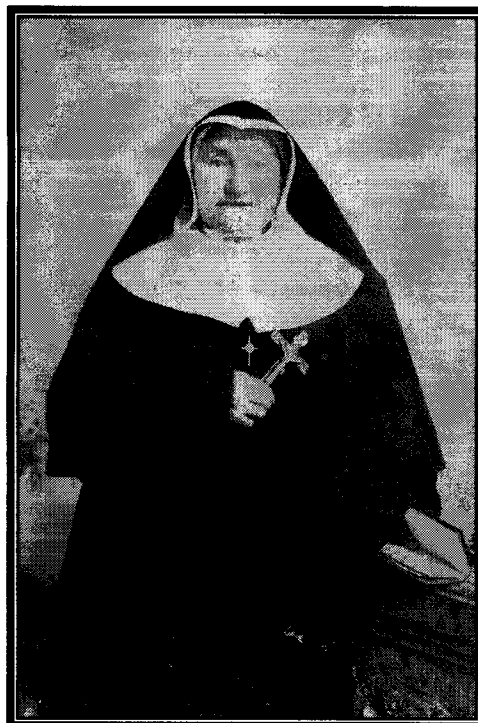


A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. VINCENT'S ACADEMY AND THE DAUGHTERS OF THE CROSS

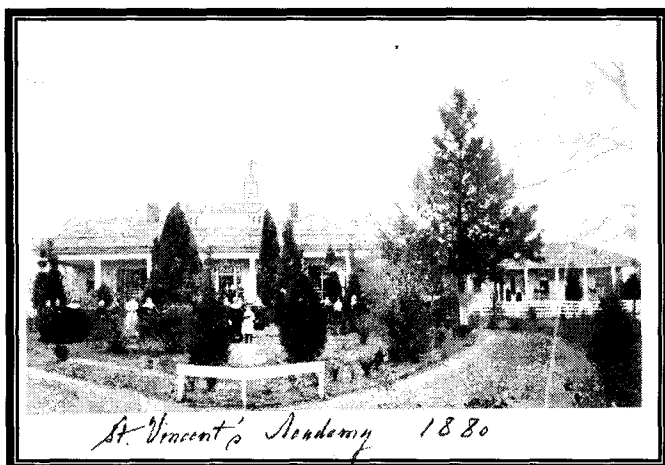
Compiled by Madeline Elford

The Daughters of the Cross began in 1622 as an inspiration of Madame L'Huillier de Villeneuve in Paris, France. She wanted to devote her life to the education of young minds. St. Francis de Sales was her counselor and spiritual director. In fact, he suggested the rules and constitution of her community. Madame de Villeneuve was a widow with 2 small daughters to raise so it was not until August of 1641 that the first Daughters of the Cross entered the convent – one of the first uncloistered communities. St. Vincent de Paul was another important counselor to the new community, especially after the death of St. Francis de Sales. He served as a superior and patron of the Daughters of the Cross and remarked, "THE CONGREGATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE CROSS WILL BE VERY USEFUL TO THE CHURCH; IF IT TAKES ROOT IT WILL BECOME A TREE BEARING RICH FRUIT." It had taken 20 years for the order to materialize. Mother de Villeneuve died January 15, 1650 at the age of 58. The original order flourished and 2 other communities were established in France. During wars, the nuns were forced to leave their communities and relinquish their properties. When peace was restored, they had to repurchase their buildings in order to reopen their schools. The order continued to thrive and began to spread to England and Belgium as well as other parts of France.

