

## DAUGHTERS OF THE CROSS

By Madeline Howard Elford

In March of 1987, 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.<sup>1</sup>

These words were specifically referring to St. Vincent's Academy, but serve as a general statement of the goals set forth and accomplished by the Daughters of the Cross. The history of the Daughters of the Cross spans many years and many miles, but the success brought about by this order is beyond time and distance. The story begins in France during the Seventeenth Century.<sup>2</sup>

1. Published announcement from the Daughters of the Cross concerning the continuation of St. Vincent's Academy, (n.p., n.d.). The Academy was to operate for one more school year and that was 1987-1988.

2. The story of the early years of the Daughters of the Cross is told by Sister Saint Ignatius, D.C., *Across Three Centures: a History of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross 1625-1930* (New York, Benziger Brothers, 1932) and Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, *They Came to Louisiana* (Shreveport: The Daughters of the Cross, 1983). This article is a brief overview of the story and contributions of the order and the serious reader should investigate the above as well as the St. Vincent's Academy Collection (354), 1869-2000 and Daughters of the Cross Papers, 1858-1998 Collection (243), Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Shreveport.

The Daughters of the Cross began as an inspiration in 1622 of Madame L'Huillier de Villeneuve in Paris, France, who wanted to devote her life to the education of young minds. St. Francis de Sales, her counselor and spiritual director, suggested the rules and constitution of her community. Madame de Villeneuve was a widow and had two small daughters to raise so it was not until August of 1641 that the first Daughters of the Cross entered the convent which was 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 take root it will become a tree bearing rich fruit." It had taken twenty years for the order to materialize. When fifty eight year old Mother de Villeneuve died January 15, 1650, her dream had been realized. The original order flourished and two other communities were established in France.<sup>3</sup>

The order continued to thrive and spread to England and Belgium as well as other parts of France. An exception to their peaceful existence occurred during wartime when the nuns were forced to leave their communities and relinquish their properties. After peace was restored, they had to repurchase their buildings in order to reopen their schools. French native Bishop Auguste Louis Martin, the first bishop of Natchitoches, Louisiana, traveled back to France seeking missionaries to work in Louisiana. He was in contact with Jean Pierre, a young seminarian, who later founded Holy Trinity Catholic Church in 1856 in Shreveport.<sup>4</sup>

When Father Jean Pierre<sup>5</sup> approached Mother Hyacinth at the flourishing community of the Daughters of the Cross about the education of his niece, he mentioned that he was going to America for missionary work in Louisiana. Mother Hyacinth, who knew that their order of nuns had dreamed of doing missionary work, asked if there

3. The reader is encouraged to see Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, *They Came to Louisiana* (Shreveport: The Daughters of the Cross, 1983)

4. Ibid.

5. Father Jean Pierre came to Natchitoches in 1854, was ordained in 1855, and served as pastor of Bayou Pierre in 1855-1856. In 1856 he founded Holy Trinity Church in Shreveport where he served as rector until 1873 when he fell victim to Yellos Fever. He is buried at St. Joseph's Cemetery on Greenwood Road in Shreveport. Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, *They Came to Louisiana* (Shreveport: The Daughters of the Cross, 1983), 46.

might be a need for her order to work and teach in America. 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 ten nuns to travel to America.<sup>6</sup>

Under the leadership of Mother Mary Hyacinth and at the invitation of Bishop Martin, the small group of ten missionaries prepared to leave their native land of Treguier, France. On October 19, 1855, Mother Hyacinth and her group of nuns left by carriage for Le Havre. To avoid the sadness of farewells, they did not inform their families of their plans but left letters behind to be mailed to them. At Le Havre in France, they boarded the steamship *Argo* on October 24, 1855 for the long, difficult journey. As a result of the turbulent ocean storms, they suffered seasickness, some severely. They docked in New York on Tuesday, November 6, 1855. The next day they left by a lumber train on a five day and four night journey which took them to St. Louis, Missouri. On November 13, they boarded the steamer, *Fall City*, for the river trip to New Orleans. The muddy river water was the only water available for the nine day trip.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, on November 21, 1855, day of the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Mother, they reached New Orleans. They had been accompanied by two seminarians, who, on arrival, carried a message from Mother Hyacinth to the archbishop. In return, the archbishop sent a letter of welcome and instructions. Five of the nuns stayed at the Convent of St. Augustine and the others went to the Convent of the Ursulines. On November 24, one month after their departure from France, they continued to Hydropolis in Avoyelles Parish accompanied by Bishop Martin. It took two days and nights of travel on the Mississippi and Red Rivers before they reached the Old River Landing. That night at 10 P.M., Father Tumoine greeted them with four carriages which would transport them the final ten miles to their destination in Hydropolis, later to be known as Cocoville. Hydropolis was located in Avoyelles Parish, half way between Marksville and Mansura. At midnight the weary group arrived at the dilapidated five room house that was to be their convent and

6. The reader is encouraged to see Sister Saint Ignatius, D.C., *Across Three Centuries* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1932).

7. *Ibid.*, 180.

schoolhouse. Nearby was a small brick building. On November 28th, Mass was said by Bishop Martin and a contract was signed founding the Presentation School and Convent. The name Presentation Convent was chosen by Mother Hyacinth and the sisters to commemorate the day of their arrival in Louisiana. In reality, the house on the remote wooded land was inadequate. There were 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. Working very hard to convert and expand the house, they added a room for the kitchen and another room for a dining room. The cultured and educated nuns were not used to the manual labor that was required of them. 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 first loss of life. Finally registration for the first students, ten day pupils and one boarder, was held on February 2, 1856. By the end of the session they had seventeen boarders. They hired a teacher to teach them English. Classes were taught French, math, commerce, music, art, social studies, astronomy, philosophy, embroidery, sewing.<sup>8</sup>

Other schools were opened in Louisiana. 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 two story convent and boarding school were built. In 1860, Reverend Pierre, who had been 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. St. Mary's operated successfully until 1954 when it closed. Many men and women 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.<sup>9</sup>

8. Ibid.

9. Sallie Tomkies Lancaster, a graduate of St. Vincent's in 1884, delivered her memoirs at the Alumnae Founders' Luncheon on November 10, 1914, concerning St. Mary's. *The Rose Jar* (Shreveport: The Alumnae of the Daughters of the Cross, June, 1915), Vol. I, 11-13.

In 1861, an armed conflict would temporarily halt progress. Every school run by the Daughters of the Cross, except St. Mary's, was in the direct path of both armies during the Red River Campaign of the Civil War. At one point in May of 1864, Mother Hyacinth, warned of an approaching battle, sent all forty-five boarders and most of the sisters to the woods for safety. She and one other sister sought shelter underneath the convent's bakery. Damage was sustained by the school, convent, and chapel but all the students and the nuns were safe. During that same year, Alexandria was almost destroyed and Isle Breville suffered much damage. The schools were forced to close. Nuns from those schools returned to Hydropolis. The Daughters of the Cross surveyed the fields but all that met their gaze was in ruin. They did not lose heart, but worked to salvage, patch, then rebuild whenever possible. During Reconstruction, the sisters had to endure many trials and sufferings from the political upheaval following the war. In early 1866, they took charge of a school in Monroe, which became known as St. Hyacinth's Academy.

That same year, Father Pierre, longtime friend and mentor of the Daughters of the Cross, told them about a parcel of land for sale near Shreveport. He thought the land would be an excellent location for a girl's boarding school. Mother Hyacinth decided to purchase the property, and with little traveling funds and scarce means of communication due to the war, she made a carriage journey to Shreveport in order 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, but Mother Hyacinth narrowly escaped injury and was able to make it safely to the other side of the river. However, the down payment money sank into the river. Luckily, some men along the river were able to find the carriage and salvage the money for Mother Hyacinth. On May 3, 1866, she purchased the building and one hundred acres for the Daughters of the Cross. The purchase price was \$15,000 – \$13,000 paid by cash with a note for the difference. The eight percent note was to be paid January 1, 1867.

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...<sup>10</sup>

The purchase document was signed by L. M. Nutt and Soeur Me 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 was signed May 3, 1866.<sup>11</sup>

Their purchase consisted of one hundred acres of productive farm land, a substantial one story home, and provisions for numerous cattle. The plantation home, in Fairfield on the outskirts of Shreveport, consisted of four large rooms, five smaller rooms, an attic, and an annex with a dining room, a kitchen, and a panty. It also included a barn, servants' houses, livery stables, and other out-buildings. 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 in debt. His solution was to sell to property to pay off some of his financial obligations. Captain Nutt asked to lease the property for seventeen months at \$100 a month. Mother Hyacinth agreed to this, giving her time to secure a teaching staff and find workers for the plantation.<sup>12</sup>

In the beginning Bishop Martin, who had been in France, was displeased about the purchase of the property. However, he soon realized that the purchase would be of great benefit to the area. Mother Hyacinth returned to France long enough to establish the American Novitiate there to 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

10. *Caddo Parish, Shreveport, Louisiana, Conveyance Records, Volume P, 1866-1868*, pp. 115-116. Microfilm reel no. 41 in Shreve Memorial Genealogy Department, Broadmoor Branch, Shreveport, Louisiana.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Sister Dorothea Olga McCants Daughter of the Cross, *Chalkdust and Pencil Shavings* (Shreveport: Daughters of the Cross, 1982), xi-xii.

