

*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

## St. Mary's, Lawrence, Class of 1914



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St. Mary's Lawrence  
Class of 1914

—There are dozens of graduation photographs in the Ipswich archives dating back to the 1870s. As I study the faces of so many of those young women, I'm always curious as to who they were and whatever became of them. I'm sure many of their teachers also wondered what life would bring to their students once they left school. Some graduating classes, especially during the 1920s, had a high percentage of young women entering religious life. Others, like this 1914 class from St. Mary's in Lawrence, MA, had more than half of the graduates go on to become teachers.

The St. Mary's class of 1914 was originally comprised of 17 young women. In March of that year, just three months before graduation, Helen Cantillon (1896-1914) died from complications after surgery to remove her thyroid. Though she did not live to have her photograph taken with the rest of her classmates, her name is listed with the other graduates on the back of the photo. The remainder of the girls were between 15 and 18 at the time of their graduation. While at St. Mary's, nine of those sixteen graduates passed the Normal School Examination, which allowed them to enter one of Massachusetts ten teaching colleges. All of them went on to become teachers. They were Veronica Delaney, Frances Devoy, Teresa O'Connor, Elizabeth McKenna, Mary McMahon, Marguerite Moran, Louise O'Brien, Catherine Duggan and Alice L. Walsh.

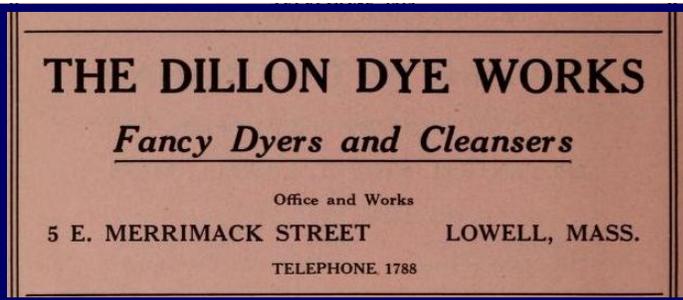
While most of St. Mary's graduates remained in or near Lawrence after graduation, either as teachers or in other employment, Alice L. Walsh seems to have been more involved than most in the life of St. Mary's Parish and devoted to the Sisters of Notre Dame. Alice was born in Lawrence in 1897, the daughter of John and Julia Walsh. Her father died not long after her birth, leaving her mother and Alice on their own. Julia could not support herself and her young daughter on the wages she took home as a weaver in one of the local mills. So Alice went to live with her uncle and aunt, Edward and Margaret Walsh, on Oak Street in Lawrence, where she remained while at St. Mary's and during her studies to become a teacher.

While at St. Mary's, Alice, like all the other girls, was taught sewing as part of the curriculum. Alice kept many of the pieces she worked on, learning everything from creating button holes, various embroidery and sewing stitches, to designing sleeves and how to pleat a skirt for her own use. Upon her graduation from Normal School, Alice and her mother were finally able to live together again as a family and they moved into an apartment on Bunkerhill Street. Alice taught in Lawrence's public schools for the rest of her life. She joined the St. Mary's Alumnae Association and just months after St. Mary's pastor died in 1925, Alice wrote a biography about him entitled, [A Sketch of the Life and Labors of the Rev. James T. O'Reilly, O.S.A., Pastor of St. Mary's Church, 1886 to 1924.](#) Sometime in the 1970s, she donated all of her school embroideries to the Ipswich archives.

Alice might have seemed the exception during those years, as she never married. As it turned out, though, 4 of the 9 students who did become teachers remained single and worked in education for the rest of their lives. The law during those years prevented women from continuing to teach after they had married. Those marriage bars were finally overthrown in 1941 and some former teachers, like Teresa O'Connor, who had married William Hey in 1924, were finally able to return to the classroom.

Five other members of the Class of 1914 became bookkeepers or stenographers, two professions that were open to women during those years. Two other students, Mary Sheehan and Frances Dillon, passed the entrance examinations for Boston University and Trinity College, respectively. Mary Sheehan was the fifth of seven children of Patrick and Nora Sheehan. She later entered the Sisters of St. Joseph and was a professor at Our Lady of the Elms College in Chicopee, MA.

Frances Dillon was born Mary Frances Winifred Dillon in 1896 in Lawrence, the daughter of John and Mary Frances (Regan) Dillon. John worked as a dyer in one of the Lawrence's dye work factories. Like Alice Walsh, Frances' father died when she was quite young. Unlike Alice, Mary Frances' father seems to have left her mother enough money for the family to live modestly. Since she was named for her mother, Mary Frances preferred to avoid confusion and was usually called Frances. After Frances left Lawrence for her studies at Trinity College, her mother moved to Lowell to begin the Dillon Dye Works in 1916. Once Frances graduated from Trinity College in 1918, she returned to help her mother with the business. After her mother's death in 1921, Frances and her sister, Anna, took over the operation of the business. The company was well known for decades in the city of Lowell and remained in operation with Frances as its president and treasurer until the early 1970s.



Advertisement from the  
 1926 Lowell City Directory  
 archive.org



**Front row, left to right:** Louise O'Brien (1897-1924), Anna McGrath (1895-1985), Mary McMahon (1898-1973), Frances Dillon (1896-1993), Catherine Duggan (1897-1978)  
**Middle row, left to right:** Teresa O'Connor (1897-1963), Elizabeth McKenna (1896-1983), Mary Sheehan (1897-1982), Frances DeVoy (1896-1967), Alice L. Walsh (1897-1979), Constance Joyce (1896-1994)  
**Top row, left to right:** Marguerite Moran (1897-1976), Nora Donahue (1896-1976), Veronica Delaney (1897-1985), Gertrude Shea (1896-1978), Mary Casey (1896-1987)

**Sources consulted for this article**

- ◆ Lawrence City Schools Collection, 2016.05.
- ◆ Ancestry.com
- ◆ Internet Archive—archive.org