Bishop Auguste Louis Martin, a native of France, was the first bishop of Natchitoches, Louisiana in the United States. He had traveled to France to seek missionaries to work in Louisiana. He was in contact with a young seminarian named John Pierre who was to become the founder of Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Shreveport in 1856 following his ordination in 1855. Father Pierre had spoken to Mother Hyacinth of the Daughters of the Cross about the education of his niece. In passing he mentioned that he was going to America for missionary work in Louisiana. The Daughters of the Cross community was flourishing and it had been a dream of the nuns to do missionary work. When he mentioned his plans for his work in America, she asked if there was a need for any of her order to possibly work and teach in America. She could not make commitments but was interested in finding out if the need was there. The bishop was delighted with the possibility of the Daughters of the Cross traveling to America for missionary work, so after much correspondence and with the approval of the bishop in France, permission was granted for 10 of the nuns to travel to America. The little group of missionaries came under the leadership of Mother Mary Hyacinth. All were natives of Treguier, France. On October 19, 1855, Mother Hyacinth and the 9 other Daughters of the Cross left by carriage to travel to Havre where they could depart for America. They had not told their families of their plans, but left letters behind to be mailed to them in order to avoid the sadness of farewells. At Havre in France, they boarded the steamship ARGO on October 24, 1855. They suffered seasickness, some severely. After the roughness and storms of the ocean, they docked in New York on Tuesday, November 6, 1855. The next day they left by a lumber train to travel to St. Louis on a journey that took 5 days and 4 nights. On November 13, they boarded the steamer, Fall City, for the river trip to New Orleans. The river was muddy and the river water was the only



Mother Mary Hyacinth Le Connait, first Superior of the Daughters of the Cross in America
Daughters of the Cross Collection, Archives, Diocese of Shreveport.



Original plantation structure purchased by the Daughters of the Cross from Leroy Nutt in 1866. St. Vincent Academy was founded two years later and the boarding school building was added to this property in 1890 (three story frame building).

*Daughters of the Cross Collection, Archives,
Diocese of Shreveport*

for the final ten miles to their destination in Hydropolis (later called Cocoville) in Avoyelles Parish. This was located half way between Marksville and Mansura. At midnight they arrived at their dilapidated 5 room house that was to be their convent and schoolhouse. They also had a small brick building nearby. On November 28th, Mass was said by Bishop Martin and a contract was signed. Presentation School and Convent were founded. The name Presentation Convent was chosen by Mother Hyacinth and the sisters to commemorate the day of their arrival in Louisiana. The reality of their situation was that the house and land were both inadequate. It was a wooded area with no families nearby. Though their funds had dwindled to \$300, they did not lose heart. They prayed and worked and turned the little attic in the house into a dorm. They worked very hard to convert and expand the house. They added a room for the kitchen and another room for a dining room. The nuns, cultured and educated, were not used to the manual labor that was required of them to do the work that was needed. They had to undertake carpentry, bricklaying and painting to make the facility usable. The small brick building on the premises was converted into a chapel for the sisters. The climate was very difficult for them and the cold winter contributed to the death of one of the missionary sisters. On February 2, 1856 they registered their first students, ten day pupils and one boarder. By the end of the session they had seventeen boarders. A teacher was hired to instruct the nuns in English. The curriculum for the students included French, math, commerce, music, art, social studies, astronomy, philosophy, embroidery and sewing.

In 1858, the school and convent of St. Francis de Sales was opened in Alexandria. It operated until 1868. In 1871 the Daughters of the Cross moved the Cocoville convent and school to Marksville. In 1890, a 2 story convent and boarding school was built.

In 1860, Rev. John Pierre, who was instrumental in getting the Daughters of the Cross to Louisiana, invited them to come to Shreveport to found a school next door to Holy Trinity Catholic Church downtown. St. Mary's operated successfully until 1954 when it closed. Many boys and girls received their early education at St. Mary's under the leadership of the Daughters of the Cross and have fond memories of their beloved school and teachers.

