

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. See XIII., Columbus, Susan Spavella, and

Annals from the Archives

Sister Bernadine Marie Daly, 1860-1942

"To her the Fenway owes a lasting debt of gratitude as she bore the burden and responsibility of the erection of this magnificent structure."

From the History of the Foundation of Notre Dame in Boston, 1849-1925, referring to Sister Bernadine Marie



Boston Academy of Notre Dame and Emmanuel College
The Fenway, Boston, c. 1920
Today the building houses Emmanuel College's administration

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—The story had been passed down in the Daly family for years and was included in a family history written by an uncle. Their great-aunt, Mary Daly, had been a Sister of Notre Dame, and was instrumental in Emmanuel College's founding and acted as president of the College. While I trusted the researcher when she contacted me and the stories she'd been told about her great-aunt, I know, as we all do, the possibility of such stories becoming exaggerated with the passage of time. But the effort to discover the truth about Mary Daly was like so much of the research into women's work and women's history. The answers are not easily unearthed.

Until only recently, married women were kept in the shadows by having to assume their husband's name. Few were included in local street directories where many researchers go to locate relatives. And none were listed in poll records until 1920. Women religious had similar problems. Everything in the culture and the Church instructed them to remain humble and therefore, invisible.

As for Mary Daly, the more I learned about her, the more curious I grew. She was born in Salem, MA on August 20, 1860, one of seven children of Matthew and Hannah (McCarthy) Daly, and the only daughter. There is no record of the day she entered the Sisters of Notre Dame but she took her first vows as Sister Bernadine Marie in Cincinnati in 1888, after which she returned to Massachusetts. Not until 1904 is there any other mention of her. And when I found the record, it was an almost inconsequential entry in the Blessed Sacrament Convent Annals stating that Sr. Bernadine Marie had sent for another Sister to return to their convent. That mention alone indicated she was probably an assistant to the local superior. This was confirmed the following year when the Superior of the convent died and Sr. Bernadine Marie was named the new Superior of the Blessed Sacrament Convent in Cambridge. There she remained for the next 9 years. Her abilities must have been noteworthy because when the decision was made to expand and move the Boston Academy of Notre Dame from Berkeley Street to the Fenway, she was named Superior of the Academy and given the responsibility of overseeing the move and the construction of the building that would house the Academy and what would later become Emmanuel College.

The work required her to maintain continual communication with the architects, Charles Maginnis and Timothy Walsh, as well as the builder, Michael Mealey. Maginnis & Walsh were noted for their innovation in church architecture. Sr. Bernadine Marie managed the construction accounts, the many dozens of donations and gifts to the project, as well as fielded any questions the architects had regarding problems encountered, such as the crack that appeared soon after the porch had been completed. The move of the Academy from Berkeley Street to the Fenway in 1916 took almost a month, and involved continual trips between sites as furniture and equipment were removed, packed and transported. As the Annalist for the convent said, *everyone can realize what planning, labor and fatigue it must have entailed to transport the furniture and other household goods accumulated during a period of more than fifty years to their new destination. To Sister Bernadine Marie also we are indebted for the wonderful equipment of this large building which bears testimony to the taste and wisdom of her arrangements.* As construction continued for the opening of the new college in 1919, Sr. Bernadine Marie ordered everything from an ice cream freezer to chemistry laboratory equipment, from Tiffany lamps to laundry equipment, from stained glass windows to girls gym uniforms. Upon completion, the building covered eleven acres and included a gymnasium, dining room, libraries, museum, classrooms, laboratories, needlework department and an auditorium for 600.

Sister Bernadine Marie's work came to fruition in 1919 when Emmanuel College opened with much ceremony and excitement. The first year, twenty-seven young women enrolled. By the following year that number multiplied to seventy-two.

In August of 1920, she was named the Superior of Saints Peter and Paul School and Convent on Broadway Street in South Boston. Her reputation must have preceded her because the Sister recording the Annals for the Broadway Street convent stated that, *this day whose morning was shrouded in heavy dark clouds was to have a rose sunset, for about 5 p.m. our present loved Sister Superior, Bernadine Marie, arrived here from the Fenway to care for us, to cheer us, and protect the hundreds of poor little souls that is our portion of Our Master's Vineyard. Since dear Sister Superior arrived one word will explain what she is to us. 'Kindness.'*

She remained Superior of Broadway Street until 1926 when she was transferred as Superior of the Somerville convent. In 1929, she was sent to Providence, RI to care for St. Teresa's convent and school. By then she was almost 70. From there, it is uncertain just when she returned to Massachusetts.

The next mention I found of her was written more than a decade later in the Tyngsboro Annals on May 18, 1942.

"At 10:30 on the 18th our Chaplain anointed our dear Sister Bernadine Marie, more, we thought as a precaution than as a need. However, as soon as she had been anointed Sister set herself to die and within twelve hours Sister had gone to her longed-for "heavenly home." Father Carey was there to absolve her and the sisters prayed until the very end with her. To do Sister justice, any account of her days here at Tyngsboro should breath the fragrance of all that is prayerful and peaceful; calm and considerate; uncomplaining and unselfish, for Sister has been in these last days, as indeed she had been all through her long, full and active life, the perfect religious lady. Daily her sweet charity found the golden grains of good everywhere. So magnanimous was she in her dealings with others that hers, it would seem, was the gift of changing hearts. Free from charge and from burden of any kind, Sister made a real business of living her religious life, and when Monday, the 18th, came Sister made a business of dying."

Though the style of the day for both religious and lay writing of tributes tended toward idealizing the subject, this does not seem to be the case with Sr. Bernadine Marie. When it was just as easy to say little, more was written indicating she was respected and loved by many. And though Sr. Bernadine Marie Daly is gone, her legacy stands in Boston as a testament to her dedication and her life.

Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ History of the Foundation of Notre Dame, Boston, 1849-1925.
- ◆ Boston Academy, Berkeley Street, Journal, 1916-1954.
- ◆ Annals of the Convent of Notre Dame, Somerville, Mass., 1879-1929.
- ◆ Annals of Tyngsboro, 1927-1972.
- ◆ Journal of Tyngsboro Convent, 1939-1953.
- ◆ Sisters of Notre Dame Entrance Records, 1877-1899.