

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. — Sister XIII., Columbus, Susan Spavella, and

Annals from the Archives

Of Pigs and Ducks and Bees, Oh My! More Tales From Worcester



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First home of the Sisters of Notre Dame on Plantation Street in Worcester

—When the Sisters of Notre Dame moved into the Swan House in Worcester to found Notre Dame du Lac, they kept up a lively account of events in their Annals during their first two years on Plantation Street. Everything from illnesses, visitors, weather, life with their farm hands and, most especially, life with their animals, were written of in great detail.

In March of 1901, the sisters wrote that “Our baby pig, ‘Ratan,’ had a history which we did not know at the time he entered the Convent. He is a native of Cambridge (not in England), and was rescued the day after his birth by a kind-hearted brakeman from the sad fate of his dozen or more brothers & sisters. It seems their mother, possibly out of love, devoured her whole litter except this little creature, which was snatched from her in time to save its life and brought by its deliverer to Worcester where he resides. His name is Callahan and he is the head of the generous family by whom our pig-sty has been, thus far, peopled. His children attend our school at Vernon St., and it was with pride and pleasure that Ratan was given by the youngest to her teacher Sr. Stanislas Kostka (called by her pupils Sr. Sandy Claus) as a present for the Farm.” Unfortunately, little Ratan died soon after, unable to thrive on the cow’s milk the sisters fed it.

To replace their little lost piglet, the sisters receive word that “a good man of the city, entirely unknown to us, told us through the telephone that he had three hogs we could have by sending for them. We gave thanks, lost no time, and before dark, the creatures were housed at the Farm.” Another happy note came when their recently acquired ducks laid their first eggs. “On the 14th our ducks gave their first eggs; they were found in their apartment in the Hennerly: they were sent to Sr. Supr. Julia who is in Berkeley St.”

In an echo of our experience in New England during the winter of 2015, the sisters’ reported that their roads at the end of what had been a snowy winter for them, were “very bad; the melting snow is washing away the soil, making deep furrows from side to side; the horses stumble and the wheels of the vehicles are now down, then up, in way that makes going out not only tedious and disagreeable but in many instances dangerous. Four Srs. went to Vernon St. [a distance of 3 miles] for Benediction on the afternoon of the 25; they were a whole hour on the way going, and longer in returning.”

