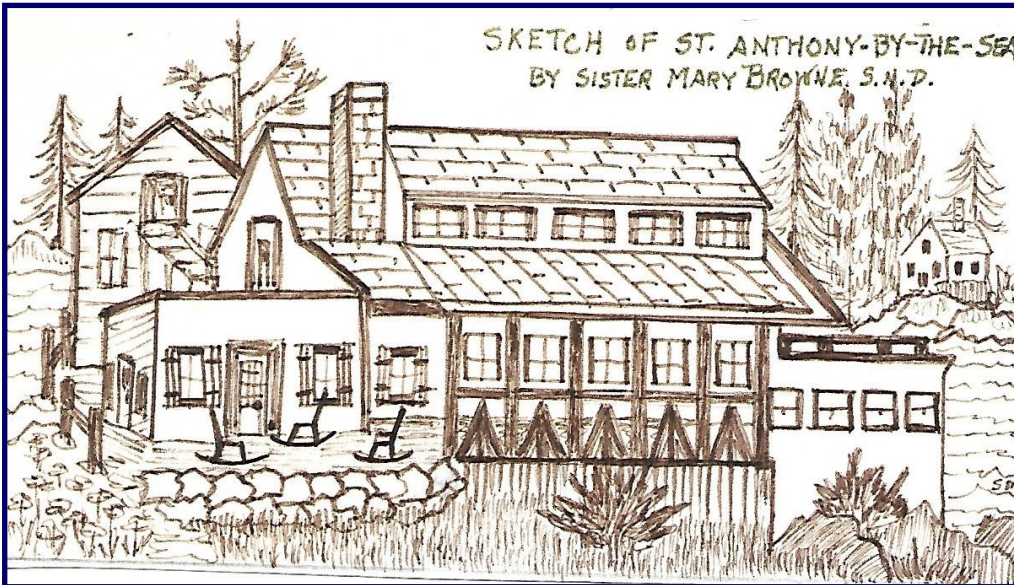


The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended and at the close of the Fair, which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored.

Annals from the Archives

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's Early Years at Peaks Island, Maine



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Written by

Nancy Barthelemy

Provincial Archivist

nancy.barthelemy@sndden.org

nbarthelemy@ewsndden.org

snddenewarchives.com

Sketch of
St. Anthony-By-The-Sea

By Sister Mary Browne
(1922-2008)

—In 1940, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were delighted to be given "Ye Headland Inn" which was located on Peak's Island off the coast of Portland, Maine to be used as a retreat and vacation home. The donation came from a Mr. and Mrs. William Simon and their daughter, Charlotte Simon. The Simons had managed *Ye Headland Inn* for more than thirty years as a lodge for vacationers between June and September. The family summered in Maine and Newton, Massachusetts, returning to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for the remainder of the year. It was during their years in Philadelphia that they became friends with Sister Mary of St. Alice Campbell (1874-1953), who taught their children at the Notre Dame Academy in West Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia.

On July 16, 1940, six Sisters arrived on the island by ferry to be greeted by the Simons. After giving the sisters a tour of the lodge, the Simons retreated to their own rooms to give the sisters time to settle in.

Area residents soon offered assistance. The sisters were donated an altar for their new chapel [which had been the former study for Mr. Simon], as well as transportation to and from Mass at St. Christopher's Church on the island. Workmen were hired to begin the renovations for their new chapel and by early August, all was ready. Vestments, altar linens, statues and various sacred vessels came from their many friends, as well as from every Massachusetts convent.

Wasting no time, the sisters held their first retreat in the now christened St. Anthony-by-the-Sea on Saturday, August 17th. A week later, the sisters began journeying back to their homes in Massachusetts, going in groups until September 14th, when the last remaining sisters made sure everything had been packed away for their return the following summer.

The sisters returned to Peak's Island on June 23rd, 1941. Carpenters had already opened the shutters to prepare for the sisters' arrival. The workmen were busily laying floors and making repairs to the porch. A few days later, the sisters descended to the beach for a "stone gathering," to find materials for the path they planned to lay between the road and main door of the retreat house. In addition to the continuous work to make the retreat house everything the sisters' hoped for, they began their yearly Summer School. Emmanuel College sisters led lessons in English and French. "In addition . . . many more of our guests [i.e. other sisters] were introduced to another study, that of 'Home Economics.' This course consisted of landscape gardening, upholstery and interior decoration."

The timing of the sisters' arrival at Peak's Island came not long before the United States entered World War II. Because of that the military restricted travel by water. But it wasn't until after July 4th, 1942 that the sisters learned of this. Friends of the sisters, a Mr. Quinn and his two daughters vacationed on Long Island, which was only a couple of miles from Peaks Island. A

few days after the Fourth, they attempted to row over to visit the sisters. But “on account of the troublesome times, none but those in service might use the waters. When about halfway over, they were overtaken by one of the officers on duty and were interrogated as to where they were going and on what business. This was easily explained. A few packages for the Sisters were in evidence and these were examined. The contents of one revealed some dulce. The second proved to be some rhubarb from Mr. Quinn’s garden and the third a two pound package of sugar. . .Having assured himself that no dangerous matter was concealed, this officer allowed them to proceed on their errand of charity. . . with the injunction they were not to repeat the offense.”

A week or so later the sisters were thrilled to see “a warship of gigantic proportions. . . sighted in the distance. This excited real curiosity to the guests of Peaks and Long Island. Everyone came out to view this wonderful masterpiece said to be The Massachusetts, the latest warship to be completed, one for which the children of all schools had contributed. Convoys led the way, encircling this giant ship and guarding it in every direction with real interest. The ship could boast . . . 2000 sailors, all in uniform. . . . This vessel carried planes and bristled with guns and other implements of war. It was a sight not easily forgotten. This monster ship had apparently come from the south and on the following morning returned, taking a southerly direction.”

That southerly direction took the vessel across the Atlantic to North Africa where the sailors engaged in the invasion of North Africa in November of 1942. Afterward, they sailed to the Pacific to join in the operations against Japan. The Massachusetts can now be viewed in Fall River, MA at Battleship Cove, a museum dedicated to commemorating Naval vessels and the sacrifice of U.S. sailors.

In 1963, the congregation purchased another property on the island, known as Oak Cottage. It was renamed St. Joseph-by-the-Sea. While it began as a summer retreat house, it eventually held a permanent community of sisters who ministered to those on Peaks Island and elsewhere in Maine. St. Joseph-by-the-Sea later offered retreats not only for the SNDDeNs, but for other religious congregations, as well as many laypeople.

St. Anthony-by-the-Sea remained a summer retreat for the sisters until 1975 when it was sold.



U.S.S. Massachusetts, 1942
Image from Wikipedia Commons

Mr. and Mrs. William Simon, c. 1940



Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ Sisters of Notre Dame Annals, Peaks Island, Maine, 1940-1942. East West Archives, 2017.37.
- ◆ Sisters of Notre Dame Annals, Peaks Island, Maine, 1941-1948. East West Archives, 2017.37.