Mother Hyacinth in her absence and was formally elected to be Mother of the community in 1867 after serving as assistant from 1858 to 1867. When several Daughters of the Cross arrived in Fairfield to start the boarding school, they were distraught to see all the work needed to clear the land of briars and weeds, and repair the building before the school could be opened. 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.<sup>13</sup>

In 1869, after the establishment of St. Vincent's Academy, the novitiate was transferred from Cocoville to Shreveport. By this time the school was accredited and able to confer high school diplomas and college degrees. Though there were only seventeen Catholic families in Shreveport at this time, there were two Catholic schools – St. Mary's and St. Vincent's. In 1869, the St. Vincent's Mother house and Academy for girls was established for grades one through twelve. Enrollment included boarders as well as day students. In 1869, St. Vincent's Academy produced its first graduate, Elizabeth Rose Scott Youree.<sup>14</sup>

The enrollment continued to rise until the occurrence of the devastating yellow fever epidemic in 1873. Five priests including Father Biler, chaplain for the Daughters of the Cross, died during the epidemic. Several of the nuns from St. Vincent's aided the sick, working to the limit of endurance while helping care for the stricken and the dying. Sister Marie Marthe de Nes, Sister Marie Angela Nedlec, and Sr. Rose of Lima died as a result. Several other nuns contracted yellow fever but recovered. At the time of the epidemic, it was not known that the dreaded disease was spread by mosquitoes, and students were sent home. Many residents left Shreveport to try to avoid the disease. It took several years for the school to regain the

13. *Caddo Parish, Shreveport, Louisiana, Conveyance Records, Volume Q.*, pp. 851-852. Microfilm reel in Shreve Memorial Genealogy Department, Broadmoor Branch, Shreveport, Louisiana. Seven sisters signed the Charter of the Daughters of the Cross. These were president, Mother Theresa of Jesus (Trebeden), vice-president Sister St. Bernard (Rolland), Secretary Sister Mary Philomena (Briand), Treasurer Sister Mary Celeste, Sister St. Joseph, Sister Mary Eulalie (Vandegaar), and Sister Mary Laretto (O'Neill). Witnesses were J.W. Duncan and L. Bissey.

14. Elizabeth Rose Scott, daughter of W.T. Scott from Scottsville, Texas, later married Captain Peter Youree of Shreveport in 1869.

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 Reverend Napoleon Joseph Roulleaux, age thirty-five, who was appointed as chaplain of the convent and school in 1883. He held that position until his death thirty-five years later. Through much effort on his part, in 1890, a three story frame building was built to house the boarders, supplementing the small frame buildings purchased by Mother Hyacinth in 1866. The school thrived and a beautiful gothic chapel was constructed.

But disaster loomed. In February of 1906, the school was being wired for electricity in order to avoid having to use kerosene oil lamps. This was being done to reduce the chance of a fire. However, a tragic fire happened in that same year. An excerpt from *Across Three Centuries* by Sister St. Ignatius, D.C. gives the following description of 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-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.<sup>15</sup>

St. Vincent's was reduced to ashes. All buildings including the new gothic brick chapel were destroyed. Classes were moved downtown to St. Mary's, next door to Holy Trinity. Father Roulleaux and some of the workers remained on the premises and lived in the barn and tents so they could provide care for the plantation and farm that included cattle, turkeys, and geese. They were able to salvage the beautiful Stations of the Cross from the gothic chapel. These were the ones to be used in their future chapel that many of us were a part of for so many years. The insurance money provided only \$15,000. Neighbors and friends began taking up collections by walking door to door seeking contributions. They raised \$8,000. Commercial National Bank gave them a loan for the rest of the money.<sup>16</sup>

Father Roulleaux, a native of France, helped design a gothic building to resemble the ancient chateaux of his native Normandy. He had been instrumental in assisting the nuns for many year. He contacted John Garson, the builder of the chapel which had burned, to draw plans for a new gothic building. The rebuilding began immediately. They quickly built two buildings to use for the convent and school rooms while the larger new school building was being planned. From the clay on the premises, Father Roulleaux, the nuns, and workers made the bricks to build the new St. Vincent's Academy and mother house. The clay was fired in a kiln on the property. John

15. Sister St. Ignatius, *Across Three Centuries*, 322-323.

16. *Ibid.*

Garson and his brother<sup>17</sup> served as builders and architects. The school reopened in the new east wing in 1907. Also completed were the south annex and laundry building. The following year, the north wing and main section of the new building were completed. The solid iron bell on top of the new building was cast in Hillsboro, Ohio by the C. S. Bell Company.<sup>18</sup> From miles around the sound of the St. Vincent's bell high atop 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 and for her funeral.

The nuns were often seen around town. They had a surrey that could hold nine – three on each of the three seats. This fine carriage was pulled by a horse and mule. The trolley only ran to Jordan Street from downtown so without the buggy, they would have had to walk down the dirt road from there 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 others taught at St. Michael's in downtown Shreveport. There were convents downtown at St. Mary's and St. Michael's. St. Michael's operated from 1899 until 1928 and was located on the corner of Marshall and Fannin.

The schools held high academic standards. Some of the subjects that were taught in the old school were listed on the report card of one student who graduated in 1910 as salutatorian. Listed were the following: 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 1900s included orthography, reading, arithmetic, geography, history, Christian doctrine, physiology, mythology, botany, physics, geology, astronomy, bookkeeping, stenography, typewriting, logic, moral philosophy, civics, government, trigonometry, music – including piano, violin and guitar, Latin, and plain sewing. Many teachers got their training at the college under the leadership of the Daughters of the Cross. New

17. The Garson Brothers were natives of the Orkney Islands. John Garson returned there in the 1930's but his brother, Pete, remain in Shreveport where he was buried in Forest Park Cemetery. Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, *With Valor They Serve* (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1975), 132. Additionally, the reader may wish to see the Records of Forest Park Cemetery located at their office on St. Vincent's Avenue, Shreveport, Louisiana.

18. *The Shreveport Times*, June 20, 1907.

buildings expanded the possibilities at St. Vincent's. On July 27, 1917, the west wing and the new chapel were complete and dedicated by Bishop Cornelius Van de Ven. The Caplis family, in honor of their mother, donated the main altar. St. Cecilia and St. Agnes statues on the main altar were donated by other benefactors and were carved in Carrara marble as was the main altar. The cost of the new St. Vincent's Academy exceeded \$200,000. The construction was under the direction of Father Roulleaux. The beautiful Stations of the Cross, salvaged from the chapel fire of 1906, were an important part of the new chapel. The equally beautiful stained glass windows that were above the main altar were believed to be at least 300 years old. In March of 1918, only eight months after the dedication of the chapel, Father Napoleon Joseph Roulleaux died at his cottage on the grounds of St. Vincent's Academy. His crowning glory had been completed and his funeral was held in the chapel that he had been responsible for building. The school was closed for period of time during the influenza epidemic of 1918.<sup>19</sup>

A natural disaster struck in 1939. A tornado hit the campus uprooting several large trees on the front lawn. Windows and door panels were broken. No one was injured although the storm included 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 continued to educate its students. It served elementary, high school, and college students for a period of time. It was a day and boarding school from its beginning in 1869. The boarding school closed at the end of the 1959-1960 session. Boys were admitted to St. Vincent's 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. In the 1940s and early 1950s, the seventh and eighth grade records were included with the high school records. Starting with the 1954-1955 session, the seventh and eighth grades were included in grade school rather than high school. St. Vincent's served as a college from 1921 until 1942 when war conditions forced the closing of the college portion of St. Vincent's.<sup>20</sup>

19. Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, "St. Vincent's Academy: The First Century, 1866-1971, North Louisiana Historical Association *Journal*, Spring, 1972, Vol. III, No. 3, 73-80.

20. McCants, *With Valor They Serve and They Came to Louisiana*.

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. More than ever before, salaries became a greater factor in the tuition charges.

Many changes occurred during the 1960s. Due to the deterioration of the old building, in September, 1962, the academy was transferred from the old site at 1135 St. Vincent's Avenue to the new site at 3500 Fairfield Avenue. In June of 1967, the community lost twenty of their nuns who left the convent and went 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 one hundred years service and Jesuit High with sixty-four years of service. At this time the enrollment was approximately 600 students between the two schools. However, after some consideration this idea was abandoned.

In 1972 the Convent and the Daughters of the Cross moved down the hill to their new home on Fairview Street. However, this meant an end to the old plantation home. An auction was held at the old building and over 600 people came from far and wide to take home a bit of history or a memento of a very 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 a vital aspect of St. Vincent's. At the time of the auction, four of the sisters from France, were alive. The possibility exists that these nuns had contributed to the building's rise from the bricks made of clay on the premises.

An attempt had been made to get the old St. Vincent's Academy building on the National Registry of Historic Places.<sup>21</sup> This would have helped to preserve the site, but the attempt was too late to be successful.<sup>22</sup> Also, there had been talk of a possible lease of the

21. Application for the National Register, St. Vincent's Academy Collection, 1869-2000, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections, Louisiana State University in Shreveport.

22. The razing of the building apparently was prolonged as long as possible. A 1959 article entitled "Memories Evoked of St. Vincent's Academy" states that "Sometime next year, the stately St. Vincent's Academy building will be razed and Shreveport will lose one of its best-known landmarks." Sunday, April 5, 1959, *The Shreveport Times*.

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 role in the lives of so many people who were fortunate enough to receive their education under the leadership of the Daughters of the Cross. Demolition began in January, 1973 on the old St. Vincent's Academy.<sup>23</sup>

In the following years, the Academy and Convent enrollment declined. With the shortage of nuns, more and more lay teachers were hired. In 1987, Loyola high school, formerly Jesuit until 1982, decided to go coed. Enrollment, and revenue, also dropped at St. Vincent's. During its last year only six of the twenty-three teachers were nuns. Due to economic conditions, St. Vincent's Academy closed at the end of the 1987-1988 session after 119 years of service by the Daughters of the Cross. Many traditions including the ring ceremony for the juniors and the senior presentation, which had meant so much to the graduates, were gone forever. The last diploma was awarded May 25, 1988.