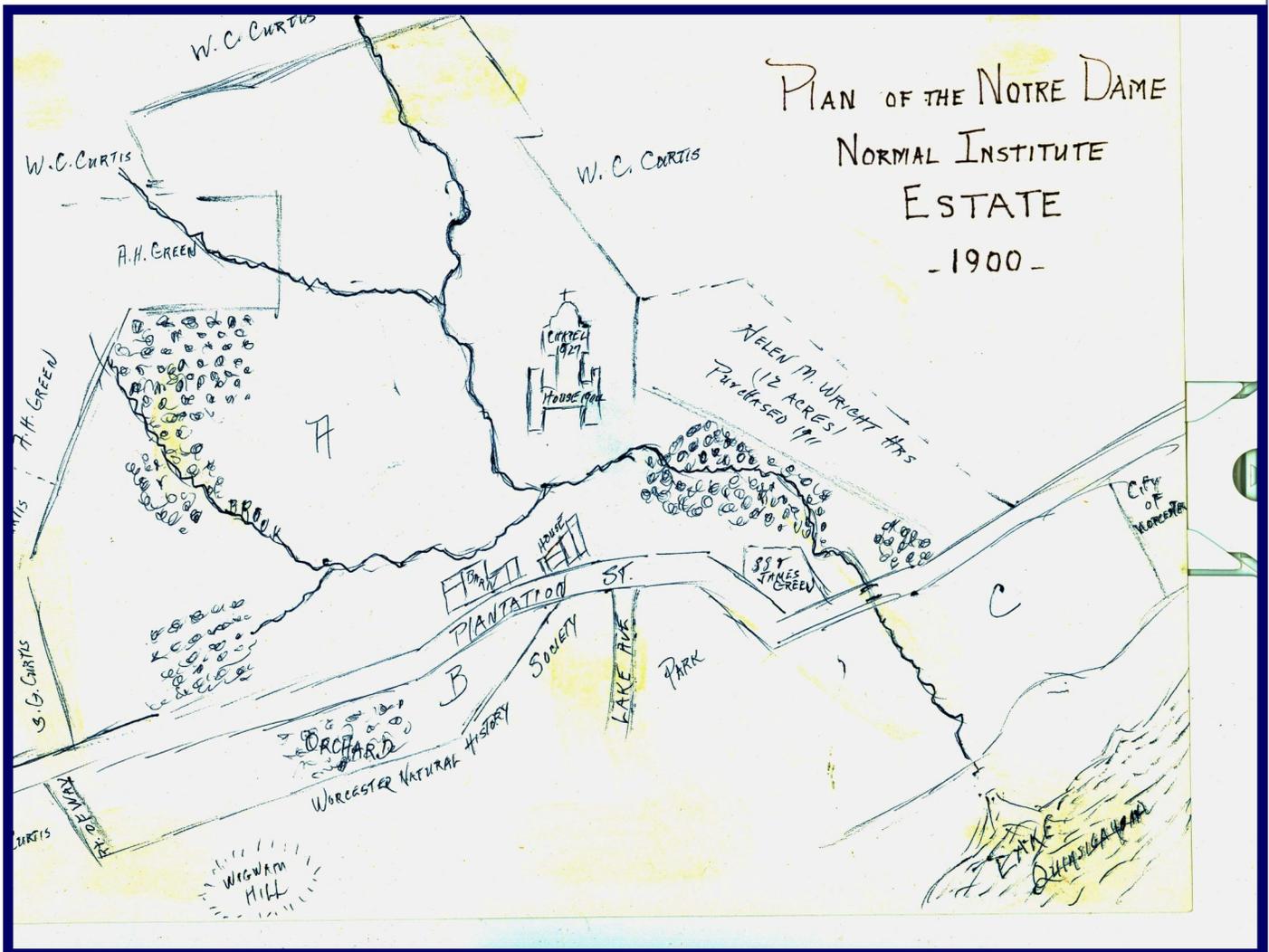
In addition to the melting snow, rain began to fall in April and continued on and off until the end of the month. “Up to the 28th of this month [April] there was no day without rain. Occasionally a gleam of sunshine appeared; but as if the great luminary had made a mistake, he was soon lost in a cloud; so that the 28th was the first dry day from morning to night.”

The long awaited spring weather finally arrived in May—“clear, cool and charming.” The work for another season began when the “men. . . busily engaged in ploughing and planting.” In addition, the sisters expanded their apiary.

"We commenced with two hives, now we have four, as the interesting process of swarming took place last week. A Mr. O'Connell. . . was instrumental in procuring the colony for us; and once a week, he or his son, a student at Holy Cross, comes to look after them. The latter is making a special study of the habits and treatment of those sweet creatures of God."

As is typical in New England, the weather fluctuated during May and early June. "It was mild, even hot, the second week in May that we felt safe in taking down our stoves, the space they occupied being more necessary than themselves; but on the 25th, we were glad to set them up again and light fires for several days." And then in June, "the first full week. . . brought summer weather but it did not come to stay. A light shower on First Friday afternoon was followed by a high, cold and destructive wind, similar to visitations one expects in March."

June continued to be a lively month. Visitors arrived to enjoy picnics and were often amused by the unexpected happenings with the farm animals. "The V. St. [Vernon Street] High School had their day here on the 12th. As they were about to leave we had an unexpected and exciting scene. One of the pigs escaped from the pen and raced furiously for nearly half an hour through potato and corn fields, pursued by Denis; as the men were milking and could not well leave, the poor boy had it all to himself; when he succeeded in catching the frightened animal, he and it were well nigh exhausted. George, as soon as he could leave the cows, arrived with a wheelbarrow on which he coolly placed the creature and drove her home, Thos. and Denis forming a guard on either side. Thus we had an unannounced 'Pig-race' all our own and all to ourselves."



Sketch of Swan Farm. Original house next to Plantation Street, across from Worcester Natural History Society. Boston/Ipswich Archives

Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ Annals, Plantation Street, 1900-1902.