisfactorily completed a certain prescribed course. . . The present demand for degrees by young ladies who go to Protestant institutions to obtain them necessitates our giving to St. Mary's pupils all that they can obtain elsewhere."[13]

In the face of Mother Pauline's reluctant refusal, Bishop Spalding arranged with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur to carry to completion his plans resulting in the founding of Trinity College which first opened its doors to students in 1900. During these years many other Catholic colleges for women emerged from their academic beginnings. These include St. Mary's-of-the-Woods in Terre Haute, Indiana; Manhattanville in New York; St. Xavier's in Chicago; Notre Dame of Maryland; and Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois. To all of these we may apply the words of John Lancaster Spalding, taken from an address delivered under the auspices of the Auxiliary Board of Trinity College in 1899: "Their [the various Sisterhoods] success in cultivating

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[13]Council Minutes, Archives.

the virtues which are women's glory. . .is conceded by friend and foe. On this foundation must we build if we would raise woman's mind to the ethereal heights of intellectual truth and splendor, without risking the loss of her heart of goodness and love. It is from this foundation that Trinity College shall rise."[14] It was from this foundation, laid by Mother Angela and Mother Annunciata, the second Directress of St. Mary's Academy, that St. Mary's College began its existence under the wise and capable guidance of Mother Pauline. In 1903 the accrediting committee of the North Central Association recommended that the Charter of 1855 be amended to include the term "college". Formal accreditation of St. Mary's College occurred three years later.

How did a religious congregation of women manage to prepare teachers for higher education in an era when Catholic universities were not open to women students, when summer schools as such had not yet been inaugurated, and when it was unheard-of for Sisters to attend secular universities? From its earliest days, St. Mary's has profited from its close association with the University of Notre Dame. If the Sisters were unable to attend the lectures of professors at the universities, what was there to prevent the professors from bringing their lectures to the Sisters? As early as the 1870's there is mention of lecture courses for all the Sisters who returned to St. Mary's at the end of the school year. "Two special features of the community, for many years peculiar to St. Mary's, are the summer school and the scholasticate. Many years before the Chautauqua movement, generally considered initiatory of the summer schools now so common throughout

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[14]Spalding, p. 60.

the country, vacation classes were carried on at St. Mary's; regular lecture courses were given, laboratory and class-work prosecuted, and the best in pedagogics inculcated in theory and in practice. The scholasticate, according to the Constitutions of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, is a period after the noviceship and before final vows, extending over several years, during which time special attention is given to the science and art of teaching."[15]

Another Community historian recorded the fact that in 1890 Mother Annunciata "went to visit a number of schools in the eastern part of the country in order that the Sisters might learn what was being done in them to advance educational standards. As a result, a number of professors were hired for the summer school from various institutions, to instruct the members of the faculty, especially in music and the sciences."[16] The Chimes for September 1896 recorded the lectures for the summer session that year. They included "Law and Liberty, Human Society and Family, Civil and Political Society, Forms of Government, Relations of Church and State" by the Reverend S. Fitte, professor of philosophy at Notre Dame; a series on the Phenomena of Cell Life by the Reverend A. Kirsch, biology professor from Notre Dame; a series on English literature by Dr. Austin O"Malley, Notre Dame professor of English; and "Psychology in Its Relations to Pedagogy" by Dr. E. A. Pace from Catholic University.

The following summer Father Kirsch lectured on botany; Father Fitte discoursed on materialism, agnosticism, rationalism, naturalism,

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[15]Sister M. Rita Heffernan, A Story of Fifty Years (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1905), pp. 120-121.

[16]Sister M. Eleanore Brosnahan, On the King's Highway (New York, 1931), p. 308.

liberalism, and fatalism; Dr. O'Malley discusssed literary construction in Shakespeare; and Reverend Dr. Shahan of Catholic University lectured on the teaching of history.[17]

It was during the decade under consideration that we find the Sisters being sent to secular universities for the first time. Sister M. Madeleva, writing about the favorite teacher of her college days at St. Mary's, Sister M. Rita Heffernan, states that "When in 1904 the Academy took on the curriculum and the title of 'college' she continued head of the department of English. . .In preparation for more advanced work in her department, she went to Harvard in the summer of 1905. Here she studied Old English and Chaucer particularly, and received through informal discussion with professors even more pertinent help for her immediate needs. . .A summer in Europe in 1906 came as a sequel to graduate study."[18] In subsequent years Sisters took advanced degrees at Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, Illinois, Berkeley, Yale, Fordham, Catholic University, Notre Dame, and other well-known universities here in the United States as well as abroad at Oxford, Cambridge, and the Sorbonne.