Even after St. Vincent's Academy closed, the convent still housed the Daughters of the Cross. However, two years later, 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 but all 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 work on the convent, the nuns returned to their home.

A few years later, the Daughters of the Cross, again, sought a new home. In 1997, seven of the sixteen remaining Daughters of the Cross transferred to the order of the Marionites of the Holy Cross. The last nine Daughters of the Cross built a much smaller convent on the grounds of the Glen Retirement Villiage on Flournoy-Lucas Road. They moved to their convent in south Shreveport in November of 1998. In March of 1999, a final auction was held to dispose of items that could not be used in the much smaller facility. The Sacred Heart that had stood in front of the old St. Vincent's Academy and Convent, then the new convent on Fairview, now stands outside the chapel of

23. Personal observation and photograph collection in the possession of the author. DVD illustrating the building's demolition compiled by the author.

their new facility. By July 1999, the Catholic Diocese of Shreveport bought the last of the remaining property that the nuns had owned since 1866 when it was purchased from Captain Leroy M. Nutt.

In summary, concerning St. Vincent's Academy, Sister Dorothea 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."<sup>24</sup>

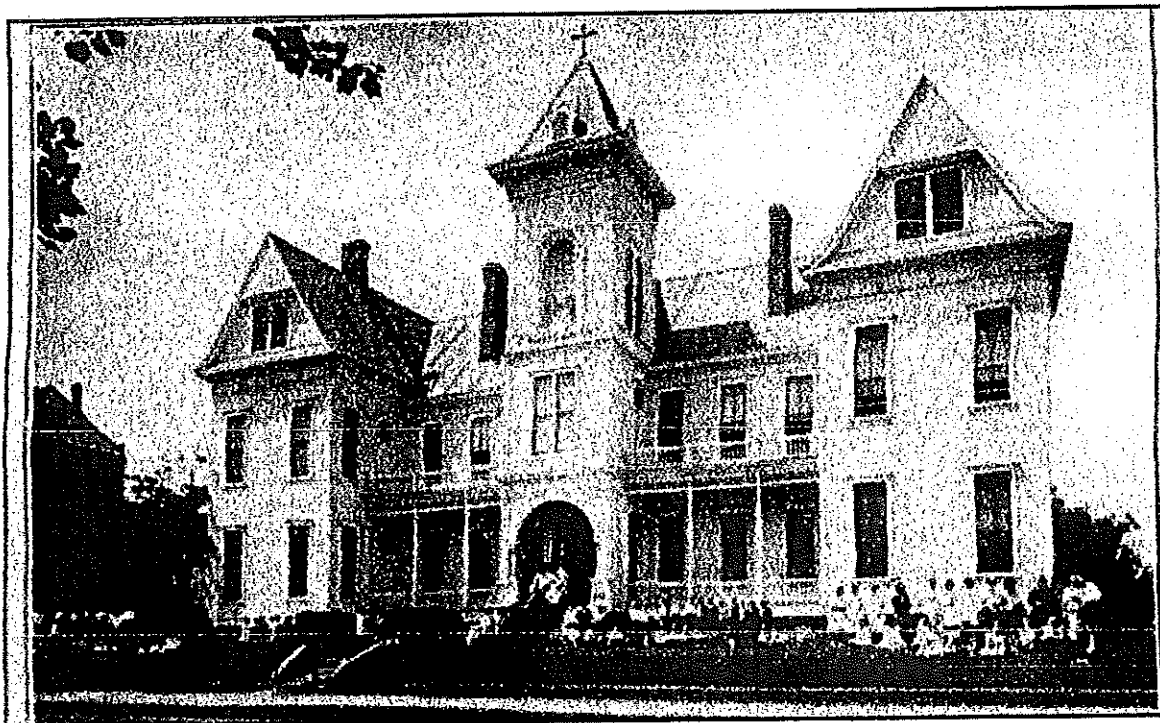
The thousands of women who were touched by the efforts of the Daughters of the Cross over the centuries feel a sense of connection that is not broken by time or era. When the farewell to St. Vincent's Mass was held in 1988, a choir was formed from young and old graduates spanning so many years. Yet, 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 who 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.

24. Undated newspaper article, SVA collection in the personal possession of the author. For further information concerning Sister Dorothea Olga McCants the reader is encouraged to see Liz Chrysler-Stacy "St Vincent's Academy Historical Notes," *Explorations: An Anthology of the Shreveport Writers Club* (Shreveport: Shreve Memorial Library, 2003), 68-69 and *The Shreveport Times*, October 7, 1995, Obituaries, Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, D. C. Sister Dorothea was a member of the Louisiana Historical Society, North Louisiana Historical Association, Historic Preservation of Shreveport and in 1970 she received the Louisiana Library *They Came to Louisiana*.



Left to right: Cammie Fahy, Sallie Tomkies, Lettie Looney, Annie Currie, Nannie Barker.

Graduation class of St. Vincent's Academy in 1884. Sallie Tomkies was later to write her memoirs of her years at both St. Mary's Convent and St. Vincent's Academy. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

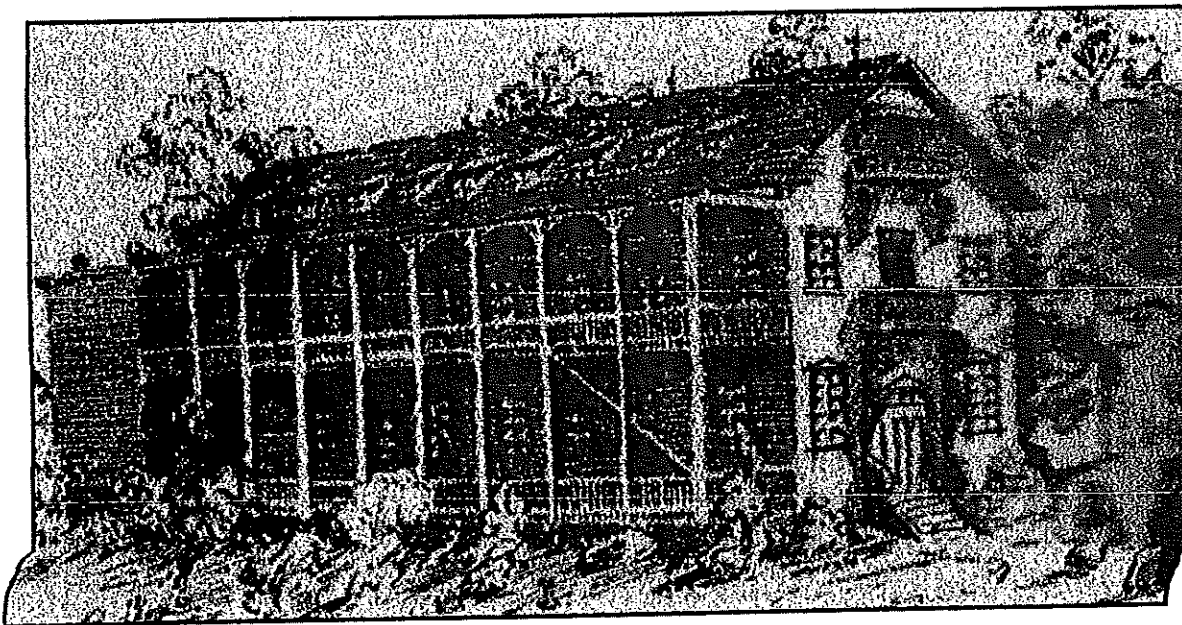


St. Mary's Convent, founded in 1860, in downtown Shreveport adjacent to Holy Trinity Catholic Church. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.





Graduation class of St. Vincent's Academy in 1895. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

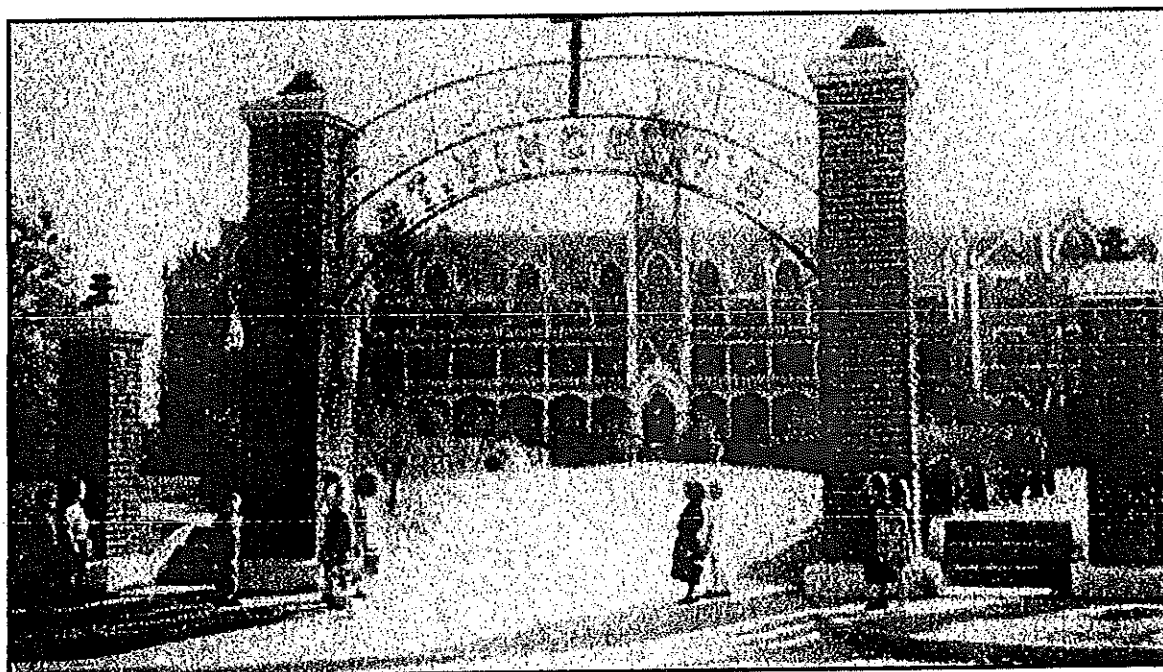


The above building served as a dormitory for boarders until 1906. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.





