

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 the report of the Fair in the Boston Herald, Dec. XIII., Columbus, Queen Isabella, and

Annals from the Archives

Federation of Notre Dame Alumnae



Massachusetts Chapter of the Federation of Notre Dame de Namur Alumnae
Picnic held at the O'Neil Estate, the Summer Home for the Sisters of Notre Dame in Tyngsboro

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—On Saturday, June 21, 1924, the members of the Massachusetts Chapter of the Federation of Notre Dame Alumnae held a picnic at the O'Neil Estate in Tyngsboro, MA. The National Federation of Notre Dame de Namur Alumnae was first organized at Trinity College in Washington D.C. in September of 1916 in an effort to unite all Notre Dame Alumnae across the country. The following year, chapters in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts also formed.

The first meeting of the Massachusetts Chapter of the Federation of Notre Dame Alumnae was held at Notre Dame Academy on the Fenway in Boston on April 15, 1917. The organizers of that first meeting came from the Sisters of Notre Dames' oldest schools in Massachusetts—the Academies in Boston, Roxbury and Lowell. Later meetings were held quarterly and included representatives from Waltham, Lynn, East Boston, Worcester, Lawrence, Woburn, Salem, Chicopee, Somerville and Peabody. The dues for state membership were twenty-five cents a year and another twenty-five cents to join the national federation. Because the United States had just entered World War I, one of the first activities embraced by the Federation was to write to the families of the soldiers who had been sent to Europe. Later meetings included presentations by various speakers, efforts to help Belgium recover after the war, sharing news regarding school events and organizing fundraisers for the Notre Dame schools. In fact, not long before the June 21, 1924 picnic, the Federation had raised \$500 for the six sisters who had volunteered for the congregation's newest mission in Okayama, Japan. The picnic was the perfect event to hear more about the upcoming voyage of those sisters.

Anna M. Johnson, the Federation State president, and a founding member of the Massachusetts Chapter, was a graduate of the Class of 1885 from Ascension High School in Worcester. She went on to become a teacher in the city, eventually rising to serve as principal of one of the Worcester schools. According to the June 22, 1924 *Boston Globe*, the picnic included flag-raising, a pageant by the children, a baseball game, obstacle races, archery, golf and croquet.

The estate was an ideal location for such a picnic. It had originally been purchased by the Sisters of Notre Dame in 1908 from Nance O'Neil (1874-1965), a famous stage and silent film star. The following year, the mansion and estate were designated as a place of recreation for the Sisters of Notre Dame and remained that until 1927 when the Academy of Notre Dame opened in Tyngsboro. The property included the O'Neil mansion, along with 194 acres that encompassed pastures, wooded areas and a pond. Many picnics had already been held in Tyngsboro by the Alumnae of various SND schools before the Massachusetts Federation was organized in 1917.

The minutes for the Massachusetts Federation recorded that "*June 21st, 1924 is memorable for the Alumnae annual*

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basket picnic, as at this picnic a tremendous number of Notre Dame Alumnae from all parts of Massachusetts attended same at Tyngsboro." No doubt, some of those attendees might have been drawn to the event by curiosity to see the famed estate once owned by Nance O'Neil, as she was still quite popular in silent films.

To commemorate the picnic and the Notre Dame Federation, the alumnae hired Lowell photographer George H. Russell (1871-1944) to take a panoramic photograph of the participants. Russell had been born in New Hampshire and began working as photographer in Lowell in 1914. He soon became well known for his work in panoramic photography throughout the area.

Though it's impossible to identify the names of those viewed in the image, below are a few of the people who attended that 1924 picnic.



Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ Massachusetts Chapter of the International Federation of Notre Dame de Namur Alumnae Association Records, 2017.10. SND New England Archives.
- ◆ Boston Globe Archives, 1872-2017.
- ◆ Center for Lowell History—University of Massachusetts Lowell Libraries, <http://library.uml.edu/clh/Russell/In.htm>
- ◆ Vernon Street, Worcester, Ascension High School Graduates, 1876-1970. 2017.07.03. SND New England Archives.