The Civil War began in 1861 and all the schools of the Daughters of the Cross were greatly affected by the struggle since all the schools except St. Mary's were in the direct path of both armies during the Red River Campaign. At one point in May, 1864, Mother Hyacinth had been warned of a battle and sent all 45 boarders and most of the sisters to the woods for safety. She and one other sister sought shelter underneath the bakery of the convent. The school, convent and chapel were badly damaged, but all the students and the nuns were safe. In the same year, Alexandria was almost destroyed, and the school there suffered much damage and was forced to close. The nuns returned to Hydropolis. The sisters

water available for use on the 9 day trip. Finally, on November 21, 1855, the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Mother, they reached New Orleans. They had been accompanied on the entire trip by 2 seminarians. Mother Hyacinth sent the seminarians to the archbishop to let him know of their arrival. They returned with a letter of welcome and instructions. Five of the nuns stayed at the Convent of St. Augustine and the other five went to the Convent of the Ursulines. On November 24, one month after their departure from France, they were on their way to Hydropolis in Avoyelles parish accompanied by Bishop Martin who had been so instrumental in bringing them to Louisiana. It took 2 days and 2 nights of travel on the Mississippi and Red Rivers before they reached the Old River Landing. They were greeted by Father Tumoine with four carriages at 10 p.m.

surveyed the fields, but all that met their gaze was ruin. They did not lose heart. They worked to salvage and patch and rebuild whenever possible. During the reconstruction, the sisters had to endure much suffering and many trials. In early 1866, they took charge of a school in Monroe, which became known as St. Hyacinth's Academy. Later that year, Father Pierre told them about a parcel of land near Shreveport that was for sale. He thought the land would be an excellent location for a girls' boarding school. Mother Hyacinth was a decision maker and decided to purchase the property. With little money for travel and scarce means of communication due to the war, Mother Hyacinth set out in a carriage to journey to Shreveport to make a down payment on the property. While crossing the Red River, the boat overturned and the carriage sank into the river. The horse drowned. Mother Hyacinth narrowly escaped injury and was able to make it safely to the other side of the river. However, the money that she had taken with her to make a partial payment on the property sank into the river. Luckily, some men along the river were able to get to the carriage and salvage the money for Mother Hyacinth. On May 3, 1866, she purchased 100 acres and the buildings on the land for the Daughters of the Cross. It was purchased for \$15000 – including cash of \$13000 and a note for the difference to be paid January 1, 1867 with an interest rate of 8%. The land was described as

“ A certain tract or parcel of land upon which this vendor, L.M. Nutt now resides with all buildings and improvements thereon containing about one hundred acres more or less, situated on the south side of the Shreveport and Norris Ferry Road in section (12) twelve township (17) seventeen range (14) fourteen and more fully described by acts of sale...”

The purchase document was signed by L. M. Nutt and Soeur M. Hyacinth, Supre de L'Ordre des filles de la Crois, (Sister Mary Hyacinth, Superior of the Order of the Daughters of the Cross). The deed of sale May 3, 1866.

The property belonged to Captain Leroy M. Nutt who had been an officer in the confederate army. After the war, he was broken in health and spirit and he was in debt. His solution was to sell the property to try to pay off some of his financial obligations. Captain Nutt asked to lease the property for 17 months for \$100 a month. Mother Hyacinth agreed to this, which gave her time to secure her teaching staff and find workers for the plantation.

The property consisted of 100 acres on which a substantial one story home was surrounded by farmland. This plantation, in Fairfield on the outskirts of Shreveport, consisted of a house with 4 large rooms, 5 smaller rooms, an attic and an annex with a dining room, a kitchen and a pantry. It also included a barn, servants' houses, etc. When several nuns arrived in Fairfield to start the boarding school, they were welcomed by the briars, weeds, and all the work to be done to clear the land and repair the building to open a school.



Looking south on St. Vincent about where Rose Neath Cemetery is now located.

Daughters of the Cross Collection, Archives, Diocese of Shreveport

Mother Hyacinth returned to France for a time to establish the American Novitiate there that would train sisters for teaching in a missionary country. This novitiate operated from 1867 to 1904 when it closed due to government interference. Sister Theresa of Jesus Trebeden replaced Mother Hyacinth in her absence and was



*Archway at the entrance of St. Vincent Avcademy.
Daughters of the Cross Collection, Archives,
Diocese of Shreveport*

formally elected to be Mother of the community in 1867 after serving as assistant from 1858 to 1867. St. Vincent's Academy was finally opened to boarders in October, 1868. The charter of incorporation for the Daughters of the Cross was executed and filed in Caddo Parish, Louisiana on November 16, 1869.