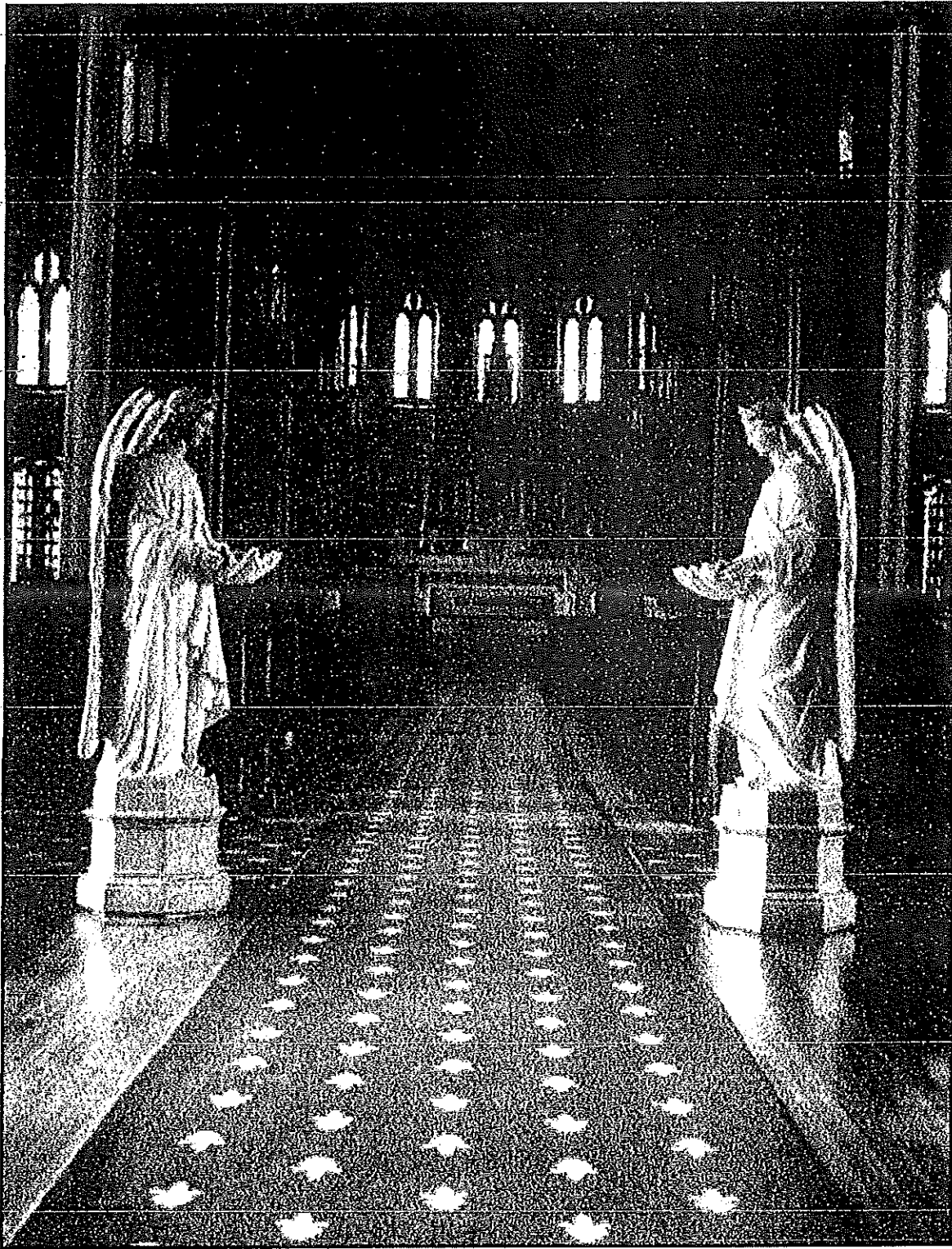
Miscellaneous group of Sisters, Mothers, Students, and one dog on the front steps of St. Vincent's Academy in 1908. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



St. Vincent's Academy Archway. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



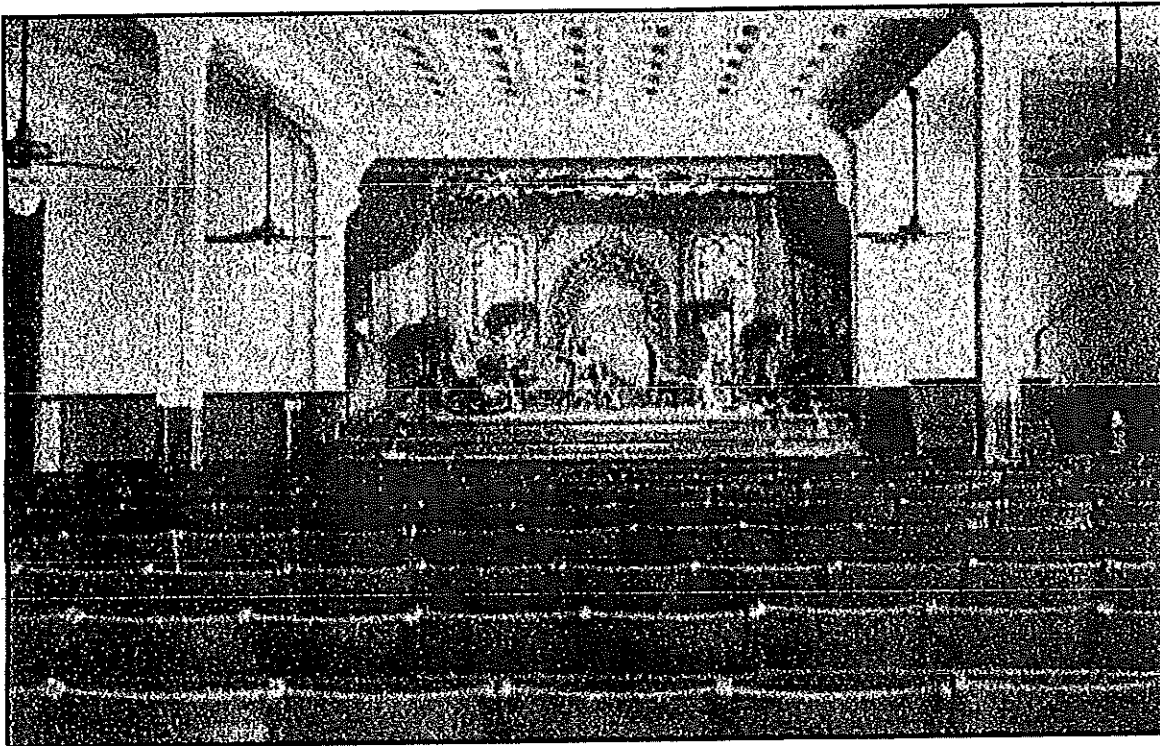
1910 Graduates Virginia McDade, Mary Vandegaer, Margaret Caplis. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



St. Vincent's Chapel Angels with Holy Water. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

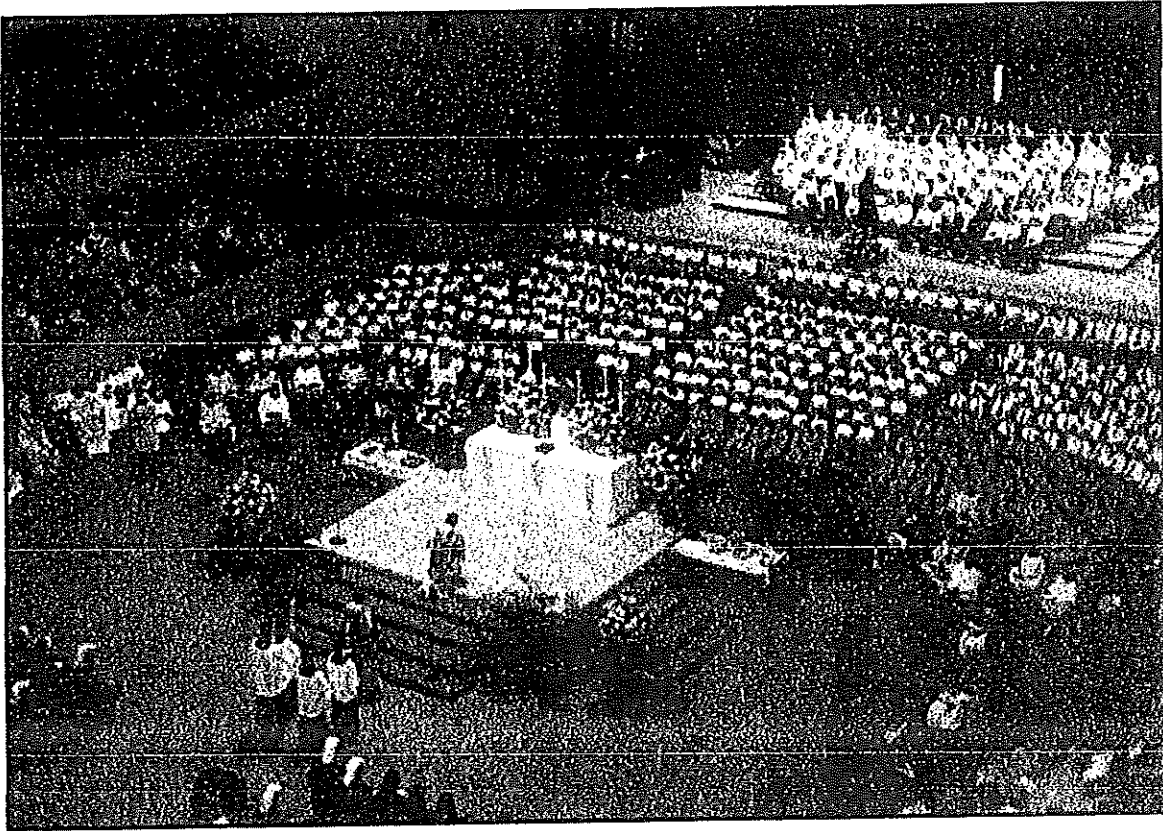


1938 kindergarten class at St. Vincent's Academy. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



The auditorium of St. Vincent's Academy. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.





