

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Records
Lowell, Massachusetts Notre Dame School Records
Finding Aid

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Collection Summary

Title: Lowell, Massachusetts Notre Dame School Records

Accession Numbers: 2016.15

Dates: 1852-2006

Bulk Dates: 1852-1990

Location: East West Province Archives, Ipswich, MA

Physical Description: 24 volumes, 10 boxes, 154 photographs: 6.5 linear feet

Abstract: The Sisters of Notre Dame were invited to take over St. Patrick's School in Lowell in 1852. Because the city employed many recent immigrants, the first superior of the St. Patrick's convent, Sr. Desiree Erculisse, also opened a boarding school for students, which became the Notre Dame Academy. Records for the Academy and Day School include the convent records kept by the sisters, a few brochures and records of student events and activities and papers for the elementary school during the early 21st century. Also included are records for St. Margaret's School and for the Julie Asian Center which closed in 2006. St. Patrick's High School closed in 1958 and the elementary school is still a sponsored school of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.

Search Terms:

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur - Massachusetts - Lowell
Lowell, Massachusetts Schools

Provenance: The records for the Notre Dame School records in Lowell, Massachusetts were sent to the archives between the 1980s and 2006 when the Julie Asian Center closed.

Processing: The collection was organized and arranged in 2016.

Conservation Work: Papers were flattened and tears mended.

Restrictions: Records for the Notre Dame Academy, St. Patrick's High School and the records for the Sisters of Notre Dame in Lowell are open to the public. The papers for the Julie Asian Center are closed until 2036.

Scope and Content Note:

When five Sisters of Notre Dame arrived in Lowell, Massachusetts on September 21st, 1852 to teach at the St. Patrick Church parish school, they could not have known the city was a tinderbox waiting to be ignited. For several years, tensions had been mounting between recent Irish immigrants and the local people. During the last two decades, the city – like almost every other city in the state – had gone through a dramatic rise in population. In 1828, the census recorded approximately 3500 people, of which about 500 were Irish. By 1850, there were over 33,000 people in the city and the Irish immigrants made up more than 11,000, 33 per cent of the city.

When the first Irish immigrants arrived in Lowell during the worst of the potato famine, most of the residents responded with sympathy. People of Lowell and other nearby communities sent money and food to the starving people of Ireland. But by the late 1840s and early 1850s, that sentiment began to shift and the Nativist or American party [so called to support native born Americans and to work against immigration], also known as the “Know Nothing Party,” swept into power in 1854. Part of the growing animosity had to do with the deep family loyalty the Irish felt – most sent a portion of their wages home to Ireland in an effort to bring other family members into the U.S. To qualify for work at the mills applicants had to produce a certificate of public school attendance. On the one hand, the new immigrants were eager for their children to attend school; on the other, they feared it was a Yankee plot to pull their children away from their Catholic beliefs.

When Sisters Desiree, Rose, Frances, Stanislas and M. Honorine arrived in Lowell in 1852 to open a free Catholic school, the local Irish and other Catholic population were delighted. Within 3 days, 300 children were enrolled. In addition to the regular curriculum of the day, the Sisters also instructed the children for preparation for First Communion and Confirmation. Beyond this work, though, the sisters soon realized that with so many of the mothers working in the mills, a good number of the children could not attend because “younger brothers and sisters were left in their charge at home.” Another issue for the children who attended was the distance some had to travel. So “the Sisters advised their parents to supply the children with bedding and table furnishings, and let them spend the night at the convent, returning home only at the end of the week. To this the parents consented. . . . And then the rumors began to spread in late May and early June of 1854 that the Know Nothings would arrive to burn down the church and convent.

