

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

Emmanuel College 1919-2019



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Postcard of Emmanuel College

Viewed from across the Fens

c. 1930

—While Emmanuel College opened its doors for classes on September 22nd, 1919, its roots can be traced back to 1849, when the first Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur arrived in Boston. They settled on Stillman Street in the North End, before moving to Lancaster Street. Finally, in 1864, the sisters opened the Notre Dame Academy on Berkeley Street. Decades passed. Due to the continual rise in enrollment, the sisters were forced to give up convent space for the classrooms. The Annalist wrote that, “Chief of these [the problems] was the lack of space in the convent, a consequence of the increase of the number of pupils in the Academy, which had necessitated the giving up of one room after another by the community, until the Sisters had literally none left to themselves but the kitchen and the dormitories.” Then in 1891 Harvard Bridge opened, which caused more traffic and an increase of new businesses throughout the area. This, along with the rising number of students, started the conversation about finding a new location for the Academy. The sisters realized that their prime location would give them a good price for the property and so they began to consider land on the Fenway as a possibility for the construction of a new school, with an eye to also eventually opening a college.

In 1912, with the help of real estate agent John C. Kiley, the congregation purchased eleven acres of land on The Fenway. Sister Mary Borgia Ryan and her provincial council began the work for the move of the academy. They hired Boston architectural firm, Maginnis & Walsh, a company that was begun in 1905 by Charles D. Maginnis and Timothy Walsh. The firm soon became known for innovative design and Gothic architecture. Michael D. Mealey & Co. was hired for the construction of the new building. The cornerstone of the Academy (now known as the Administration Building at Emmanuel College) was blessed by Mealey’s brother, the Rev. Edward J. Mealey on June 25, 1914.

That same year, Sr. Bernardine Marie Daly (1860-1942) was named Superior of the Notre Dame Academy. She was given the responsibility of overseeing the construction of the Academy, which would also eventually house Emmanuel College. The work required her to maintain continual communication with the architects and builder. Sr. Bernardine Marie managed the construction accounts, the many dozens of donations and gifts to the project, as well as fielded any questions the architects or builder had regarding problems encountered, such as the crack that appeared in the porch soon after it had been completed.

The move of the Academy from Berkeley Street to the Fenway in 1916 took almost a month, and involved continual trips between sites as furniture and equipment were removed, packed and transported. As the Annalist for the convent said, “everyone can realize what planning, labor and fatigue it must have entailed to transport the furniture and other household goods accumulated during a period of more than fifty years to their new destination. To Sister Bernardine Marie also we are indebted for the wonderful equipment of this large building which bears testimony to the taste and wisdom of her arrangements.”

Notre Dame Academy at the Fenway originally planned to open on September 12th, 1916, but that had to be postponed until October 2nd because of an epidemic of polio in the city. On opening day, 165 students had registered, but a month later, that number rose to over 200. As part of its curriculum, the NDA also included a number of lectures and recitals for the students. In

November of 1916, the Chapel was completed. The Chapel's stained glass windows were designed by the firm of Alexander S. Locke. They were responsible for many cathedral and church windows, including St. Mary's Chapel at Boston College, St. Catherine of Genoa Church in Somerville, and St. John's Seminary in Brighton. Near the end of 1916, Fr. Timothy Danahy from Needham donated a large art collection to the school, which included oil and water color paintings, etchings and engravings, pottery and other artifacts, as well as statues carved in marble and bronze. These all became part of the original museum for the new college.

The former home of the Notre Dame Academy on Berkeley Street was sold to the Knights of Columbus in July of 1918. That transaction was also handled by John C. Kiley.

As construction continued for the opening of the college, Sr. Bernardine Marie ordered everything from an ice cream freezer to laboratory equipment, from Tiffany lamps to laundry equipment and girls' gym uniforms. Upon completion, the building included a gymnasium, dining room, libraries, museum, classrooms, laboratories, needlework department and an auditorium for 600. Sister Bernardine Marie's work came to fruition in 1919 when Emmanuel College opened with much ceremony and excitement. The examinations for any NDA students who wished to attend the new college were held on May 26th, 1919. Registration opened for the new college on September 15th and classes began on Monday, September 22nd for twenty-seven young women. By the following year that number rose to seventy-two.

While the college had opened, it did not have the authority to confer degrees. It was left to Sr. Helen Madeleine Ingraham, Emmanuel's first Dean of Students, to bring that about. For the next two years, she worked to provide the kind of curriculum and qualified professors needed for college accreditation from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There were eight professors when the college opened: four Sisters of Notre Dame, three Archdiocesan priests and one lay person. The first curriculum included Sacred Scripture, Apologetics, Biology, English, Mathematics, Spanish, French, German, Logic, Chemistry, History, Philosophy, Psychology, Economics, Sociology, Oral Expression and Latin. There was also training in Physical Education. On April 12, 1921, less than two years after the college's opening, Sr. Helen Madeleine received the long awaited word from Channing Cox, Governor of Massachusetts, that Emmanuel College had the power to grant degrees to their students.

The college's Board of Trustees was established on September 24, 1921. The Board was comprised of the college's president, Sister Adela de Sacre Coeur Gils, and Sisters Florine Curtin, Berchmans Saunders, Joseph Louise Scannell, Mary Victorine O'Neill, Helen Madeleine Ingraham, and Mary of St. Claire O'Connell. Soon after, Emmanuel received accreditation from the National Catholic Education Association.

In 1931, NDA moved to Granby Street, into Cardinal O'Connell's former residence, which now gave the college much needed space. As the college grew, a new building was needed and fundraising began in the mid to late 1940s. In 1949, the new Alumnae building was opened to expand their science facilities. In 1950, Sr. Helen Madeleine resigned as the College's Dean and not long after Sr. Alice Gertrude Keating was named the president of the college. She worked to transform Emmanuel from a commuter college to a residential one. Marian Hall, St. James Hall and Julie Hall were all built during her time as president. Also during those years, sisters began taking classes with the students, rather than just on weekends or during the summer.

Since then, the college has continued to grow and adapt with the changing times. Today, Emmanuel College has more than 2500 undergraduate and graduate students from 44 countries, enrolled in 50 majors and areas of concentration.



Groundbreaking Ceremony for Alumnae Hall, 1948.

SND New England Archives, 2015.13

Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ Emmanuel College Annals, 1917-1956. 2015.13.
- ◆ Boston Globe Archives, 1872-2019.