Centennial Celebration in 1955 conducted at the Shreveport Municipal Auditorium. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

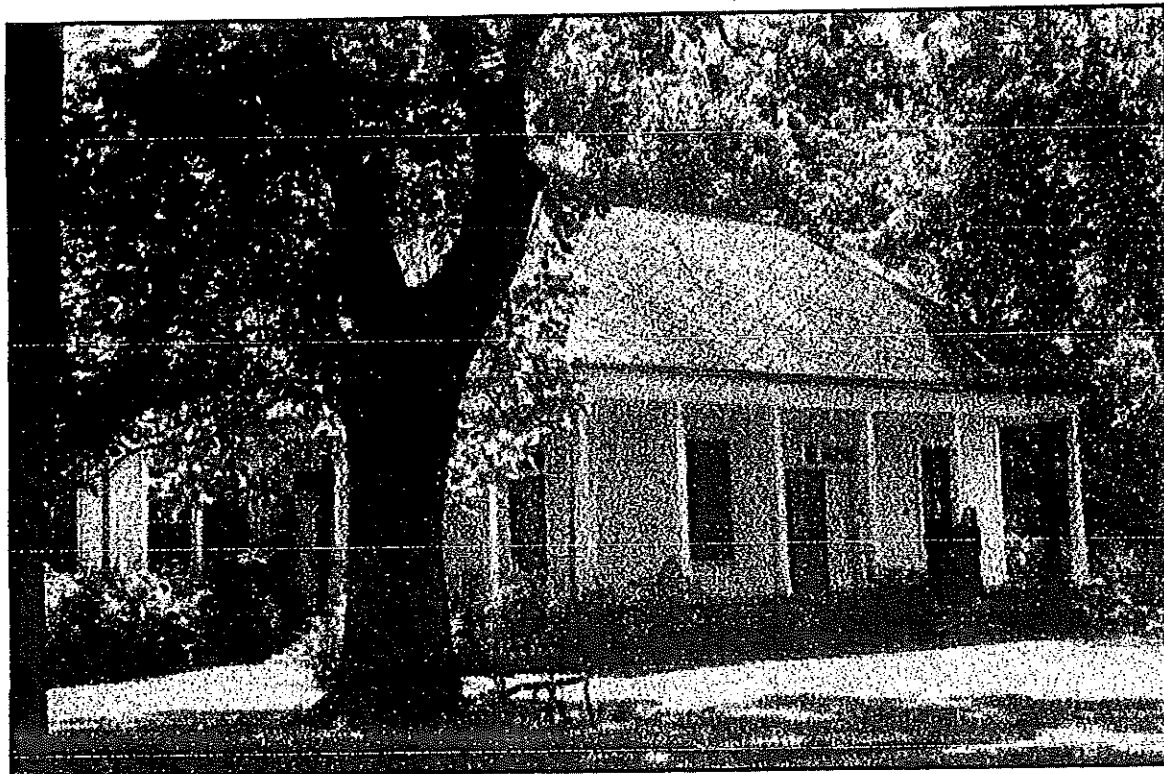


Chapel Altar. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

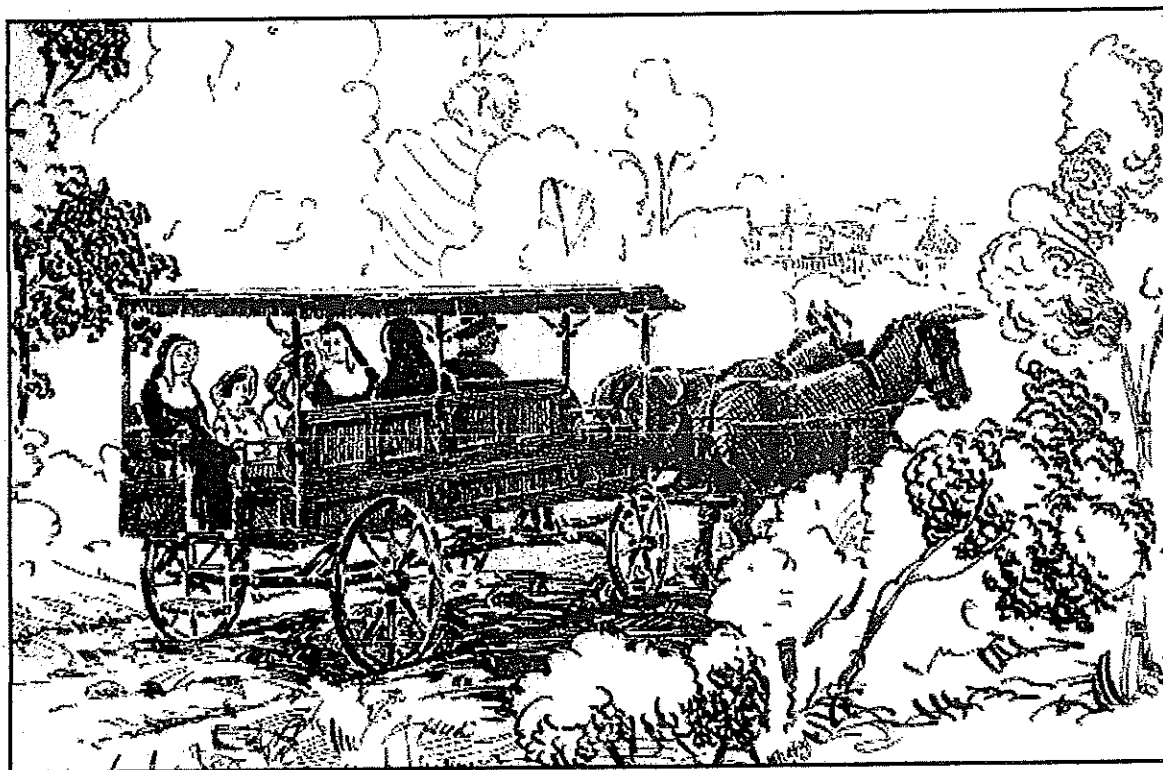


*Napoleon Joseph Roulleaux*  
SHREVEPORT, LA

Monsignor Napoleon Joseph Roulleaux. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



Msgr. Roulleaux Cottage. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



A sketch of the wagon which was frequently seen around Shreveport during the early 1900's. The wagon would often deliver the sisters from the Motherhouse at St. Vincent's to St. Mary's located in downtown Shreveport. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

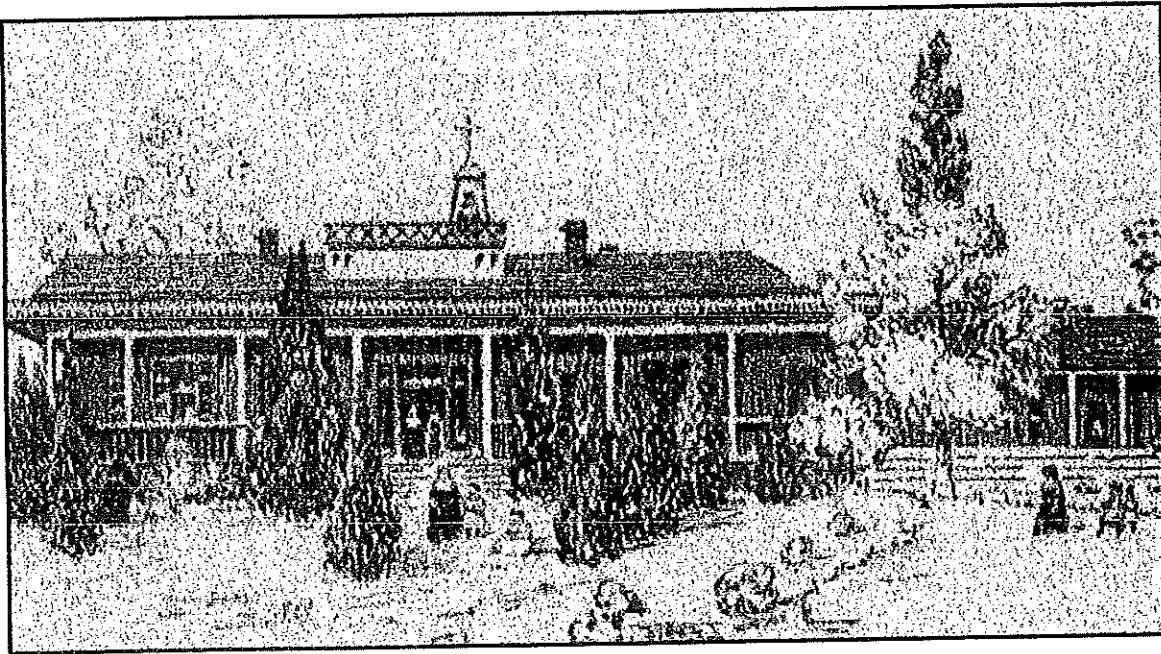


Sister Cornelia as St. Vincent's Academy Graduate Annie Cashore. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