All the Sisters knew of the 1834 attack on the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, resulting in it being burned to the ground. Another such attack seemed all too possible. Terrified, the Sisters sent the children home, expecting a mob to attack any time. They assembled small bundles if it became necessary to flee. A signal was agreed upon – one peal of the church bell would inform them that a mob was nearing. Days passed this way until a morning in early June when that dreaded peal rang out. The Know

Nothings had arrived “but they had not counted sufficiently on Irish loyalty and vim. When just within sight of St. Patrick’s they [the Know Nothings] were attacked by some strong armed Irish men and women – Yes women, for these led the attack. . . a sinewy matron unable to restrain her indignation had seized upon one of the leaders of the gang and flung him over the railing floundering into the water below. The rest of the gang made the best of their way out of the mob.”

Things settled down to an uneasy truce. But the harassment continued throughout the rest of the year. Several times, groups arrived insisting on inspecting the convent. Not long after, Sr. Desiree was granted permission to accept permanent boarders and to open up the boarding to younger children whose mothers worked in the mills – “too young to enter any of the classes, they were kept in a large room supplied with amusement and toys and subject to a kind of kindergarten surveillance. . . altogether a pleasant home provided for them.” This became one of the earliest, if not the earliest, day care center in the United States.

The work for the sisters in Lowell grew year by year. In addition to caring for the youngest children and opening a boarding school for girls, the sisters also offered food and sometimes shelter to the poor during the Panic of 1857 when many mill workers lost their jobs. As the years went by, however, the residents came to accept the sisters and their work in the city. The Notre Dame Academy remained in Lowell until 1926 when it moved to Tyngsboro, MA. St. Patrick’s High School remained open until 1958. The school is now managed as an elementary school only.

In 1985, the Sisters of Notre Dame responded to another immigrant influx in Lowell by opening the Julie Asian Center. The center assisted immigrants with instructions in language and efforts to become citizens. They also offered other classes helpful to the new resident. The Center closed in 2006.

The Lowell, Massachusetts Notre Dame School papers include convent annals, journals, financial records, commemoration volumes created by the students for the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, IL in 1893, Alumnae Association papers, brochures and pamphlets for parish and school anniversaries, school yearbooks, and student and school records for the Julie Asian Center.

Convent Annals and Journals recorded events in the convent, parish and school. They also wrote of city or national emergencies, such as the Panic of 1857 when they aided the poor or the Pandemic of 1918, when the Lowell Sisters went out to the poor to nurse them through the crisis. The Convent Annals written in 1890 record the memories of one of the first sisters in Lowell. The Columbian Exposition volume on Columbus was created by the Academy students to send to the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. The remainder of the St. Patrick’s and Academy school papers include brochures for anniversary celebrations, informational brochures for prospective students, school

correspondence and parish events and celebrations. There are also papers for the Merrimack Valley Cluster, a group begun by the Sisters of Notre Dame to explore the needs of the people in the Merrimack Valley. There are also papers for St. Margaret's Parish, where the SNDs were involved.

The collection has been divided into 2 series:

St. Patrick and NDA Papers

Julie Asian Center Papers

Organization and Container List

St. Patrick and NDA Papers

School Shelves

- St. Patrick's Convent Annals, 1852-1904.
- St. Patrick's Convent Annals, 1890.
- St. Patrick's Convent Annals, 1905-1917.
- St. Patrick's Convent Annals, 1917-1937.
- St. Patrick's Convent Annals, 1938-1959.
- St. Patrick's Columbian Exposition Volume, Columbus: Birth and Education, 1893.
- Alumnae Association Meeting Minutes, 1956-1971.
- A Century in Lowell, 1952.
- St. Patrick Catholic Church, 150th Anniversary, 1981.
- St. Patrick Parish School Anniversary, 2002.
- St. Patrick Catholic Church, 175th Anniversary, 2005.
- St. Patrick Irish Cultural Week, 2003.
- Visitation Report of the Parish of St. Patrick, Lowell, MA, 1996.
- St. Patrick's School Yearbook, 2002.