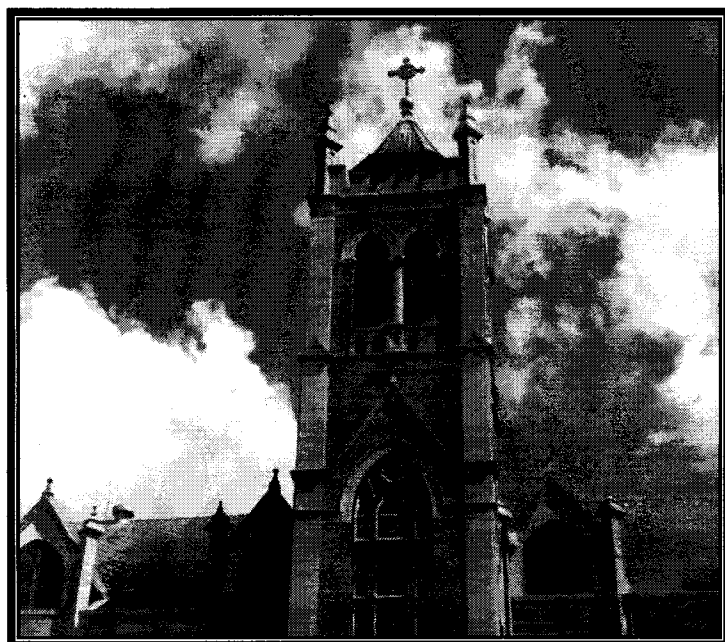
That same year the novitiate was transferred from Cocoville to Shreveport in conjunction with the establishment of St. Vincent's Academy. By this time the school was accredited and able to confer high school diplomas and college degrees. Though there were only 17 Catholic families in Shreveport at this time, there were 2 Catholic schools – St. Mary's and St. Vincent's. In 1869, the St. Vincent's Motherhouse and Academy for girls was established for grades one through twelve. Enrollment included boarders as well as day students. The first graduate of St. Vincent's Academy was Elizabeth Rose Scott (Youree) in 1869.

The enrollment continued to rise until the devastating yellow fever epidemic in 1873. Five priests including the chaplain for the Daughters of the Cross, Father Biler, died in the epidemic. Several of the nuns from St. Vincent's Academy went to the aid of the sick and three of them died in the epidemic - SR. MARIE MARTHE DE NES, SISTER MARIE ANGELA NEDLEC, and SR. ROSE OF LIMA. Several other nuns contracted yellow fever but recovered. During the epidemic, the sisters worked to their limit of endurance in helping care for the stricken and the dying. At the time of the epidemic they did not know that mosquitoes spread the dreaded disease. Students were sent home and many residents left Shreveport to try to avoid the disease. It took several years for the school to regain the strength it had before the epidemic. However, by 1886, the school was thriving with boarders and day students.

Much of St. Vincent's growth was due to Right Rev. Napoleon Joseph Roulleaux, a French priest, who was appointed chaplain of the convent and school in 1883 at the age of 35 – a position he held till his death 35 years later. In 1890, through much effort on his part, a new 3-story frame building was added to house the boarders. This supplemented the small frame buildings purchased by Mother Hyacinth in 1866. A beautiful new gothic chapel was built later.

In March, 1906, a tragic fire destroyed the buildings including the new gothic chapel. Everything was reduced to ashes. In *Across Three Centuries* by Sr. St. Ignatius, D. C., she describes the fire that destroyed St. Vincent's in 1906,