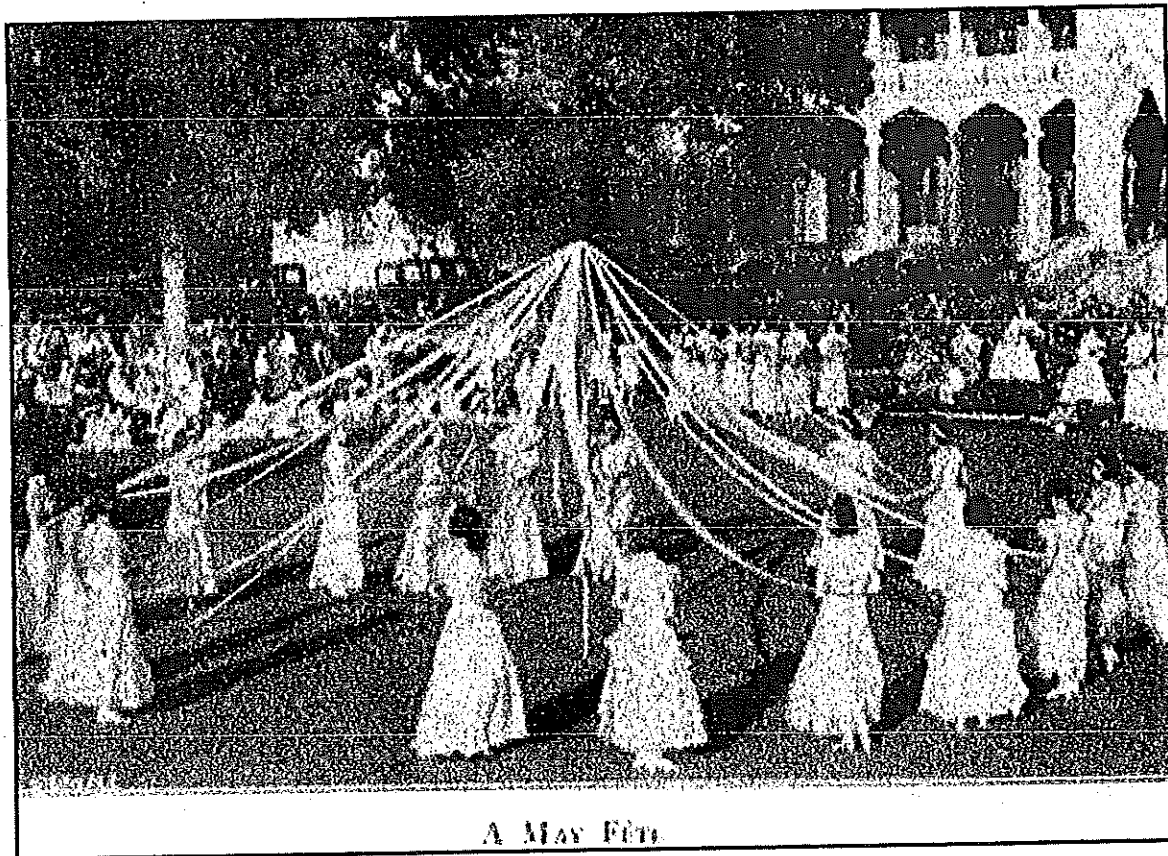




Sister Ignatius wrote *Across Three Centuries*, in which she told the history of the Daughters of the Cross. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

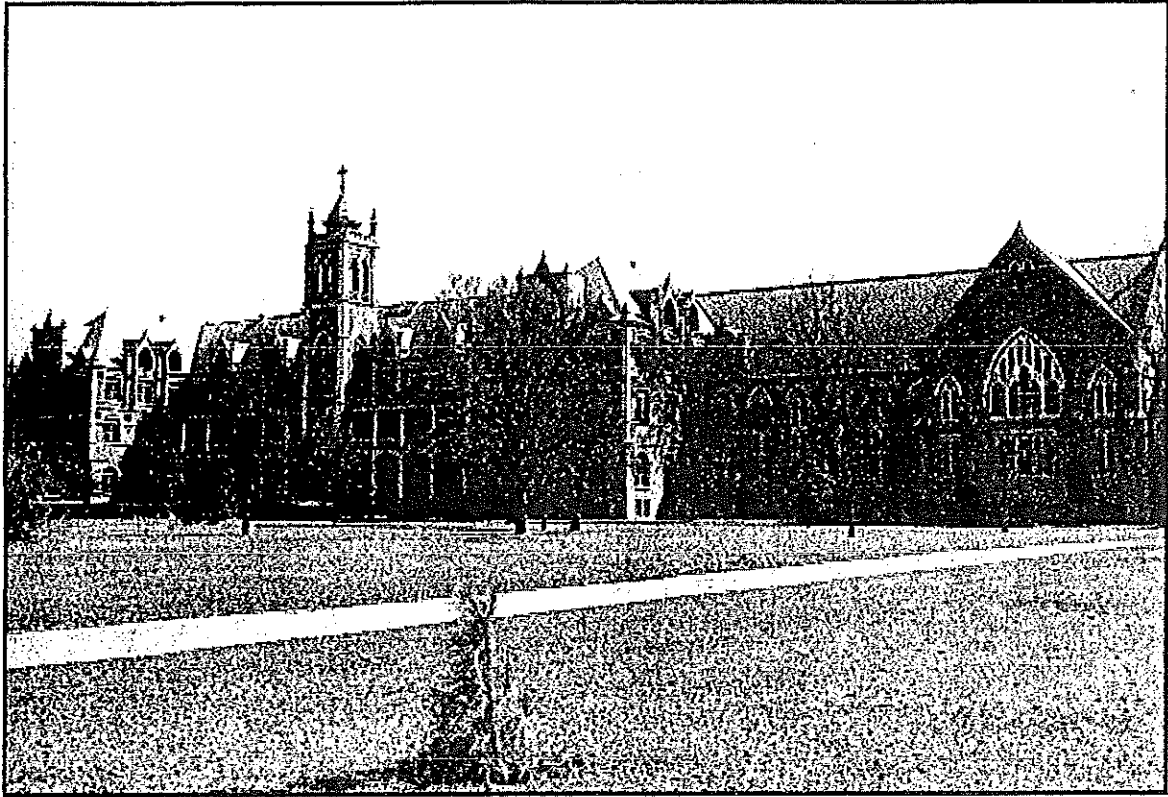


St. Vincent's Academy 1880. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



A MAY FETE

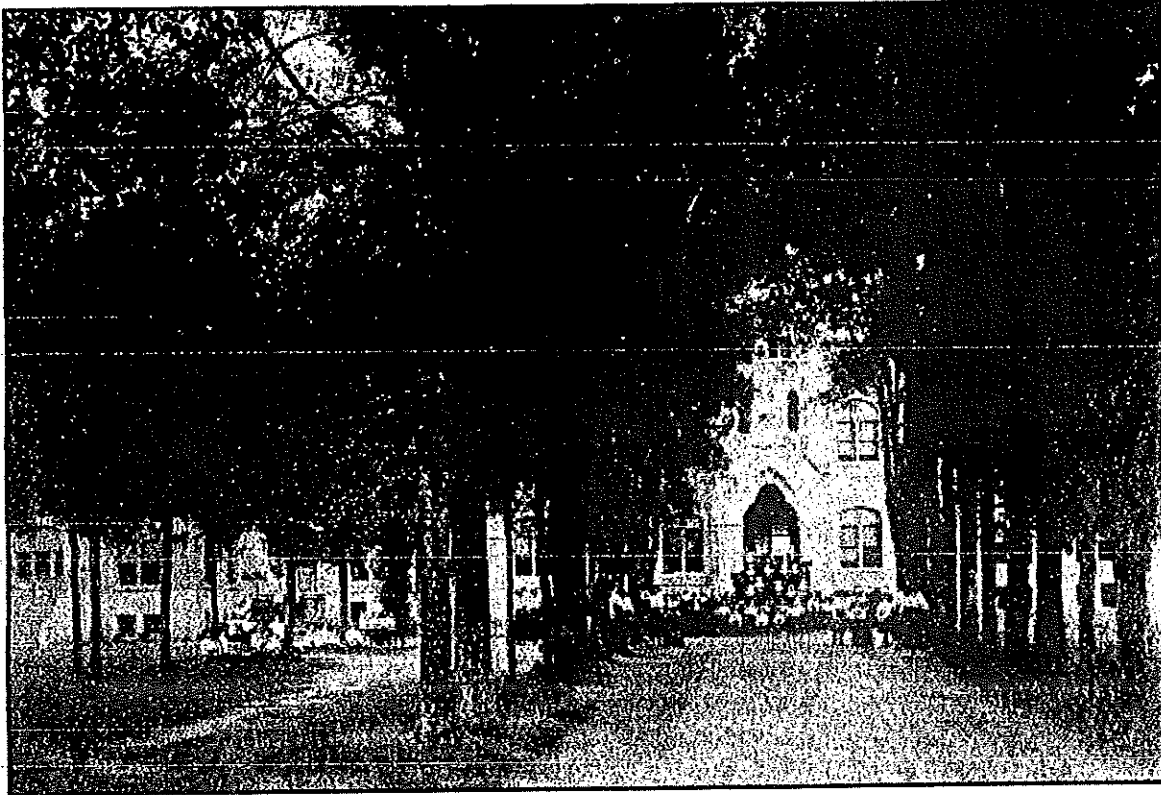
May Fete circa 1930. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



