

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

Sr. Alice Gertrude Keating, 1898-1994

Sister Alice Gertrude Keating



September 2015
Written by
Nancy Barthelemy
Archivist
nancy.barthelemy@sndden.org
sndbostonlpwlich.wordpress.com
bolparchives.omeka.net

—The last issue of Annals from the Archives focused on Sr. Helen Madeleine Ingraham, the first Dean of Emmanuel College. Just as the college was being founded in 1919, a young woman by the name of Mary Keating entered the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, taking the name Sr. Alice Gertrude. While Sr. Helen Madeleine was influential during Emmanuel College's early years, Sr. Alice Gertrude helped expand the college during the 1950s, offering the chance for the school to grow from a primarily commuter college to one that gave space for resident students.

Mary Keating's association with the Sisters of Notre Dame began long before her birth on March 29, 1898 in East Boston. Her mother Alice Halligan (1863-1928) attended Our Lady of the Isle School, located on Noddle Island, which was one of six Boston Harbor Islands that were eventually filled in to create what is the present day East Boston. Our Lady of the Isle was run by the Sisters of Notre Dame and later was the site of the Fitton School, which was named after Fr. James Fitton in 1892. That same year, at the age of 29, Alice Halligan married George F. Keating (1865-1937), a marine engineer responsible for navigating Boston ferries. Three years later, their first child, Margaret, was born. Three years after that came Mary, followed by the youngest sister, Gertrude, in 1901. The three sisters attended the Fitton School.

On Jan. 6, 1919, Mary entered the Sisters of Notre Dame in Waltham. She took the name Alice Gertrude, after her mother and younger sister. During her novitiate, she taught at St. Mary's in Lawrence. From there, she was transferred to Springfield, MA where she taught until 1924. From 1924 to 1925, she taught at St. Joseph's High School in Somerville. Between 1925 and 1929, she served at St. Gregory's High School in Dorchester. In 1929, she was transferred to St. Mary's in Cambridge. The following year, she returned to Springfield as the Superior of the Sacred Heart Convent. She remained in Springfield until 1934 when she was named the superior of the Academy of Notre Dame in Roxbury. She remained in Roxbury for the next six years. Her next transfer was to the Notre Dame Academy in Tyngsboro. Archival records indicate that it was while she was in Tyngsboro that she began the kind of work for which she ultimately became known—supervising the construction, renovation and expansion of numerous SND buildings and schools.

When she left Tyngsboro in 1946 for St. Mary's Convent in Cambridge, the Tyngsboro Annals described her work in this way, "Each one who has come to take charge at Tyngsboro has helped to make Tyngsboro grow, but it has been our present Sister Superior's joy not only to build but to beautify. From top to bottom and from end to end of our big house the Painters have worked persistently until delicate colors have added warmth to each room and light to each corridor. . . . Lunchroom and Locker rooms, Recreation rooms and Classrooms, each has had its share of attention. Best of all, Sister Superior has built a place in our hearts for she has made a happy home because of her quick understanding and gentle consideration."

Her next six year term at Cambridge indicates she supervised renovations there as well. Through those many years, she took summer classes as was common then with the sisters to earn her Bachelor's Degree. In 1948, she received her B.A. in English from Emmanuel College. Not wasting any time, she immediately launched into work for her Master's Degree, which she completed in 1952, the same year she was named the president of Emmanuel College. Upon her transfer to Emmanuel, the Cambridge Sisters wrote in their Annals that, "Sister Superior has endeared herself to all during her years with us. Our convent and both the boys and girls schools bear silent testimony of her devotedness and care for us."

Her first months at Emmanuel were a whirlwind of activity. And with 1952 being an election year, the sisters' interest in the state and national elections were intense. They were especially delighted when a member of their Advisory Board, John F. Kennedy, defeated Henry Cabot Lodge to become their Massachusetts Senator. Despite the many appointments and ongoing events, Sr. Alice Gertrude lost no time in planning for the future.

In her first report to the Emmanuel College Trustees written on Nov. 18, 1952, she stated that "*Statistics in the education world point to heavy enrollment in colleges beginning in the year 1956. It is for us to plan now for that time by planning new buildings to meet the need when it arises.*" She began to investigate methods to raise the necessary funds for such expansion and reported on Dec. 11, 1953 that the blueprints and plans for what would become Marian Hall were being reviewed by the Trustees. Ground was broken for Marian Hall in June of 1954. The building was completed and dedicated on September 26, 1955. It held a dining hall, gymnasium, lounges for the students, classrooms, an infirmary and 20 more rooms for resident students. She also encouraged the faculty to work on their graduate degrees and explore research opportunities in everything from sociology to Russian, from business to psychology, from geography to public relations. In 1955, she acknowledged the low pay the lay professors received and with a grant from the Ford Foundation was able to "*establish a new salary scale, which has given great encouragement to the faculty.*"

Despite the opening of Marian Hall, Emmanuel continued to struggle with space, especially as enrollment increased with every passing year. More buildings were needed and Sr. Alice Gertrude worked to find the funding for the necessary expansion. By 1958, St. James Hall, which provided housing for the sisters, and Julie Hall, a new dormitory for students were completed. When Sr. Alice Gertrude started as Emmanuel College's president in 1952 there were 598 students at the college. By the end of her tenure in 1960, that number had risen to almost 900 students. Despite her heavy schedule, she found time in 1959 to assist with the work to furnish both the newly built Bishop Fenwick and Bishop Stang Convents.

When her term as president ended in 1960, her work wasn't over. She turned to her new project, supervising the planning, construction and opening of the new Novitiate in Ipswich, MA. She also worked with the architect, Eugene F. Kennedy, on the construction of the new NDA in Hingham. Included among her many projects during those years were the new hospital wing at Notre Dame du Lac in Worcester, renovations of the vacation cottage and chapel at Peaks Island in Maine, and designing the new wing and chapel at the vacation home in Gloucester.

Sister Alice Gertrude Keating died at the Lake on May 5, 1994.



Marian Hall in 1955, after the building was completed.

Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ St. Mary's Convent Annals, Cambridge, MA.
- ◆ Academy of Notre Dame Annals, Roxbury, MA.
- ◆ Notre Dame Academy Annals, Tyngsboro, MA.
- ◆ Emmanuel College Annals, 1952-1956.
- ◆ Emmanuel College Papers, SND Archives, Ipswich, MA.
- ◆ *Boston Globe Archives*, 1872-1980.