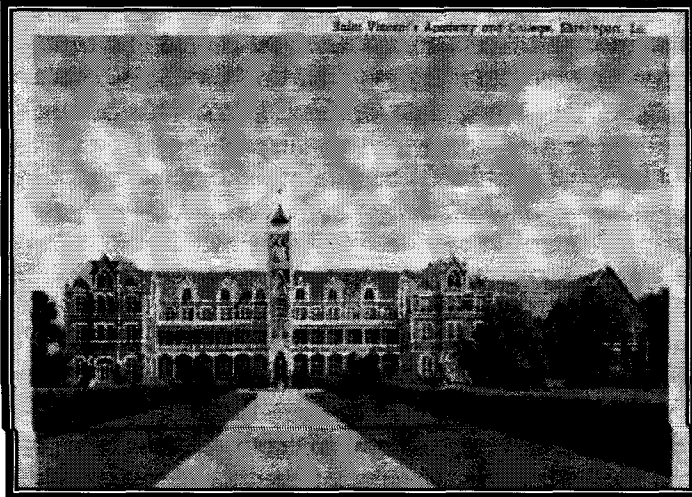
“In February, 1906, the buildings at St. Vincent's were wired. Electric lights replaced the kerosene oil lamps. One danger of a disastrous fire was eliminated. Alas! Another was lurking. The furnace was in the basement of the boarding school, and there was a defective flue. On March 16, 1906, at 12:30 p.m. fire was discovered in the upper story. It was a very cold day and a fierce wind was blowing. All the pupils were spending the recess hour in the recreation hall. When the directress, self-



View of the steeple

possessed Sister Loretta, was told that the boarding school was on fire, she calmly walked into the recreation hall and told the sister in charge to take all the pupils to the chapel to pray for a special intention. The chapel was the building farthest from the one on fire; besides, it was of brick with a slate roof. When all the children had been gathered in the chapel, the doors were bolted. Had it not been for this wise measure, it would have been a difficult matter to prevent some of these children from rushing into the burning building to try to save some precious keepsakes. The news that St. Vincent's was on fire soon spread and the whole of Shreveport fled to the rescue, but St. Vincent's was not within the city limits at that time. The fire department brought out all the hose that could be had, but St. Vincent's was too far

distant from the nearest water main. Nothing could be done and in a short time, it was evident that the various buildings would only help to feed the devouring flames, which it was impossible to control. The kind neighbors offered to care for the boarders, and the poor frightened children were taken away from the scene of the disaster.”



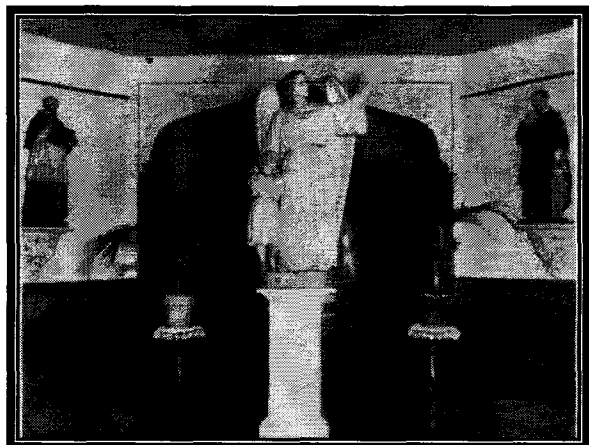
Postcard of the old St. Vincent's Academy. Circa 1940s

building. They began to rebuild immediately. They quickly built two buildings to use for the convent and school rooms while the larger new school was being planned. From the clay on the premises, Father Roulleaux, the nuns and other workers made the bricks to use for the new St. Vincent's Academy and motherhouse. The clay was fired in a kiln on the property. Father Roulleaux fashioned the new building after the gothic architecture and design of the ancient chateaux of his native Normandy. School was reopened in the new east wing in 1907. Also completed were the south annex and laundry building. In the following year, the north wing and main section of the new building were completed. The bell on top of the new building was cast in Hillsboro, Ohio by the C. S. Bell Company and was made of solid iron. For miles around the sound of the St. Vincent's bell high on top of the building could be heard announcing the Angelus at 6 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. It also tolled to announce the death of a Daughter of the Cross as well as for her funeral.

These were horse and buggy days with dirt roads all around the convent. The nuns at the time had a surrey that was pulled by a horse and mule. The surrey could hold 9 – 3 on each of 3 seats. There was a trolley that ran only to Jordan Street from downtown so if they had not had the buggy, they would have had to walk from downtown to the convent. Sometimes they would walk all the way from Holy Trinity to St. Vincent's. Some of the nuns taught at St. Mary's next to Holy Trinity and also at St. Michael's in downtown Shreveport. They also had a convent downtown.