A comparison of the bachelor of arts curriculum during these transition years with that of the University of Michigan reveals a similarity in total credit hour and language requirements. While the University quickly moved in the direction of greater flexibility with the inclusion of many electives, St. Mary's adhered to a structured program ranging through the liberal arts and sciences. Two years

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[17] Chimes, VI (Sept. 1897), pp. 9-10.

[18] Pioneers and Builders (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1941), p 172.

of advanced Latin and four years of a modern language were required of all. Catholic students included Christian Doctrine and Church History in their programs each year. Besides these, the curriculum prescribed English Composition, American Literature, American History, and Trigonometry for the first year; English Literature, English History, Logic, and a choice of Analytic Geometry, Advanced Physics, or Advanced Chemistry for the second year; Literary Criticism, French History, Psychology, and Geology for the third year; and General Literature, General History, Ethics, and Astronomy for the fourth year.[19] The 1904-1905 catalog listed degree courses in English, history, general science, biology, and pharmacy. There were approximately fifty-five students in the collegiate division that year. The bachelor of arts degrees were conferred bringing the number awarded thus far to twelve. The next two years added ten and seventeen to that total.

Sister M. Rita, describing the college courses of the various teachers, said that "the laboratory method, the research method fully obtain."[20] In the sciences, well-equipped laboratories for physics, chemistry, geology, and biology furthered serious investigation of the type indicated by this description from Chimes: "An article in a late number of the Scientific American suggests a new line of investigation for the class in physics. It treats of the theory held by some that the auroral beam is an electrical discharge directed through our atmosphere of graded density. . .With interest in the work and with means of experimenting at their disposal, who knows but that some of the scientists of the present school year may have the honor of throwing new light

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[19] Forty-Eighth Yearbook of St. Mary's Academy, p. 11.

[20] p. 206.

on the problem of auroral, coronal, and cometary phenomena.[21] Reverend J. A. Zahm, a Notre Dame professor who was a noted scientist, author, and explorer (he accompanied Theodore Roosevelt on one of his South American journeys), took an active interest in St. Mary's. His controversial book, Evolution and Dogma[22], in which he set forth the thesis that evolution was not contrary to reason or Scripture, was favorably reviewed in Chimes.

Concerts and lectures have always been an integral part of education at St. Mary's. If, in the early years, the students' physical activities were somewhat circumscribed by the limits of the hundred-acre campus, the opposite was true of their intellectual horizons. The lecture series for the 1904-1905 school year brought an exciting breadth and depth of scholarship to the small college in the persons of William Butler Yeats, Seumas MacManus, James Field Spalding, Hamilton Wright Mabie, William A. Taft (then Secretary of War), Dom Gasquet, Abbot-General of the English Benedictines, Reverend Edward Pace, Dr. Thomas Shields, President Harper from the University of Chicago, Elizabeth Jordan, editor of Harper's, and Henry James, whose topic was "The Lessons of Balzac."

In the preceding discussion of the faculty and the curriculum of St. Mary's during the transition decade, we have already indicated, to some extent, the vision and foresight of Mother Pauline, the administrator. She had not been in office long when she built Collegiate Hall, a separate unit for the college division which was still in its infancy. When this building was first occupied in 1904 there were few students

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[21] Chimes V (Oct. 1896), p.22.

[22] Rev. J. A. Zahm, Evolution and Dogma (Chicago: D.H. McBride)1896.

in degree programs, but Mother's faith in the future of Catholic college education for women was such that she planned even greater expansion as the yeaars brought fulfillment to seemingly ambitious aspirations for St. Mary's College.

Mother Pauline's soundness of judgment is exemplified in the students whom she encouraged to earn degrees at St. Mary's. Of the first seven Academy graduates who returned to earn a baccalaureate degree, at least two went on for higher studies and pursued academic careers. Agnes Ewing Brown earned a M.A. in Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Ethics at the University of Michigan in 1905, and later taught at Ohio State University. Caroline Burson continued studies at Columbia University, earning a Ph.D. in Spanish. She later was professor and department chair at Sophie Newcomb College of Tulane University.

All the varied persons who knew Mother Pauline spoke of her farsighted wisdom, the abilities that gave her a grasp of practical affairs, the deep interest she displayed in so many phases of the intellectual life of the time. She was a strong leader who during her long term of office built a firm foundation and set a true course for St. Mary's College. Reverend James A. Burns, President of the University of Notre Dame during Mother Pauline's administration characterized her influence upon St. Mary's College as the "progressive enlargement and enrichment of educational opportunities. . .so that young women who came there might be adequately prepared for a successful and happy life."[23]

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[23] Chimes, XLIV (February 1935), p. 72.