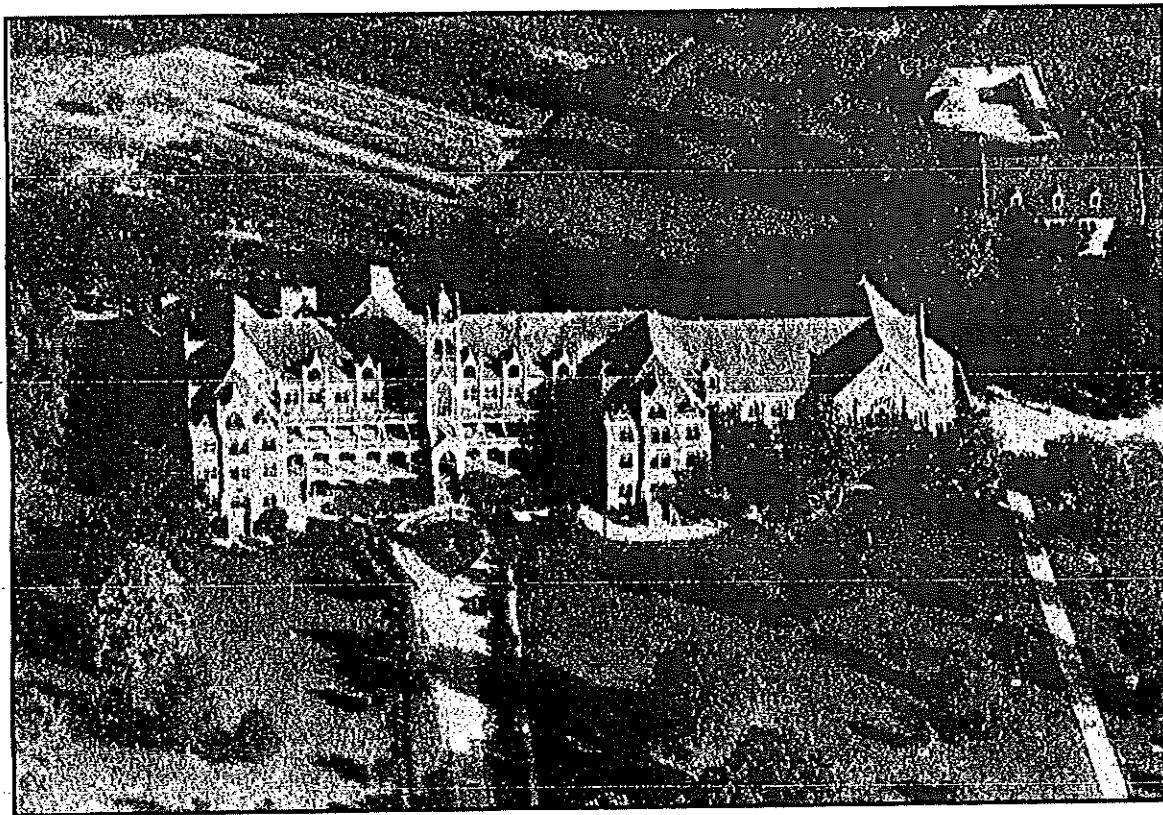
St. Vincent's Academy during the 1930's. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



St. Vincent's Academy, 1919. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

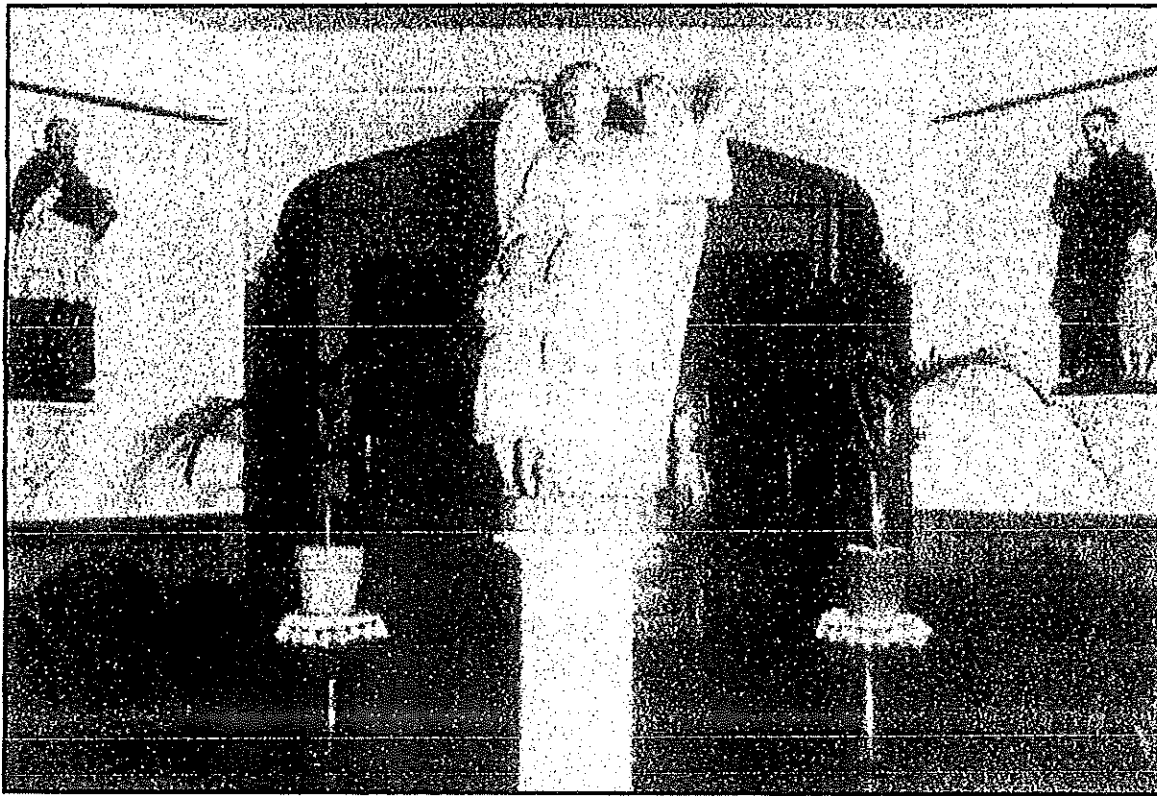


St. Vincent's Academy with the trees and walkway. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

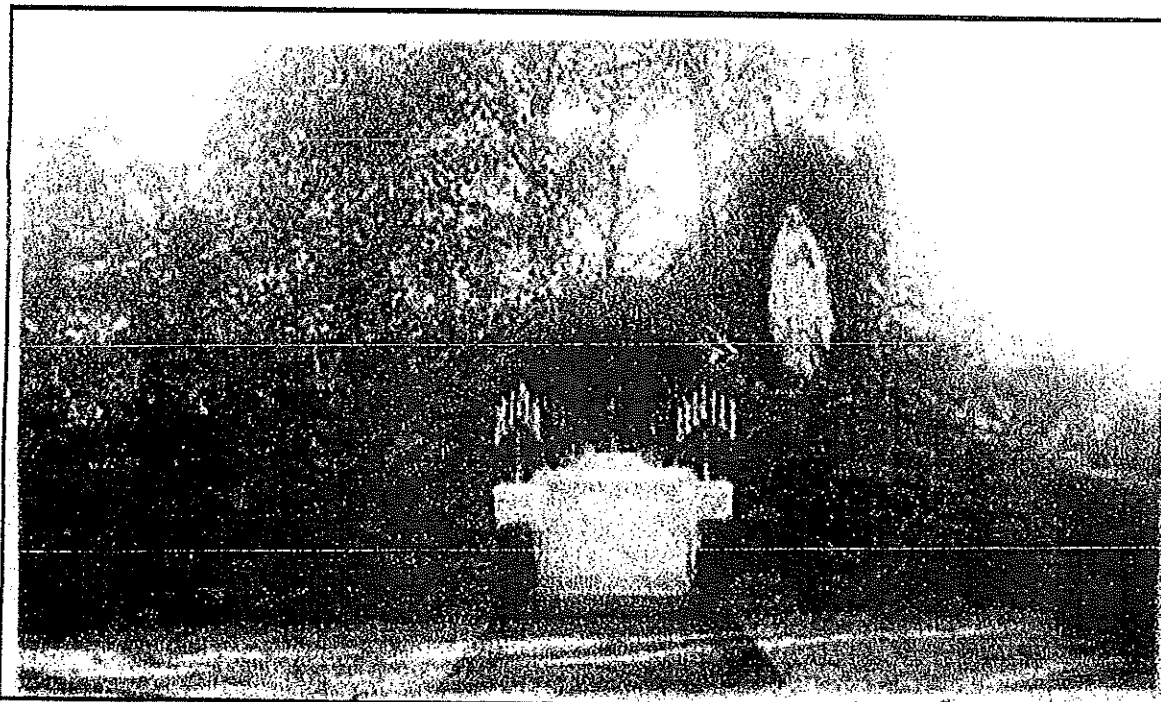


Aerial View of St. Vincent's Academy which shows gardens, noviatiate, and swimming pool in background. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport Noel Memorial Library. Archives and Special Collections.

