

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, Queen Isabella, and

Annals from the Archives

Sister Alberta Julie, 1900-1964

Beatrice Kelleher in 1920



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Last month I wrote about Sr. Julie de la Sainte Famille, who served as a General Councillor in Namur during WWII.

In contrast, this article tells of a lesser known Massachusetts Sister.

—Photographs from long ago or not so long ago always have a way of pulling me in, causing me to wonder about the person, their lives and the moment the photograph was taken. I found this picture of Beatrice Kelleher in the archives with the records from Somerville.

Beatrice Kelleher [or Kelliher as the name was spelled by her parents] was born on March 14, 1900, the third child of Patrick and Bridget Kelliher. Her parents emigrated from Ireland in 1897. With them was their baby, Helen, whom the family called Nell. After arriving in the United States, Patrick found work as a laborer and they settled into a rented house at 8 Bigelow Street in Somerville. Beatrice's brother John was born in 1898, followed by Beatrice in 1900, Francis in 1902, Arthur in 1903 and Albert in 1912. Eventually Patrick settled into a job as a laborer for the Boston and Maine Railroad. Typical of the times, he worked twelve hour days, six days a week. Bridget's role was as hard. She raised six children. But, as indicated by the only surviving letter from Beatrice, Bridget relied a great deal on Nell to assume much of the burden for the house and children, because she was the oldest and a girl.

The children attended St. Joseph's High School and all worked hard to achieve their parents' dream. Already a caretaker in many ways, Nell went to nursing school, working first at the local hospitals and then ultimately became the nurse for the City of Somerville. John initially worked as an engraver and then later as a clerk for the Boston Casket Company. By 1940 he had teamed up with Francis MacCarthy to open the MacCarthy and Kelleher Funeral Home on Broadway Street in Somerville. Beatrice graduated from St. Joseph's in 1918. Between 1918 and 1920, she worked as a clerk and a stenographer. Frank became a salesman, Arthur a teacher at the Somerville High School and Albert worked as a clerk at a local business.

In 1920, the same year she had the above picture taken, Beatrice entered the Sisters of Notre Dame. Her youngest brother, Albert, was only 8 then. But she seems to have had a special bond with him because she took as her religious name, Sister Alberta Julie. She completed her novitiate in Waltham and she had her first mission teaching in East Boston. In 1929, she was sent to Worcester, where she also took her final vows.

The following year, the Kelleher family lost both parents. Patrick died first, at the age of 66 and Bridget followed some months later at age 58. The family's only comfort lay in the fact that through their parents' hard work, the home that they had once rented was now theirs. John lived there for the rest of his life, along with his sister and brothers. None of them ever married. Sometime in the early 1930s, Sister Alberta Julie was transferred to Notre Dame Academy in Lowell and in 1940, she went to the Villa Immaculata in Leominster just before the Julie Country Day School opened. While in Leominster, she served as a delegate to the 1948 Chapter.

There is only one surviving letter from Sister Alberta Julie to her brother John, written on May 12, 1946, around the time he opened the Kelleher Funeral Home in Somerville. Her opening indicates that his last visit happened many years before.

“My dear John,” she began. “Your yearly visit is long past due. . . I want to thank you for the lovely desk set, paints etc. which you sent by Nell. . . I had a pleasant visit last Sunday. . . however Al still remains very thin. I do wish that he would put a little flesh on. It seems to me, that he could carry a little more. Tell him for me, that I am praying hard for his interests. . . .Are you still at the Boston Casket Company? . . . Now John, I am going to ask you to do a favor. It is not for myself but for my dear Nell. Wouldn’t you urge her to take a the pilgrimage. . .to St. Ann de Beaupre in July. . .In all these years of devotedness and self sacrifice, our poor Nell has received so little in the line of pleasure. . .”

Sr. Alberta Julie’s question to her brother about the Boston Casket Company reveals just how long it had been since his last visit or since a detailed conversation between them had occurred. John had left the Casket Company over eight years before. Alberta Julie remained in Leominster until 1960 when she was transferred to St. Margaret’s parish in Beverly Farms. Two years later, in August of 1962, she was sent to the Ipswich Novitiate just after its dedication. She remained there until her death on July 21, 1964.

Two months before John’s death on July 6, 1985, the Kelleher house was donated by the family to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. It is still used by the Sisters today.



Kelleher House in Somerville, once owned by the family of Sr. Alberta Julie

Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ Somerville Annals, 1879-1929
- ◆ Leominster Annals
- ◆ Ancestry.com
- ◆ Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Entrance Records, 1877-1973