

The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended, and at the close of the "Fair," which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored ones. The medals were given by the Hon. Geo. Dix, Columbus, Queen Isabella, and

Annals from the Archives

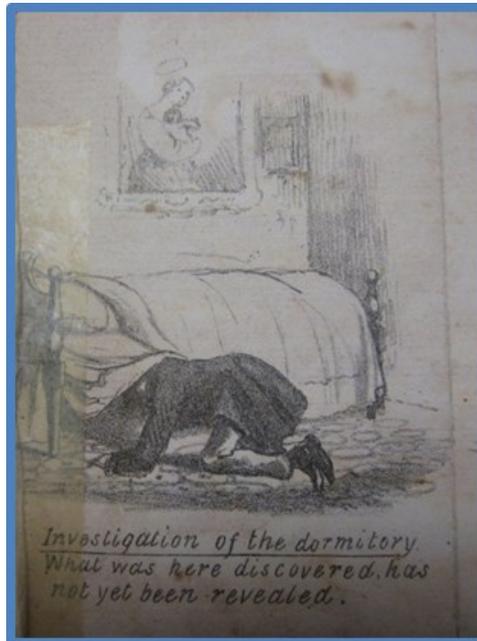
The Sisters of Notre Dame and The 1855 "Nunnery Committee"

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Member of "Nunnery Committee"
searching under a bed.

Lithograph by David Claypoole
Johnston, 1855

From the Boston/Ipswich Archives



—In 1855, our country had long been divided. Civil war would begin in six years and slavery was only one of the many disputes facing the nation. Another was immigration. In the last decade, tens of thousands of Irish and German Catholics came to our country to find a better life. In reaction to the influx of so many immigrants, the American Party or *Know Nothing* Party was formed. They were called the Know Nothings because when asked, they declared they *knew nothing* of what happened at their secretive meetings.

The Know Nothings became so prominent in Massachusetts that all of their candidates for office in 1854 and 1855 won election, including the new governor, Henry J. Gardner. It was in this political climate that the Nunnery Committee was created. On March 26, 1855, convinced that shady dealings were afoot in Roxbury, nearly 20 men arrived unannounced at the Notre Dame Academy's convent.

Sister Mary Aloysius, the Superior, wrote in the Annals, ". . . about half past eleven in the morning, we saw to our great surprise two omnibuses drive up the avenue and stop before our house. . . The Sisters were much alarmed to see so great a number of men enter our little house, and several of the pupils began to weep and cry aloud. The portress showed the men to the parlor, after they had announced that they were sent by the Legislature to visit such establishments as ours. . . I had been occupied all the morning in applying remedies to a sick pupil. . . As soon as we understood what it all meant, I went to the school to reassure the children and to beg them to keep quiet and not to be afraid. Then I went back to our sick child for the same purpose, and I told her to seem to be asleep, if the men came upstairs. When I entered the parlor I was trembling with emotion and indignation, so that I could hardly speak. . . The men repeated to me what they had already said to the portress, and asked whether I had any objections to their inspecting the house. I said that I had not. . . Then commenced

the famous (and villainous) inquisition. They went every place, upstairs and down, and even to the cellar. They opened every door they found—even those of the cupboards in the wall. In the pupils' dormitory, one of them had the boldness to bend over the bed of the sick girl (who had her face turned to the wall) in order to see who she was. In the classroom, the biggest rascal took it into his head to question one of the pupils . . . As the one to whom he addressed himself happened to be the least polite of the children, she became vexed and gave in a loud voice some impertinent answers which put an end to his questioning. . . .”

Despite the Superior's comment, could it be she felt some satisfaction with the student's attitude? Newspapers from Boston to New York condemned these happenings led by Massachusetts congressman, Joseph Hiss. As is often the case, Hiss's actions led to his downfall. When an investigation soon followed, it was revealed that Hiss had housed his mistress in a Boston hotel at the state's expense.