Box 01

- Folder 01** Notre Dame Convent Anniversaries, 1902-1927, 1989-2002,
- Folder 02** Influenza Papers, 1918.
- Folder 03** Notre Dame Academy Brochures, 1902-1906.
- Folder 04** Notre Dame Academy Events, 1896-1925.
- Folder 05** Notre Dame Academy Student Essays, 1891.
- Folder 06** History and Annals, 1939, 2003-2005.
- Folder 07** Correspondence, 1925, 1973-2005.
- Folder 08** Merrimack Valley Cluster Meetings, 2003.
- Folder 09** School Events, 1985-2005.
- Folder 10** School Papers, 1989, 2000-2006.
- Folder 11** Student and School Awards, 1864, 1908, 1990.
- Folder 12** Church History, 1989-1996.

- Folder 13** St. Patrick's Parish Papers, 2002-2006.
- Folder 14** St. Patrick's Church Newsletters, 1999-2004.
- Folder 15** St. Margaret's Parish Papers, 2002-2004.
- Folder 16** St. Margaret's Parish Papers, 2005.
- Folder 17** St. Margaret's Parish Papers, 2006.

Julie Asian Center Papers

- Folder 18** Julie Asian Center Journal, 1985-1987.
- Folder 19** Julie Asian Center Journal, 1987-1995.
- Folder 20** Julie Asian Center Journal, 1995-2005.
- Folder 21** Julie Asian Center Papers, 1988-1999.
- Folder 22** Julie Asian Center Papers, 2001.
- Folder 23** Julie Asian Center Papers, 2004.
- Folder 24** Julie Asian Center Papers, 2005-2006.

Box 02

- Folder 01** Julie Asian Center Papers: Volunteer and Teachers, 2000.
- Folder 02** Julie Asian Center Papers: Staff Information, 1996-2005.
- Folder 03** Julie Asian Center Papers, 2002-2005.
- Folder 04** Julie Asian Center Papers, 2002-2005.
- Folder 05** Julie Asian Center Papers: Student Information, 1995-2005.
- Folder 06** Julie Asian Center Papers: Julie Billiard Information, 1995-2005.
- Folder 07** Julie Asian Center Papers: Adult Education, 1995-2005.
- Folder 08** Julie Asian Center Papers: Adult Education, 1995-2005.
- Folder 09** Julie Asian Center Papers: Adult Education, 1995-2005.
- Folder 10** Julie Asian Center Papers: Adult Education, 1995-2005.
- Folder 11** Julie Asian Center Papers: Adult Education, 1995-2005.
- Folder 12** Julie Asian Center Papers: Adult Education, 1995-2005.
- Folder 13** Julie Asian Center Papers: Adult Education, 1995-2005.
- Folder 14** Julie Asian Center Papers: News Clippings, 1991-2005.
- Folder 15** Student Stories, 1989-1995.
- Folder 16** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 17** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 18** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 19** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 20** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 21** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 22** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 23** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.
- Folder 24** Julie Asian Center Celebrations, 1989-2001.

Box 03

- Folder 01** Newsletter Subscriptions, 1990.
- Folder 02** Newsletters, 1998-2001.
- Folder 03** Newsletters, 2002-2003.
- Folder 04** Newsletters, 2004-2005.
- Folder 05** Student Newsletters, 2000-2005.
- Folder 06** Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston [RCAB] Papers, 1999-2001.
- Folder 07** Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston [RCAB] Papers, 2000-2003.
- Folder 08** Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston [RCAB] Papers, 2001-2004.
- Folder 09** Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston [RCAB] Papers, 2002-2003.
- Folder 10** Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston [RCAB] Papers, 2003-2004.
- Folder 11** Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston [RCAB] Papers, 2005-2006.
- Folder 12** School Expenses, 2002-2006.
- Folder 13** Finances, 2002-2004.
- Folder 14** Finances, 2004-2006.

Box 04 Financial Records and Donor Lists, 1991-2005.

Box 05 Grant and Donor Lists, 1987-2006.

Box 06 Grant and Student Information, 1994-2006.

Box 07 Student Information, 2001-2004.

Box 08 Student Information, 2004-2006.

Julie Asian Center Shelves

- Julie Asian Center Photograph Album, 1985.
- Julie Asian Center Photograph Album, 1985.
- Julie Asian Center Photograph Album, 1985-2005.

Photographs 2 Boxes, 154 photographs.