Some of the subjects that had been taught in the old St. Vincent's were listed on the report card of one student who graduated in 1910 as salutatorian. Listed were Application, Health, Grammar, Composition, Rhetoric, Algebra, Chemistry, Zoology, Literature, Geometry, Penmanship, Elocution, Piano, Painting, Drawing, French And Fancy Work. Other subjects available to the students in the early 1900's included Orthography, Reading, Arithmetic, Geography, History, Christian Doctrine, Physiology,

The buildings including the new gothic brick chapel were destroyed and classes were moved downtown to St. Mary's. Father Roulleaux and some of the workers remained at Fairfield and lived in a barn and tents so they could care for the plantation, farm and livestock. They were able to salvage the beautiful Stations of the Cross from the chapel that was destroyed. The insurance money provided only \$15,000. Neighbors and friends began taking up collections and walked door to door seeking contributions. They raised \$8000. Commercial National Bank gave them a loan for the rest of the money needed to rebuild. Msgr. Roulleaux who was so instrumental in assisting the nuns for so many years, contacted builder John Garson to draw up the plans for a new gothic



St. Vincent Academy foyer featured in 1925 yearbook. Called "the Guardian Angel" statue. Gift from the Alumnae Association in the early 1900s. Given to Holy Angels school when SVA was demolished in 1970s.

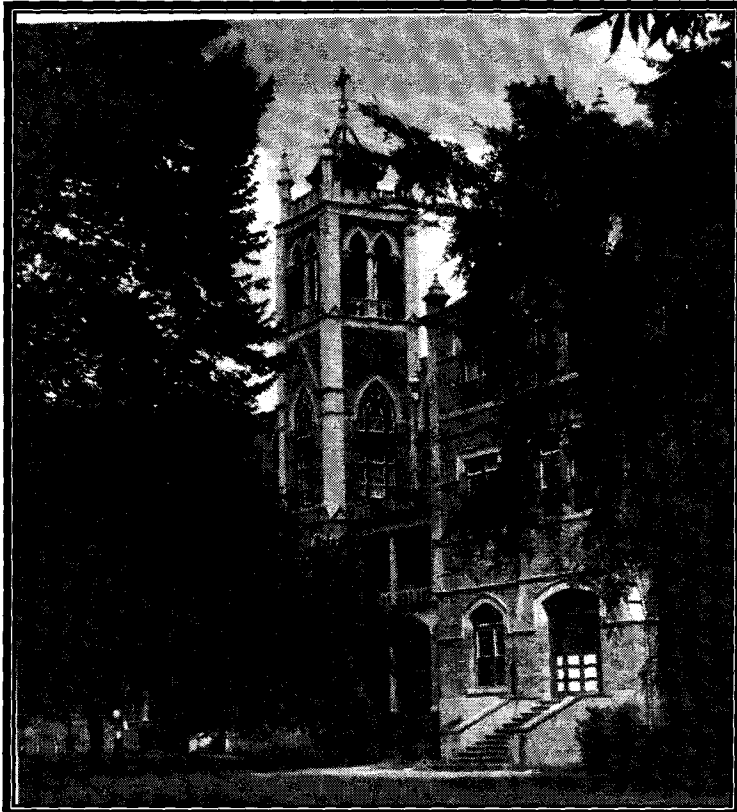
Mythology, Botany, Physics, Geology, Astronomy, Bookkeeping, Stenography, Typewriting, Logic, Moral Philosophy, Civil Government, Trigonometry, Latin, Plain Sewing And Music – Including Piano, Violin, Guitar.