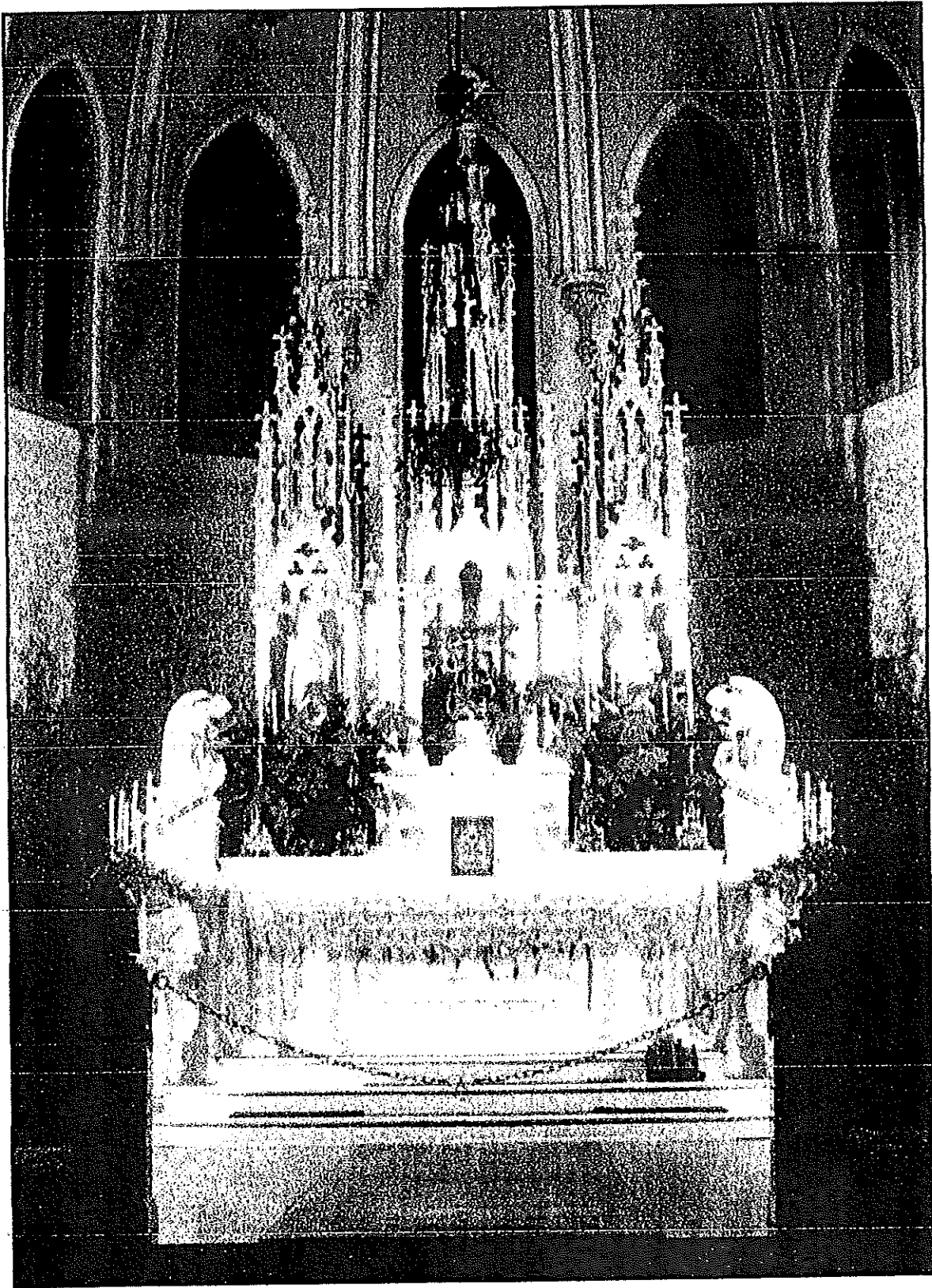




Entrance to the first floor of St. Vincent's Academy in 1929. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



Grotto on the west side of the St. Vincent's campus. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



Altar in the chapel at St. Vincent's. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.



Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, Janet Lindsay, Mary Hope Sherman, and Mrs. Kate Wolcott. Mrs. Wolcott is displaying a circa 1880 graduation dress which the Daughters of the Cross donated to the Spring Street Historical Museum in 1997. Courtesy of Louisiana State University, Shreveport, Noel Memorial Library, Archives and Special Collections.

## **A Tribute to St. Vincent's Academy and the Daughters of the Cross: The Teachers, the Students, and the History**

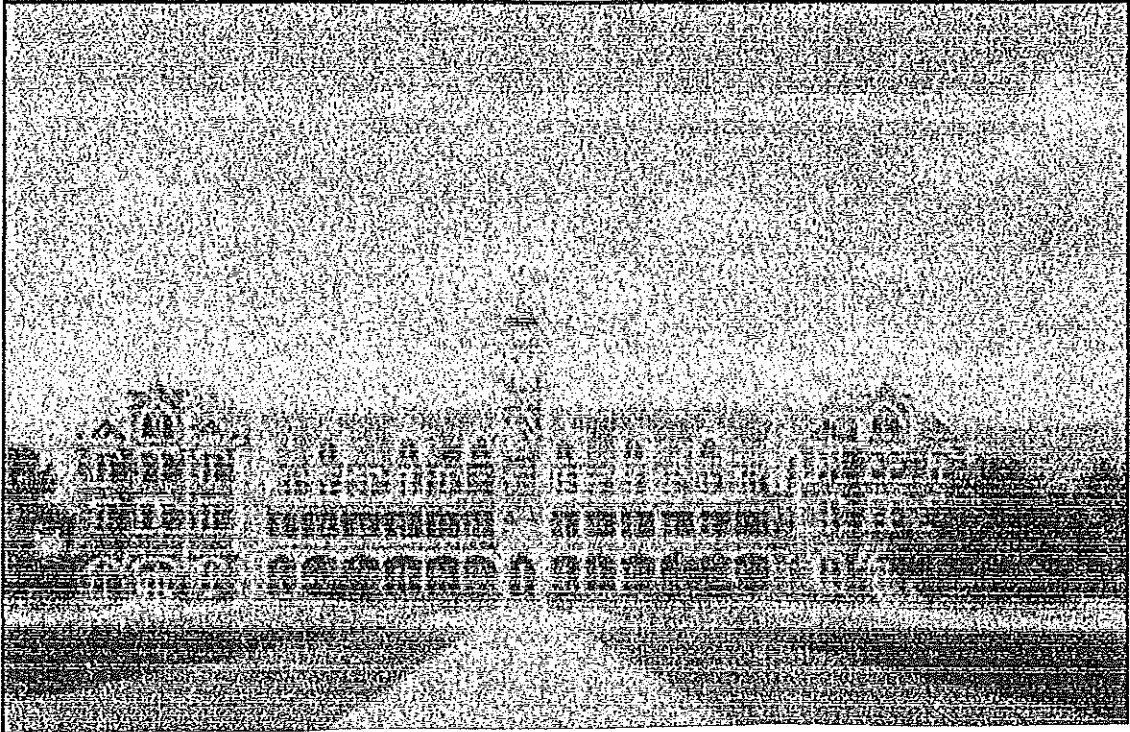
An exhibit of the history of St. Vincent's Academy and the founding Daughters of the Cross, may be seen at the Slattery Library in the Catholic Center until the end of November, 2007. The Diocese of Shreveport and the Slattery Library are located at 3500 Fairfield Avenue.

The material was lovingly collected by Madeline Elford and compiled with the help of her husband Len Elford. Their goal was two-fold. First, to share these memories with fellow alumnae and the community; secondly, to honor the memory of the Sisters who taught at the academy. Visually, the school's history can be seen by photographs, yearbooks, student poems and speeches, brochures, booklets, school rosters, and memorabilia. A rocking chair with shortened legs to accommodate the French nuns is on display. The chair is on loan by Gay Means and Gary L. Fox. Furthermore, parts of the altar rail from the chapel of the 1907 building have been beautifully refurbished by Len Elford and the columns to the altar rail are present also. Other artifacts are a uniform and gym suit

from the 1960's. Among the highlights of the exhibit is an 1880's graduation dress on loan from Spring Street Museum. The walls are filled with art work by Sister Joan Koen, Sister Sophia, and numerous other artists. Many of these include the old gothic St. Vincent's Academy. Other archival material such as the application for the National Register for the 1907 building may be viewed. Around the exhibit areas are chairs which invite researchers to sit, listen to music from the St. Vincent's Academy farewell Mass and, perhaps, take notes to refresh memories of by-gone years. Furthermore, this is an excellent service for researchers. Adding a touch of reality are the nun dolls in period costume surveying the activities of the exhibit.

Glenda Sharbono





**Madeline Howard Elford** is a resident of Shreveport, Louisiana. She attended St. Vincent's Academy from which she graduated, having completed grades one thru twelve at the old gothic building built in 1907. Three generations of her family attended this school which influenced the lives of so many women. She went on to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Centenary College. After a career with the United States Civil Service Commission as an examiner and IRS taxpayer service representative and raising two sons and one daughter, she has turned her attention to music, flowers, photography, as well as entertainment at retirement centers and luncheons. She directs the choir and serves as organist for Holy Trinity Catholic Church. She has created numerous exhibits for the Shreveport community, the latest honoring St. Vincent's and the Daughters of the Cross.