On July 27, 1917, the west wing and the new chapel were complete and dedicated by Bishop Cornelius Van de Ven. The Caplis family donated the main altar in honor of their mother. The St. Cecilia and St. Agnes statues on the main altar were donated by other benefactors. They were carved in Carrara marble as was the main altar. The new chapel included the beautiful Stations of the Cross which had been salvaged from the 1906 fire. The glass from the magnificent stained glass windows that were above the main altar were believed to be at least 300 years old. The construction, which cost in excess of \$200,000, was under the direction of Father Roulleaux. He had been the friend and chaplain of the Daughters of the Cross since 1883. In March of 1918, only 8 months after the dedication of the chapel, Monsignor Napoleon Joseph Roulleaux died at his cottage on the grounds of St. Vincent's Academy. His crowning glory had been complete and his funeral was held in the chapel that he had been responsible for building.

In 1939, a tornado hit the campus. Several large trees on the front lawn were uprooted. Windows and door panels were broken. No one was injured though the storm contained hail as large as a fist. A worker at the convent stated that the storm seemed to split and go around the building, which was a great blessing.

St. Vincent's Academy educated kindergarten, elementary, high school and college students for a period of time. St. Vincent's served as a college until 1942 when war conditions forced the closing of the college portion. Many teachers got their training at the college under the leadership of the Daughters of the Cross. Boys were admitted in kindergarten through third grade from 1869 until the early 1930's when they were admitted through the sixth grade. This continued until the elementary school closed at the end of the 1958-1959 session.

St. Vincent's was a day and boarding school from its beginning in 1869. The boarding school closed at the end of the 1959-1960 session. In the 1940's and early 1950's, the seventh and eighth grades were included with the high school. Starting with the 1954-1955 session, the seventh and eighth grades



St. Vincent's pictured from the front yard.

were included in grade school rather than high school. For many years, there were very few lay teachers. However, in the 1950's a few more lay teachers taught at St. Vincent's and by the 1960's even more lay teachers were included in the faculty due to the fact that there were fewer nuns available to teach. Around this time salaries became even more of a factor in the tuition charges.

In September, 1962, St. Vincent's Academy was transferred from the old site at 1135 St. Vincent's Avenue to the new site at 3500 Fairfield Avenue. This was due to the condition of the old building and the costs that would be involved in meeting certain safety codes.

In June of 1967, the Daughters of the Cross community lost 20 nuns who left the convent to move to Wisconsin to begin an experimental religious program. In addition to this, at this point there were fewer vocations than there had been in the past.

Around 1969, there was some talk of a merger between St. Vincent's

with over 100 years of service and Jesuit High with 64 years of service. At this time the enrollment was approximately 600 students between the 2 schools. However, after some consideration this idea was abandoned.

Even though the school had moved to the new location in 1962, the nuns still resided at the old motherhouse. In February 1972, the new St. Vincent's Convent on Fairview was blessed and the Daughters of the Cross moved down the hill to their new home. An auction was held at the old building and over 600 people came from far and wide to try to take home a bit of history or a memento that could be a reminder of what had been an important part of their lives. Bishop Greco was on hand and mentioned that he hoped some of the tangible remembrances would be a reminder of the spiritual energy that was such an important part of what St. Vincent's stood for. At the time of the auction, four of the sisters from France who had watched the building rise from the bricks made of clay on the premises were still alive.

An attempt had been made to get the old St. Vincent's Academy building on the national registry, which would have helped preserved it, but the attempt was too late to do any good. Also, there had been talk of a possible lease of the property in early 1972. In the end, the numerous efforts were in vain to save the grand old building that had played such a large roll in the lives of so many people who were fortunate enough to receive their education there under the leadership of the Daughters of the Cross. Demolition began in January, 1973 on the old St. Vincent's Academy.

With the shortage of nuns, more and more lay teachers had to be hired. In 1987, Loyola High School decided to go coed. That same year, the mission statement of the Daughters of the Cross was included in their announcement to continue St. Vincent's as an all girl's school.

A summary of the Mission Statement of the Daughters of the Cross stated that, "The faculty assists students to integrate religious values with human culture so that they may live faithfully, happily, and productively in the contemporary world. The school attempts to create an environment permeated with Christian values where students are prepared in academic fields, experience a caring community, and have opportunities for the formation of character and the development of talents. The mission of the Academy is fulfilled when students assume responsibility for

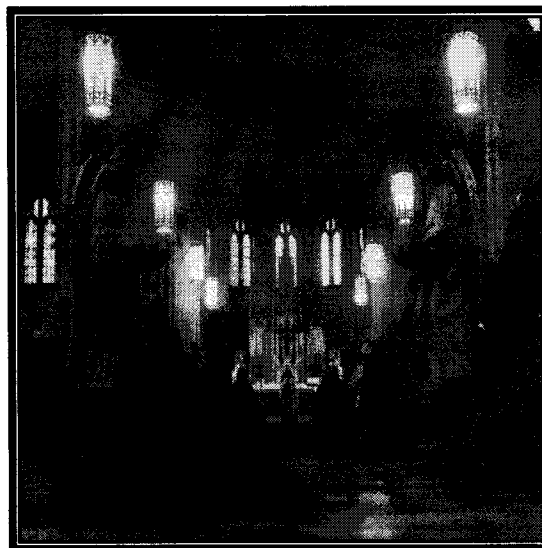
furthering this vision by sharing themselves and their gifts with others. These women can think intelligently, choose maturely, and act faithfully as citizens of the world and children of God."

In spite of all their efforts to continue, enrollment was dropping as well as revenues at St. Vincent's. Out of 23 teachers the last year, only 6 were nuns. Due to economic conditions, St. Vincent's Academy closed at the end of the 1987-1988 session after 119 years of devoted service by the Daughters of the Cross. Many traditions, including the ring ceremony for the juniors and the senior presentation that had meant so much to so many graduates were over. The last diploma was awarded May 25, 1988.

After the closing of the school on Fairfield, the facilities continued to be used for various services such as a day care center for the elderly run by Schumpert Hospital. The convent remained on Fairview Street and continued to be home for the sisters.

On Monday evening May 7, 1990, a fire broke out in the convent. Most of the nuns were at supper when the blaze started in a second floor bedroom. Five of the nuns had to be hospitalized due to smoke inhalation and they plus 15 others were left homeless. The second floor was badly damaged as the result of a vigil candle that was left burning. The nuns were invited to stay at the convent of Schumpert Medical Center. After extensive repairs on the convent, the nuns were able to return to their home.

In 1997, seven of the sixteen remaining Daughters of the Cross transferred to the order of the Marionites of the Holy Cross. The nine nuns who remained in Shreveport as Daughters of the Cross built



A view of the Chapel from the back

a much smaller convent on the grounds of the Glen Retirement facility on Flourmoy-Lucas Road in south Shreveport.



Aerial view of the school.

Note the novitiate and swimming pool in the upper right.

Cross over the centuries feel a sense of connection that is not broken by time or era. When the farewell to St. Vincent's Mass was held in 1988, a choir was formed from young and old graduates – spanning so many years. Yet, they came together as a single voice and as a group that felt and sounded like they had been singing together for many years. That sense of connection remains not just in the singing of beautiful music for a day but in many other connections as well. There is a link between all of the students that benefited from the efforts of the Daughters of the Cross. There is a real sense of appreciation to the Daughters of the Cross who came to teach and to inspire and who continued to do so for so many years.

Sr. Dorothea, author and historian, wrote, "With the destruction of the old edifice reality..... is wrenched from our presence, but the memories associated with it will forever live. They will remain deep-seated in the minds and in the hearts of countless women and men who walked its spacious halls and who sat in its inspiring classrooms seeking the truths that made life worthwhile."

History compiled by Madeline Howard Elford (class of 1959) from

Across Three Centuries by Sr. St. Ignatius, *They Came To Louisiana* by Sr. Dorothea McCants and numerous articles and newspaper reports.



Aerial view shows the old St. Vincent Academy (constructed between 1907 and 1917) in the center of photo and the new SVA where the Catholic Center is now located. Circa 1962 (Parking lot and corner of Sears in upper right corner, Rountree Olds in bottom left of photo)

Daughters of the Cross Collection, Archives, Diocese of Shreveport

